

CHAPTER ELEVEN



SOMEDAY I'LL SHOWER BEFORE NOON

The Power of Optimism

by April Perry



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Throughout her college parenting classes, she was sure that she was going to be a fun mom—enjoying hay rides, a daily batch of brownies, and science lessons around the kitchen table. The first 12 years of motherhood, however, pretty much put her into survival mode. But now that her children, Alia, Grace, Ethan, and Spencer, sleep through the night and put on their own shoes (yay!), she's starting to rediscover the "fun."

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Here are some details captured at the end of a particularly frustrating day when my children were small:

No shower. Never left the house. One child pounded through piano practice . . . just to prove a point. Tried to do a 20-minute exercise video, but all the children wanted to do it with me in a tiny area of our living room, and then they started being silly and jumping on my back, so I sent them to their rooms. I ambitiously tried to bake bread, which got ruined because the oven control locks don't work when the oven is on. Children wanted to eat every 20 minutes the entire day (why did I let them?). A couple of stressful family issues needed to be handled. Forgot to grease the pizza pan, so we had to pry our dinner off. Spilled smoothie on freshly-washed pants. Tried to get work done during the first half of naptime, toddler woke up an hour early, so I never got to catch up on sleep. Three-year-old screamed at LEAST 50 times throughout the morning. Five loads of laundry. Dusty house.

Am I supposed to be optimistic during days like this? I realize that I'm lucky to have a house, a healthy body, food to eat and children to love, but is it totally unrealistic to want a shower in the morning, a few minutes to exercise, and some sense of order?

When I'm feeling discouraged, grumpy or impatient, the *last* thing I want to hear is that I should "look on the bright side," "change my attitude," or "count my blessings." Typically, I want to feel understood. I want to know that it's normal for me to be struggling. Well, I've discovered that it *is* normal, but I've also learned that there is incredible power in learning to be optimistic.

Let's Define Optimism

I know this is a basic word, but I was confused for a long time. I thought optimism meant I was supposed to *love* messy diapers. I thought mothers naturally danced around the kitchen and opened their arms lovingly when their children woke up at 2 a.m. The ideal mother would smile 24/7, would be described as "peppy" and "giddy," and would never—ever—hide in the closet to cry.

The *actual* definition of optimism is "the tendency to expect the best and see the best in all things" (Webster's online dictionary). Of *course* you're not supposed to love the mess and stress and worries of motherhood; it's the results you love: the daughter who hugs you every six minutes, the son who leans *way* over the seat to kiss you before jumping out of the car at school, and the toddler who excitedly opens his arms and announces, "Right here, mom! I'm right here!" when he wakes up in the morning.

Here's one wise mom's perspective:

Being positive and optimistic doesn't mean I naively pretend there is no negative; being positive means I actively determine my focus and give energy to what aids me in learning

and growth. There is no positive without negative. It's against the law; the natural law that is! It's like trying to separate two sides of a coin, or setting a cause in motion while hoping to avoid the effect. I think when we only desire positive and no negative at any given moment in our lives, we limit ourselves significantly. And in doing so, consider how much growth one might be missing. I admit it's easier said than done, but if I wanted easy I never would have chosen motherhood!

- Amy Oliver

Learning to grow through life's challenges while keeping a positive focus is a *skill*—one that anyone can develop. I've seen this modeled in the very worst of circumstances, and once I learned to apply it to *my* life, *everything* changed.

Here are some practical ideas that lift and inspire me on the days life seems too hard (if today is one of those days for you, I'm so sorry. You *will* get through this.)

Optimism Requires Action

For mothers everywhere, “life” comes fast—constantly trying to pull us down. We typically don't value the sandwiches we make or the lullabies we sing; instead, we're quick to notice how we “lost it” when our daughters were squabbling or our sons were playing Tarzan on the basketball hoop with their jump ropes. We also don't specifically spell out what we need in order to feel happy—we just get grumpy and expect our families to read our minds (or is that just me?). At the same time, we're being watched every minute. We're leaders facing constant pressure and heavy responsibilities.

So what are we going to *do* about this?

Optimism doesn't mean we shrug our shoulders at our failing circumstances or bad habits. Eating donuts and ice cream all day won't create “abs of steel”—no matter how many happy thoughts we send toward our midsections. We need to take action. When I (1) carefully examine my life, (2) identify what's *really* wrong, (3) make a specific plan to improve it, and (4) think optimistically as I follow my plan, *that* is when I feel like dancing in the kitchen. Working *toward* our goals brings just as much satisfaction as *achieving* them. It's sometimes painful, and it requires hard work, but action enables optimism.

