

## Perspective



Can I please go to the bathroom alone?

I stumbled down the stairs in my early Monday-morning stupor. Mornings aren't my strong suit and it takes quite a bit of time for me to feel lucid. I closed the bathroom door for my first trip of the morning, only to hear my teenage daughter yell up the stairs, "Mom, did you wash my gym clothes?" Within seconds, I heard her slightly younger brother bellow, "Mom, if you are picking me up early today, I need a note." I'd barely been in the bathroom for a full minute before eight-year-old Erica was knocking on the door announcing that her two-year-old brother was awake and had produced a very dirty diaper sometime during the night.

I closed my eyes and thought, *Can't I just have two minutes alone in the bathroom?*

When Jesus walked on this earth, the Bible tells us that "large crowds followed him wherever he went" (Matthew 4:25 NLT). Whether you have one child or a whole houseful, the concept of being followed everywhere you go is one you have to get adjusted to when you become a mother. It begins right after birth or adoption. Suddenly

you can no longer walk out the door without considering the needs of this new little one. A simple trip to the store requires a diaper bag full of baby supplies and a vast array of baby paraphernalia.

If you add more children to the family, the crowd becomes larger with time. And as children grow older, it's rare that they want to embark on any endeavor without a friend in tow. Let's face it—large crowds follow us everywhere we go!

Some moms relish this constant activity of kids and their friends, and some moms find themselves overwhelmed and stifled by it. I enjoy the constant activity but can only handle it for a limited time. Because of my people skills and ability to handle most social settings with ease, I've assumed that I was an extrovert. However, as I've become more in tune with myself, I've actually discovered I'm an introvert. I've also discovered that the terms "introvert" and "extrovert" don't really have much to do with your people skills. Instead they are really more about how you are emotionally drained and refueled. Simply put, being with people refuels an extrovert and being alone refuels an introvert.

So what does an introvert mother of five children do? She learns to take care of herself and get the alone time she desperately wants to find the emotional refueling she desperately needs. I've learned to find a bathroom in the middle of the day, or to seek the refuge of my front porch during the kids' nap or rest time. I've asked my husband to take the kids to the park occasionally so I can have time alone at home. I've learned to take an evening out once a week to go for a walk alone, or meet a friend for pie and coffee. This is not only beneficial for me, but for my family as well. When I'm running on a full emotional fuel tank, I'm more patient, more effective, and far more enjoyable to be around.

Conversely, what does an extrovert mother of one do? She learns to take care of herself by seeking out a moms group she can

become a part of. She invites another mother and her children over for peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for lunch. She organizes a ladies night out for the moms in the neighborhood. And even though being with people refuels her, an extrovert mom still needs to find quiet moments to nourish her soul.

Jesus was intentional about finding time to refuel. He knew there were many demands upon His time and energy and He had to be a good steward of His body, soul, and mind. Nobody had to tell Him, “Jesus, go rest.” Instead He recognized His need to pull away from the crowds and find the refreshment He needed.

As moms, we need to do the same. People and responsibilities demand much from us and we have to be good stewards of our body, soul, and mind. We can’t wait until we’re drained dry or until someone comes along and offers to watch our kids (like that happens very often!). Instead we have to learn to be proactive about our self-care so that we can be ready to meet the needs of our family.

Talk to God about the demands you feel upon you. Where do you feel smothered by them? What wears you down? Pour your heart out to Him about how you feel and where you feel pulled in a dozen different directions. After all, “large crowds followed him wherever he went.” He really understands.

*Pray . . .*

*Thank you, God, for having an understanding heart.*

*You didn't have much personal space in Your life and I often feel*

*I don't have much personal space in mine. Thank You for Your example of intentionally refueling with rest and prayer, and intentionally pulling away from the crowds. Help me learn to do the same*

*and to recognize the benefit for my family  
and myself when I do so. In Jesus name, Amen.*

*Talk to God about the demands on your time and your desire to  
learn how to be more intentional about self-care. Just talk to Him  
like you would any friend—remember He’s a Friend who understands.*

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*Discover . . .*

*Read Matthew chapters 5 and 6.*

*Ask God to help you see Jesus in a new light.*

TRUTH . . .

Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up  
and went out to an isolated place to pray.

