

Twelve Ways to Be a More Joyful Wife and Mother

In thinking about what I've learned in the past thirty five years, I decided to make a list of things that I believe help to make a woman a more joyful wife and mother. Though certainly not complete and knowing you may want to add your own ideas, hopefully it will be springboard for thought:

1. *Find peace amidst the chaos by putting first things first.* There are many things that seem important –organizing “events”, PTA assignments, clean windows, shopping, and so on – that may be taking huge amounts of time from the relationships you have with your husband and children. Discipline yourself to prioritize the most important things first.

2. *Don't always be logical.* Often logic just doesn't work when planning and dealing with a family. If we had waited for a logical time to have a baby, when there was plenty of money, an extra room, and no outside demands, life wouldn't be nearly as exciting and fulfilling as it is today. If I had waited to take a little get-away with Richard or to jump into a new idea when it was logical, I would have missed out on so much fun in life.

3. *Progressively nurture divine love.* Divine love sounds so easy, but as a dear friend has taught me, keeping that thought foremost in your mind when children don't follow the rules, don't do well in school, become involved in drugs or alcohol, date someone you don't like, or even marry someone you don't approve of, is one of life's greatest challenges. Husbands even have their moments when you find yourself not loving some of the things they do or say. Bemoaning strange habits, bad judgments, and immaturity can obscure the divine love that you need to feel if you don't constantly remind yourself of its importance. Learning not to judge goes hand and hand with this particular “commandment.”

4. *Laugh sooner rather than later.* The fewer hours spent in misery because of a daily crisis or disaster, the better. Decide in advance, that when (not if) the next disaster happens, you're going to laugh ... as soon as possible. The sooner you learn to laugh instead of cry, the happier your life will seem.

5. *Have a formula for dealing with guilt.* One thing that is a given in motherhood is feeling guilt. Especially as children get older and start leaving home, you realize that there are things you could have done better, things you missed along the way, or things you wish you would have done. The best solution for dealing with guilt is to tell your husband or children that you're sorry for mistakes you may have made. Advise them not to make the same mistakes. Remind yourself that there is still time to change. The process of change (sometimes known as repentance) is still a living, working principle – no matter where we are in the process of mothering.

6. Put your husband first. Often as a young mother, although I never said it out loud, I indicated to Richard that he was a big boy and, because a lot of little people were dependent on me, he was going to have to take care of himself. To a degree, of course, this is true, but it is important to remember that having a great relationship with your husband is the most important thing you can give your children.

7. Educate yourself. Although it may seem that your own needs always come last, one of the things that can keep your life exciting is to continue to educate yourself, even in the throes of motherhood. To me, nothing is more exciting and stimulating than learning new things. Make time for an art class, a parenting class, a book club, an exercise class, a cooking class. If you find it hard to concentrate on anything but the good of your family, remember that the best thing you can do for them is to educate yourself!

8. Ask for help! If you're drowning (I've learned that almost every mother feels this way at times), ask for help! Instead of being a martyr and feeling overwhelmed and depressed, explain your feelings to your husband and your children and enlist their help. Set up some family systems and rewards that enable the children to take some of the responsibility and remind your husband that the most appreciated gift he can give you is help.

9. Have a passion for something and remember your dreams. Think about what *you* love. Contrary to what the children may believe, you are a person too, with a passion for the things that excite you. I met a woman on a plane recently who is the wife of a world-renowned figure. In talking about the ever-present demands of her husband's career, she confided in an unguarded moment of truth, "I've forgotten what it was that I wanted to do." Remember what you have a passion for and, though there are years when that passion will be off in the distance, don't lose sight of it. If you share your dreams with your husband and your children, they'll be much more likely to help you fulfill your dreams, even as you are helping them with theirs. Plus, having passions and fulfilling dreams is a great cure for what is often known as the Empty Nest Syndrome.

10. Have faith. Develop what we call at our house, "confident humility." This is knowing that *without* the help of a loving God in your everyday life as a mother, there is very little that you can do successfully. At the same time, know that *with* his help, there is really nothing that you can't do. It's a great mind-set to have on those days when you feel defeated and it seems impossible to go on.

11. Celebrate your accomplishments. At the end of a long day filled with disasters and disappointments, take a few minutes to review the things you've done well! Remind yourself that you're doing the most important job in the world. Give yourself a pat on the back for surviving!

12. Treasure the moments. Every day contains moments of wonder, surprise, warmth, and humor if you're watching for them. Giggling at the funny things that can only come out of a child's mind or being in awe of a beautiful sunset can turn mayhem into magic (at least for a moment). Remember that life is beautiful!