I recently started experiencing some heavy anxiety, to the point where I was waking up at night feeling sick to my stomach. As much as I told myself to relax, I couldn't shake the stress. My pre-teen daughters would come to me, wanting to talk late into the night about the discussions on the lunch benches, the photography class they wanted to take, and their birthday party plans, and all I could manage was five minutes of chit-chat before sending them to bed—and then I'd spend the rest of the evening wondering what was wrong with me.

At that point, I knew I needed to change my course. Over the next few days, I invested several hours thinking, reading, brainstorming and praying. I realized that I'd over-scheduled my life, I'd let too much clutter creep into the house, I had pages and pages of ideas and tasks I hadn't processed, I had been eating too many cookies, I hadn't been taking time to *enjoy* my life and I wasn't spending my time on the most essential things.

Then I made a plan. I bought three excellent books on the subjects where I was weak (one about work/life management, one about healthy eating, and one about house cleaning), I quickly read through them and then I started applying the ideas I'd learned. Within *hours*, I started feeling optimistic. The clutter didn't go away all at once, but I knew I could get it under control within the month. I started thinking more about health, and the cookies didn't appeal to me as much. I stopped checking email every hour and established better boundaries with my computer work. Those simple changes, among others, helped me feel optimistic about creating my best life. It took a lot of work, but now I can sleep at night, and I feel happier when I'm with my family. It's worth the effort.

Find the “Something Beautiful” in Every Day

Having a family is a privilege. Even when things look like they can't get any worse, there's always *something* to smile about.

I could hear my seventeen-month-old son, Asher, in the kitchen, but I didn't have the strength to find out what he was up to. Five months pregnant, I had come down with a bad case of the stomach flu just the day before. I was relieved when I learned that the abdominal pain, constant body aches, fever, nausea and vomiting posed no danger to my baby; all I had to do was rest, stay hydrated and endure the symptoms. That much I could handle, but how was I supposed to take care of our home, my husband, my infinite to-do list and my adventurous son in the meantime?

As I lay on the bed, just wishing this would all pass quickly so I could get on with my life, I heard a rustling close by. I opened my eyes and saw Asher come into the room with a bag of corn flakes. Apparently, our little one had pulled himself onto a chair and then onto the dining table, where he retrieved the cereal bag that my husband had opened earlier that day for breakfast. He proudly mounted onto the mattress where I was resting, and before I could stop him, turned the bag completely upside down! Corn flakes were everywhere—on the pillow, on the mattress, on the floor, and even in my hair and clothes. I could hear myself screaming in my mind, “Nooooo! Do-n't!” but I was too weak to mutter a word. I just lay there in disbelief.

Naturally, Asher was thrilled with what he had just done. He bounced on his knees and giggled with excitement. I kept thinking, “I can't believe he just did this. What a mess! How am I going to clean this up?” But then I watched my son delicately pinch a corn flake between his tiny thumb and forefinger, slowly lean his body forward and push the

corn flake onto my lips. He opened his mouth as if to say, “eat it”—and that’s when I realized he wanted to feed me.

My heart filled with love, and I felt like we were both beaming. I could sense how pleased he was to be taking care of me, and I instantly felt so grateful for my son, my husband (who later cleaned up all the corn flakes), my pregnancy, our home, my health and so many other things in my life that I’m sure I wouldn’t have thought of had this happened at any other time. The sickness was not at all pleasant, but this experience taught me to “watch,” slow down and be grateful, for there is joy and love that can be found even in the midst of what seems like a huge mess.

- Becky Nibley Budge

We can all relate, can’t we? When I think back to my most painful moments (miscarriages, surgeries, years without sleeping through the night, and personal struggles that led me to tears and to my knees) every single heartache is coupled with a sweet image I wouldn’t trade for the world: “Get well” cards scrawled in crayon, a five-year-old vacuuming without being asked, a six-year-old changing his brother’s diaper so his mom could sleep a little longer, or strawberry-scented foot massages and sliced cucumbers—picked from a salad in the fridge and placed on my eyes.

Sweetness surrounds us at every turn, and motherhood is an incredible opportunity! The secret is learning to see the beauty.

Awhile back, I was at my friend Cara’s house. I was there to borrow some cute bud vases. I knew she would have a good selection, and she didn’t disappoint.