MARK 1:35 (NLT)



DISCOVER GOD'S TRUTH:  
JESUS WAS COMPASSIONATE AND TENDER

## The Truth about a Gentle Spirit

*Erica began to panic at the prospect of the immunization she was about to receive.* The fear that set in caused her to “awfulize” the situation in her mind. She cried uncontrollably and was on the verge of hyperventilating. I wanted to take her face in my hands and tell her to “get a grip.” My patience was wearing thin with my seventeen-year-old who I felt was acting like a two-year-old. Just as I was about to let my tongue go, a nurse walked in who had given Erica an immunization several months earlier. She knelt beside her and began to talk with her. She was tender, funny, and reassuring. Her kindness and humor brought a welcome distraction to the situation and within minutes Erica had calmed down.

Compassion and kindness had won out. A tender, gentle heart had conquered the fear. And I was convicted. Convicted of how often I jump to anger and don't even think about the tender, gentle way that I could approach the situation.

cleaned up and sensitive to God's leading. If we don't take care of business, our heart becomes hard, bitter, and numb to feel God's presence in our life. To be more like Christ, we have to have a soft, open spirit to God and His truth. So taking care of our own heart business with God is vital to becoming more compassionate and more like Christ.

Some of us struggle with acknowledging our sins, weaknesses, or failures. We too easily play the blame game or too quickly try to minimize the mistake. Pride gets in the way and keeps us hardened to God and His truth. Through owning our own stuff and confession to God, we are pursuing internal renovations that build our character, repaint our perspective, and reorganize our thoughts to be God-focused instead of me-focused. That's a makeover job that's always in process when a person wants to be more like Christ.

Once we've done business with God, we may or may not need to do business with others. Let me give you an example for both situations. There are seasons of my life when I move along and kind of forget to talk with God. Life's going along just fine and as long as there's no crisis, I unconsciously move God from the front burner to the back burner. "What's wrong with that?" you might ask. In reality many of us go day after day without praying. Is that really a sin? Well, it's the sin of pride because pride says, "I can do it on my own, thank you very much. I don't need Your help, God." Once I realize that's what's going on in my heart and mind, I need to take care of business with God. He's the only one who's been directly affected by my sin. I talk to Him humbly and say, "God, I'm so sorry that I've been prideful in my heart. I don't want that—I really do want humility and I want to trust You more than I trust me. That's so hard to do, but I know it's not impossible. I'm sorry for my pride. Will You please forgive me?"

But let's say that in the midst of that prayerless week or two, I'm very irritable with my kids or very critical of my husband. We are who we hang with and if we're not hanging around Jesus and spending time with Him, it will often be evident in our interactions with others. In this case I begin by doing business with God, admitting my pride and prayerlessness and asking for forgiveness. Then I do business with my family, apologizing for my impatience, irritability, and criticism, and asking for their forgiveness.

By allowing God to mop up our messes with His forgiveness, we become more humble, gentle, and forgiving ourselves. When we realize that we're no different from anyone else around us—we all mess up—then we become more tender and empathetic because it puts us all on level playing ground. You and I can't become compassionate like Christ without identifying our own imperfections.

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## Mommy Matters

It was a day that felt like everyone needed me. Mark needed my help with a church event. Anne had called two or three times. Evan had done the same (both Anne and Evan are grown and out of the home). Erica was in her final few weeks of the spring semester of homeschooling. Austin and Kolya both had homework they needed help with. I had stayed up late several nights in a row and the lack of sleep was affecting me more than I cared to admit. I'd had my time with Jesus each morning, but somewhere around 5:00 p.m. on that Wednesday night I lost it. I don't remember

God! But we can show our kids how to handle our human failures under the wings of God's forgiveness and grace.

There's nothing more powerful than to have a child aspire to be like their mom or dad. And that's especially inspiring when their parent aspires to be like Jesus. Jesus was tender, compassionate, and gentle in His interactions with other people. May we aspire to be more like Him.

*God, I do want to be more like You, but I seem to be stuck in my ways so much of the time. Help me to be intentional about taking care of myself so I have the emotional and physical energy for a gentle, tender spirit. I want to learn to ask questions rather than give judgment or demand answers. Help me to put myself in other people's shoes. Remind me of how difficult fourth grade was for me so I can be more sensitive to my son. Take me back to high school to remember the challenges of peer pressure so I can relate better with my daughter. Help me to think about the environment my husband has been in all day before I lash out in anger because he forgot about something I asked him to do. Thank You for being my example and my Friend who understands.*