

CHILL OUT:

U - Unleash Your Laughter

Ecclesiastes 3:4

“...a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.”

Quick—give me your mad mom face. Yeah, that one.

The one that says, “You’ve really done it now,”

“You’re in big trouble,”

“You’ve done it again.”

The one that evokes shame in some of your kids, fear in others, and repentance in still others. That face. You wouldn’t want to receive the look, but you have developed it over the years and yeah, it’s pretty effective.

Every mom has one. We think we have to. We think that it is just part of our repertoire of tools in our mom tool boxes. We know how to pull out a glance, a nod, a tap, an eyebrow and use it like a professional carpenter. We’ve got it going on.

But would you like a secret? Our mad mom face is probably over-used. Terrifying isn’t it? To think that you might be without it. But before you think I am going to jump off into the abyss that is the current rage, that of being a ‘yes’ mom, I am not. I will not. I cannot advocate for that.

I am just suggesting that smiling at your kids, at ‘that’ kid might very well do more good than your best mean mom look. Yep. Don’t believe me? Here’s my reason: your kids, especially ‘that’ kid, needs to know that you are on their side, that you’ve got their back, that you love them. Yes, that’s it, that you love them. That’s what the smile on mom’s face communicates, “I love you!”

My mean face is really good at shaming my kids, at making them feel like all they can do is what I’ve asked them not to do, at making them feel like all I care about are their actions. It is really good at communicating that I’ve got it all together, that I don’t ever mess up, that I’m perfect. But none of that is true. I don’t have it all together. I mess up daily. And I am far from perfect.

The fact is that when I dare to smile at my kids—often—I am communicating to them that I do get it. I get that it’s hard to do the right thing all the time. I get that it is hard to sit still. I get that it’s hard to pay attention. I get that it’s easy to get distracted. I get that sometimes I don’t know why I’m sad or mad or frustrated or grumpy. I get it.

Smiling communicates to my kids that we are on the same team. We are all living in a fallen world and we need each other to fight temptation, to encourage each other, to celebrate victories.

Similarly, laughing with your kids is like glue. My Dad has a great laugh, very distinctive and frankly, loud. I love my Dad's laugh. To me it represents security, acceptance and comfort. I know that when Dad laughs everything might not be alright, but we are going to make it through together.

Laughter is like a safety valve for stress. When you don't have it in place, stress can be overwhelming, even debilitating. But when the valve exists and is characteristically wide open, stress dissipates even when circumstances don't change.

Our guiding verse for this point is Ecclesiastes 3:4, "a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance...." And in Proverbs 17:22 it says "a cheerful heart is good medicine."

As I study the life of Jesus, the only people He became angry with were the one who should have known better. With the Pharisees He responded with righteous anger and frustration. We are not Jesus. And generally, even though we might want them to know better, they are in process. They forget. They don't learn the first time. They don't understand. And they, like me, like you, mess up.

Our kids need to see our smiles. They need to hear our laughter. They can spot a fake from a mile off. But as we cultivate our own joy, the joy of our salvation, we can "laugh at the days to come" (Proverbs 31:25). How is that possible? Because we know that God is on the throne. We can live with confident hope knowing that He's got this!

So, how do you characteristically respond to your kids? Possibilities include:

- Mean mom face
- Ignore
- Kindness
- Frustration
- Yelling
- Compassion
- Patience

(If you don't know, ask your kids. They would probably love to tell you. Just saying.)

List some activities you enjoy doing with you kids.

Would you say that your kids see your smile often? Laugh often? Is it difficult for you to smile? Laugh? Why or why not?

Often we don't smile or laugh because we are holding too tightly to some things. Example include: things are not going like we want, no one understand or appreciates all

we do, no one respects our pet peeves. Are there some things that are keeping you from smiling/laughing?

Sometimes we don't smile or laugh because we are afraid that doing so would mean that we are okay with everyone else's standards and we are not. We want the house to be neat and organized. We others to do things we the way we want them to do it. Are there some things that you would be willing to admit you need to start letting go?

Our smiles and laughter come from our knowledge of Him. We must not refuse to smile or laugh because everything is our lives isn't the way we want it to be. But rather we smile, we laugh because God is on the throne. The more we know Him, His grace, His sovereignty, His patience, His love, the more confident we are in His timing and His plan. Describe God.

Fear often overshadows and obscures hope and consequently, joy. What are you afraid of? Dare to write it down.

In Jeremiah 8:10 says the 'joy of the Lord is your strength.' Joy of the Lord is key. Do you have the joy of the Lord? Why or why not?

Joy is not defined by circumstances, but rather it is grounded in who God is. What circumstances are challenging your joy?

Action Items:

Choose to smile.

Allow yourself to laugh.

Remember-many of the things that cause frustration REALLY don't matter.

Take a line from Elsa and 'let it go!'

Book recommendations:

Knowledge of the Holy, by A.W. Tozer

Pain is Inevitable, but Misery is Optional, by Barbara Johnson

Surprised by Joy, by C.S. Lewis