Everywhere I turned in her house I saw something cute. Cute pillows. Cute drapes. Cute dishes. Cute frames. Cute, cute, cute!

I thought to myself, “If my house was this cute, I would be smiling all day long!” Which led to remembering something I had heard on a talk show. They say you should surround yourself with the things you love.

On my way home I was worried. My house is always under construction. I had a concrete floor at the time. My dishes don’t match. My walls are bare. You get the idea. How could I be happy if I’m not surrounded by things that I love?

As soon as I asked that question, the answer came into my mind. Of course! I am surrounded by the things that I love—my wonderful children and husband.

I am definitely surrounded. Matching dishes can wait

- Christi Alston Davis

You Choose Optimism

One thing that helps me handle the discrepancy between the mom I *thought* I'd be and the mom I *am* is to say, "I choose to be happy."

When I'm cleaning up "potty accidents," juggling coloring books and crayons in cramped doctors' offices, or dealing with daughters who are as emotional as I am, I repeat over and over in my head, "I choose to be happy." Life is full of reasons to look on the bright side:

Like the majority of moms, I do the same repetitive jobs each day, seven days a week: sweep the floor, do laundry, fold and hang clothes, dust furniture, prepare meals, clean up those meals, mop the floor, vacuum here, vacuum there, wash more dishes, and somehow in between it all, manage to change a few hundred diapers. What I do feels like my own version of a movie called "Motherhood Groundhog Day," only my costume is gray sweats and my make-up is, well, none.

A few years ago I started to believe I had the most brainless, unappreciated, and certainly, most unglamorous job in the universe. I was doing my ten-thousandth load of laundry, robotically placing each piece of dirty underwear in the washing machine. I'd done this job so many times before that it certainly required no thinking and especially none of my hard-earned college degree. After loading all the clothes, I suddenly snapped out of my mechanical state and thought, "This is so mundane, this is so boring. I'm so tired of boring. I want engaging. I want pink stilettos, not sweats. I want intellectually stimulating! I want pizzazz! I want a change of scenery. I want out!"

And so I headed to Wal-Mart. (Believe me when I say that in my small town, this is often as electrifying and engaging as it gets!) As I threw this and that in my cart, I headed over to the scrapbook aisle. Now don't think for a second that one of my Super Mom qualities is scrap-booking, because to this day, it's not. But I'd considered taking up the hobby, so I went to this particular section of the store to see what I was up against.

As I browsed through the different sheets of scrapbook stickers, one in particular jumped out at me. There, typed in cute, squishy blue print was a phrase that grabbed my attention in a most life-changing way: "Always thank God for a normal, boring day."

There, of all places, was the answer. I had been looking at my day-to-day mundane tasks as a burden rather than a blessing. Instead of robotically doing laundry, I needed to be grateful I had all those cute little clothes to fold because it meant that after heart-wrenching infertility struggles, I was blessed to finally bear children. Instead of begrudgingly sweeping and mopping the kitchen floor, I needed to feel lucky that each member of my family was healthy enough to walk across the floor, even if they did have gobs of mud on their shoes.

In sum, what I often classified as a boring or monotonous day meant I hadn't taken any trips to the ER, my house didn't catch on fire, I never received a dreaded phone call with tragic news, my basement didn't flood and my husband arrived home safely from work. Standing in that store aisle, I thought of all the worst-case scenarios that could have gone wrong to break up the dullness of my daily, repetitive household tasks, making me feel grateful for all those typical, ho-hum days of motherhood.

- Jamie Lynn Hadfield

There are lots of ways to bring fun, purpose and nobility into the monotony of family work, but really, the “boring” days are a blessing. We get to choose our perspective, and sometimes that simply means clarifying our focus:

After losing my second child during pregnancy, I realized how fragile this maternal journey I was on could be. During the long, hard days that followed my loss, I made a choice that I would focus on the things that brought happiness into my life. It was a deliberate, conscious choice and it really changed who I was as a mother.

I once heard an anecdote relating to this: look around the room and count as many blue things as you can. Then, close your eyes and list the yellow things you saw. Most people can't do this because they were too focused on the blue things.

I find the meaning of this so applicable to motherhood and all that it entails. If we only focus on the blue things, the hard things, the things we cannot control, the exhausting things, we can become completely blind to the yellow things, the beautiful, wonderful parts of motherhood that completely surround us.

We can choose which color we focus on, even though both colors are present in our lives.

