

MOTHERHOOD
Realized





YOUR CHILDREN WANT YOU!

April Perry

There's this crazy phenomenon going on right now. Good, devoted mothers get on Pinterest (and blogs, and Facebook, and Twitter), and then they flip through parenting magazines and TV channels (full of advertisements and media hype), and they're convinced they're not enough.

They're convinced that everyone else has magnetic, alphabetized spice containers, and unless their garden parties are thematically accessorized with butterfly lanterns, *and* they're wearing the latest fashions (in a size two, of course), there's no point in even showing up for the day.

Last Saturday, this happened to me. I came home from a lovely day out with my extended family and had serious intentions to spend the evening making a craft for an upcoming holiday and trying out a new recipe. By the time I got everyone settled and fed, however, I was so tired that I just lay on the couch and dozed while my children played and got themselves to bed.

Around eight thirty, when I finally had the energy to sit up, I decided to try out Pinterest for a few minutes until my husband got home. There it was—a thousand reasons why I’m failing at all things domestic. I don’t make grilled cheese sandwiches that look like ice cream cones. I don’t even have seasonal throw pillows on my couches or live plants *anywhere* in the house. Is it really so hard? Can’t I pull myself together and wrap some candles in green foliage and bring happiness to our decor with bright fabrics and handcrafted photo frames?

As I was trying to calm my frenzied state of mind, my husband came home and held me tight. We talked about our day, and he told me how much he loves me and that he wants our boys to marry someone like me. I fell asleep snuggled under his arm.

The following morning, our children enthusiastically bounded into our bedroom and tucked themselves into our covers. My four-year-old gave me an arm massage, and we all sat there together—joking, laughing, planning the day ahead, and enjoying that special feeling of family.

Reflecting on the discouragement I’d felt the night before, I realized that my family doesn’t care about what I see on Pinterest. They care about *me*.

My daughter, Grace, loves me to sing “Baby Mine” to her each night before bed. When I go out of town, she misses that special ritual. We have recordings of Michael Crawford and Allison Krauss singing their versions, but Grace doesn’t want those. She wants me. So I recorded myself singing “Baby Mine” and emailed the audio file to her and to my husband so Grace can hear “her song” before she sleeps. As far as she’s concerned, my untrained voice belongs at the top of the charts.

A few months ago, I was practicing sideways Dutch braids on my two daughters. They had found these great how-to videos online, and we set up our comb, brush, and hair bands in front of the computer so I could become an expert. Half-way through the braid, my fingers got all tangled up, the hair was too loose, and one of my daughters had been sitting with her head to the side for several minutes.

Feeling extremely frustrated, I said, “That little girl in the video is so lucky to have a mom who knows how to do hair.” My daughter stopped me in my tracks when she responded, “But I have a mom who is trying.”

My mom is in her 70's, and her memory is starting to go. Her sweetness and love are as strong as ever, but when we talk on the phone, she can't remember the last time we spoke or the last time we saw each other. At the end of one phone call a few weeks ago, I whispered, "I miss you, Mom."

She said, "Oh, I miss you, too! But we'll get together soon. You can come down to the park, and we'll get an ice cream cone at McDonald's."

I replied, "Yes, that will be fun." But then the tears started, and I had to use every ounce of control to keep my voice even so she wouldn't know I was crying.

What I *really* meant was, "I miss being able to talk to you, Mom. I miss lying on the grass while my children make a hopscotch and savoring our long phone conversations. I miss you remembering all those secrets I used to tell you. I miss you asking me if I'm okay. I miss seeing you read books and hearing you sing while you do the dishes and having you drive out to my house without getting lost. I miss you remembering how much I need you."

My mother didn't specialize in home decor or gourmet cooking, and she didn't lift weights or run marathons. But she makes me feel like I am the most important, wonderful person ever born. If I could pick any mother in the whole world, it would be *my* mom.

There's something deeper going on in family life than can ever be expressed on a social network. Whatever it is we feel we are lacking, can we collectively decide—as deliberate mothers—that we are not going to sit around feeling discouraged about all the things we're not? Can we remind each other that it is our uniqueness and love that our children long for?

It is our voices. Our smiles. Our jiggly tummies. Of course we want to learn, improve, exercise, cook better, make our homes lovelier, and provide beautiful experiences for our children, but at the end of the day, our children don't want a discouraged, stressed-out mom who is wishing she were someone else.

If *you* ever find yourself looking in the mirror at a woman who feels badly that she hasn't yet made flower-shaped soap, please offer her this helpful reminder: "Your children want *you*!"



Question: How can you best remember how important you are to your family in the midst of so many temptations to compare yourself with others?

Challenge: Recognize any tendencies you might have to get wrapped up in discouragement, and set up a regular way to remind yourself that your children want *you*.