On days when I am pushed to my limit, I remind myself of the gift that is motherhood and how grateful I am for it. I remind myself that while there are plenty of crazy days, there is nowhere else I would rather be than right here in the “thick of things” with my children.

- Felicity Aston

Beautifully said, don't you think?

Tell the Best Stories from Your Day

One day as a new mom, I videotaped my toddler screaming in her crib when she refused to take a nap. When my husband got home, I played the video so he could see what I had to “put up with.” He lovingly said, “Honey, I'm sorry you had a rough day, but I don't videotape the worst parts of *my* day and show them to *you*.”

That wasn't quite the response I'd expected, but you know what? He was right. I decided from that day forward to tell him the best stories from my day (and occasionally review and/or cry about the hard parts). I started keeping an eye out for the sweet, funny, clever moments that my husband missed.

"Today Alia and Ethan were singing songs and reading stories in the downstairs bathroom for a *really* long time. Finally they emerged, and Alia said, 'Ethan set a family record for sitting in the bathroom cupboard for 12 minutes.' I looked at Ethan, who had a huge smile plastered across his face as he reflected on his success. 'A family record!'"

Sometimes I tell how the children decorated the walls of the garage with coloring pages or how they made snack trays that looked like faces. I tell him how the baby can say a whole prayer by himself, and I show him the display of notes reading, "I love Mom." Sometimes I wonder if I'm falsely representing my reality, but I've noticed when I focus on the best stories of the day, those are the only parts I remember.

This process works for athletes, too (though I am not one). My brother-in-law Jim has played for and coached many athletic teams, and he said that sometimes coaches will only focus on the good—as a way to keep the players mentally strong and focused. Other times, when the players are in a slump, they'll replay tapes of past successes to remind the players of the thrill of achievement.

Here's a sweet experience from a mom who learned a valuable lesson about recording her best moments:

Soon after my good friend was killed in a car accident, something was found among her possessions that changed my life. It was an insignificant-looking notebook that she called her "Happiness Is" book. Every day, she took note of the small blessings she noticed in her life and jotted them down.

She recognized things like "a day at the park with my kids," "ham and crackers and macaroni and cheese on the floor all day, because not only does it mean I had a full and busy day, but that I have a baby to love," and "talking to Sarah on the phone" as things that brought happiness to her life. (Imagine my thrill when I realized I had made someone else's happiness book!)

I determined to make one of my own, in memory of her. And I did. And I wrote in it . . . for a few months. And then I forgot all about it.

A few years later, I had just had my fourth child and was going through post-partum depression for the first time. After several months of learning and growing in ways I wasn't sure I wanted to learn and grow, I was still struggling and looking for something—anything—that could help me. I thought back to my friend's "Happiness Is" book and decided to give it a try again. Every night before bed, I jotted down some blessings I recognized throughout the day.

Like I said, it changed my life, but not right away. It was weeks, and even months, before I looked back and realized that the small act of recognizing and writing down those few gifts each day allowed me to feel gratitude. Not only for the big things – family, faith, a home, living in a free country; but also for the small things – a hot shower in the morning, the joy of watching a five-year-old discover his first loose tooth, a few free minutes to read a favorite book, and a husband who listens.

Taking a few minutes to write at the end of each day gave me something to look forward to. Soon I began to recognize little blessings as they occurred, and I felt consistent gratitude permeate my life. Two years later, I feel greater optimism and opportunity in my life than I ever have. Did having a “Happiness Is” list change everything? Perhaps not my circumstances, but it did change me.

- Sarah Bradshaw

I love that last sentiment. Recognizing, sharing, and recording the happiest parts of our days won't change the sequence of events, but they *will* change us.

Remember: Crisis + Time = Humor

We had three children very close, and one summer when they were four, two, and one, we were living in an extremely tiny apartment. Keeping our nap times in tact was of the utmost importance, and I'm sure you can imagine my angst when I heard my four-year-old coaching her two-year-old sister on how to “escape” from the crib: “Now Gracie, all you have to do is put one leg over like *this*. . . .” It absolutely wasn't funny at the time, when I was barely keeping things together, but looking back, that image always makes me giggle.

Around that same time, one of my friends was pretty upset when her four-year-old son colored in ballpoint pen all over their light-colored couch. In response to his mother's anger, he calmly replied, “Some parents *thank* their children for coloring on the couch.”

One of my children's favorite stories is called “Hot Dogs and Peas.” They beg me to tell it whenever we're folding laundry or cleaning the kitchen together. It all started when four-year-old Alia asked if she could leave the table to go play with her toys. I was on a business call, and I whispered, “First you have to finish your hot dogs and peas.”

A few minutes later, she showed me her empty plate, and I nodded that she could go play. Then I looked over at Ethan in the high chair, and he had a *huge* pile of hot dogs and peas on his tray. I called Alia over, told her I'd discovered her little trick, and sent her to her room to sit on her bed. I tried to finish the phone call, but Alia was screaming at the top of her lungs about how unfair it was for her to be punished for “sharing” with Ethan.

Once Ethan finished picking his dinner off the mountain of food, I settled him into the bathtub with his sister, trying to keep the phone balanced on my shoulder and occasionally

whispering, “Shhhhhhh” to Alia, who was still screaming as she poked her nose through a little crack in her bedroom door.

Two-year-old Grace finished up her bath first, so I dried her off and let her run naked into her bedroom while I scrubbed the ketchup off Ethan’s face. Within seconds, Grace started shrieking (in tandem with Alia), and when I looked across the hall, I could see she’d had an accident on her carpet and she wanted me to clean it up *right that minute*.

I pulled the plug in Ethan’s bath and let him play with the bath toys for a second while I went into Grace’s room to pick up the mess on her carpet. I was only gone for 30 seconds, but Ethan decided he wanted to get out of the bath by himself (for the first time), and he dove head first over the edge of the tub, slipping onto the tile and crying for me to come pick him up. I was still on the phone at this point (what was I *thinking?*), and Alia’s shrieks were simply getting louder, so I finally finished the call, wrapped Ethan in a towel, got a diaper on Grace, cleaned up the carpet, and sat down to talk with Alia.

Right then, my husband got home from school, and seeing me sitting so calmly with three happy children said with a smile, “How was your day?”

We’ve got a whole slew of stories like this, and when we review these “crises” as a family, we always end up laughing. The secret really is to learn to laugh now. I know this isn’t easy, but remember, optimism is a skill. It’s like learning to play Mozart. When you find yourself in a frustrating situation, ask yourself, “Will this *ever* be funny?” It usually will, and life just feels better when you’re laughing.

Pay Attention to Who You’re Becoming

Our work and sacrifice yield results—we just need to identify them.

As a first-time mom, I had all the same worries that any other first-time mom has. Will I be able to tell what my child needs and when? Will my child be healthy? Will I be comfortable nursing in public, or nursing at all? Will I ever be able to get back to that pre-mom shape?! My head flooded with questions that multiplied by the hour.

After ten years of motherhood, I feel confident in my ability to know what my children need and when they need it. We survived nursing, and it was almost a breeze. We even survived fourth grade, and at times, it was questionable with all of the drama. My husband and I have been able to conquer many experiences and are now proudly raising two very happy, outgoing, smart little girls, but it is the last question of getting back my figure that still seems to have gone unanswered.

As I think back to what my figure was in high school (when my high-school sweetheart—now husband—and I first met), I wonder why I didn’t relish the cheerleading days of jumping, flexibility, and eating anything without gaining an ounce. With the new metabolism that graciously protrudes itself around my mid-section; I can’t help but feel

that those skinny days were just a dream. While I have tried many diets, quit drinking soda, and squeezed in various exercise regimes between work, sports and school activities for my kids, the weight seems to cling to me as much as my kids do when they are sick.

So, instead of focusing further on the weight, I propose a new way of looking at what I have “gained”:

- I have gained a wonderful daughter who looks more and more like me everyday, and who has taught me to be creative and look at the world in an entirely new way. She is growing up way too fast.*
- I have gained a second amazing daughter who makes me laugh on a regular basis and who, for the moment, loves her mom terribly and wants to do everything she does. I know I’ll miss these days when they go.*
- I have gained the admiration of my husband who does remember to tell me how much he loves me and what a great mom I am when I am having a frazzled day and am fighting to balance work, homework and housework.*
- I have also gained admiration for my husband, who, before our daughters were born, would not dance in front of anyone. He adores our daughters and has taught them to cook, fish, build a campfire, hunt and so many things that would fill a separate story. His support and involvement in their lives will make them well-rounded young women.*
- I have gained a sense of pride at how happy our little family is, and I wonder in amazement (and worry at times) at what our girls will say and do next.*
- I have gained patience that I never knew was possible. Food dumped on the carpet? No problem—that’s why we have puppy dogs. Crayon pictures on the wall? Well, I guess we did need a little redecorating.*
- I have gained a new kind of love that every new mother gains. It’s not the kind of love you have for your husband, your parents or your siblings. It’s a protective kind of love where you would do anything to keep this little person happy, safe, and healthy while still wanting them to make their own mistakes in order for them to grow.*

So, while I may have gained a little around the middle, I have also gained many wonderful emotions and memories that take my mind away from the fact that my stomach is now and forever lined with shiny stretch marks. To that, I say . . . ”Go Figure?!”

- Chantól Segó

Developing that kind of optimism is a beautiful goal. Sometimes, though, it’s hard to keep that perspective. At one point in my mothering experience, I felt like I was running on a hamster wheel. The housework was never “done,” the writing I pored over each Wednesday

evening wasn't getting published anywhere, and I wondered if my children were hearing *anything* I was saying to them.

One morning, I wrote this question on a half-sheet of paper: "What are we becoming today?"

I taped the paper to our refrigerator door, and then I mentally answered that question whenever I started feeling frustrated. When I wanted to yell at my boys for hitting each other with light sabers, but didn't, I realized that I was becoming more patient. When I sorted through the stacks of graded papers in my children's backpacks, I saw how they were becoming more skilled in math, writing, and science. When we gathered around the kitchen counter to decorate homemade scones with powdered sugar, I watched our family members laugh together, and I noticed that we were becoming closer friends.

Every single day, we are becoming *something*. Realizing that, growth can't help but inspire optimism.

Gain Control over Your Internal Voice

Every mother I know has an internal voice that sometimes gets out of control. Sometimes that voice says, "I am terrible. My life isn't even that hard, and I still can't pull it together." To that voice, I say, "*Every* life has its hard parts, and I *will* pull it together."

Sometimes that voice says, "It's only 7 a.m. and I'm already in a bad mood. Guess today's going to be long and hard." A possible response? "Today might be hard, but that's okay. It's still going to be great. I can do this."

How about this one? "I look terrible. I don't even want to look in a mirror." A new friend recently taught me to say, "When I look in the mirror, I think, 'I bet I look at least 25 percent better to other people.'" That one made me laugh.

I've also heard my internal voice say things like, "I don't have the potential to live the life of my dreams. I just wasn't made to succeed." *That* voice is the trickiest. I used to listen to it every day—when I would decide not to exercise because I would "never look as toned as my muscular friends," or when I wouldn't even *try* to submit my writing for publication because I was "just a mom." Now I tell that voice that I have the potential to do exactly what I'm meant to do, and I will pursue those dreams with everything I've got.

Dance to the Music

Once there was a young boy who walked into a room where an older man wearing head phones was dancing like crazy. It was almost embarrassing to watch as he waved his arms, bounced his knees and moved his body with incredible enthusiasm. The young boy noticed a second set of head phones in the room, so he put them on and then shook his arms, bounced his knees and tried to do everything *exactly* like this man who was clearly enjoying

himself. After a few minutes, however, the boy got tired—and a little disgusted—and he threw the head phones onto the ground and stomped out the door. What was wrong?

He hadn't turned on the music.

Have *we* turned on the music of motherhood? Do we see how fun this really is? Can we feel the magnitude of our work? Do we know what a difference we are making in the lives of our children . . . and what a difference they are making in ours? Or are we simply exhausting ourselves as we do the mommy dance that all those “other moms” seem to enjoy?

I couldn't always say this, but now I genuinely *love* motherhood. I don't love it because it's simple. I love it because I hear the music and I am making it a priority to enjoy the dance.

Living with optimism is a spiritual process for me, more than anything else. I feel powers beyond my own ability—helping me to change my heart, get the support I need, and feel hope that things, no matter how hard they are, will get better. We're not alone in this. There's purpose in what we're doing. These days with our children are *beautiful* days. We're going to miss them terribly at some point, and once we “have it all together,” we'll wish we could go back and do it one more time—this time not focusing so much on the delayed shower, the messy kitchen, or that negative voice in our head.

As in the opening paragraph of this chapter, I could create a long list of frustrating details *every single day*—no problem. However, that's not going to help anything. What *does* help is remembering that my life, my purpose, and my motherhood experiences are not about *me*.

As we make a conscious effort to see the beauty, humor and growth in the stories of our lives, we become women with the power to make real differences in the lives of others—and the people whose lives will be improved because of what we offer aren't concerned one tiny bit with the timing of our showers.