



Hope and care for all

When we enter into the lives of children in foster care or adoption, we enter into brokenness. We enter into the stories of children and the pain of their pasts. This brokenness shows itself in so many ways. We all see it in the things they are afraid of. We see it in their unexpected reactions to ordinary things. We see it in their social interactions and their performance at school. Past brokenness tends to reveal itself in present pain.

Sometimes the brokenness we see in our kids is so evident, that we lose sight of a really important part of the equation: We've been hurt or broken too.

We can lose sight of just how broken we are, or have been - how our own past and pain shows up in parenting and serving children. We see it in the things we are afraid of. We see it in the unexpected reactions to ordinary things. We see it in our social interactions and our performance at work.

The stuff we all deal with as we raise and work with children from hard places isn't just about their past brokenness. It's about the past brokenness of our kids colliding with the past brokenness of the adults taking care of them. Children know, most of the time unconsciously, how to push your buttons. But, there is a reason your buttons are different from your spouse's or from your best friend's. Those "buttons" - the things that make us lose our mind - came from the mud of our own experiences, trauma, sin, insecurities and fears. Each of these, interact with the brokenness of others to produce results that none of us really desire.

Dr. Karyn Purvis often said, "You cannot lead a child to a place of healing if you do not know the way yourself." So the next time you are aware of your child's brokenness, remind yourself, even as you have experience some yourself, there is hope for both. That's why we emphasize self-care so much. It may not be easy, but it is necessary.

As parents, there are different seasons when you focus more on some things than others, maybe you're in a season that you've been focusing too much on the well-being and health of your child that you have neglected yourself. Maybe you feel like the needs of your children are more important than yours. And it may be that you have failed to recognize that taking care of yourself ensures that you have what you need to parent well.

Many parents carry their weariness as a badge of honor. We can see that when we ask any parent of a newborn, and you can see that principle in play. But when you are the parent of a child that came from a hard place, the need for self-care is exponential. In order to parent well, your emotional and spiritual tank needs to be

filled constantly. And that's true for every parent, specially for those whose child has additional emotional or physical needs, as well as those who work with them.

It is not being selfish. If you've had the chance to travel on airplane, when they teach about safety rules, they always say that if the cabin experiences some pressure problems and they release the oxygen masks, to put yours first. Why? Because if the adult suffers, there's one less person capable of helping others.

Maybe now is the time to seek counseling or therapy to deal with some things.

What do we see in the Word?

Even Jesus would step back from the multitudes who needed Him desperately to go and pray, refresh, and refocus. As you go through your daily routine, try to set aside some time and a place for prayer, a time to be quite, and reflect on the Father who knows more about parenting special kids, because He parents each of us daily. Schedule in moments of peace, such as napping when your child naps, connecting with a trusted prayer partner for coffee, or scheduling a dinner with family members who support you well.

Community is key when you are in the trenches. Connecting with your Father in heaven is of the utmost importance to give you the ability to see from a heavenly perspective. As you walk out your days, speak kindly to yourself, note your "wins" and be thankful! Be intentional in these practices because the joy and the little victories can easily be swallowed up by the day's needs and the difficulties. And most importantly, at the end of the day, reflect on the goodness of God in gifting you with the specific child or children you are parenting. Thank Him for the measures of grace and mercy He gave you to give to them. Thank Him for these precious souls who look to you to see their first glimpse of the heavenly Daddy who loves them. And then just breathe. You have done well, good and faithful servant. And well, is good enough.

And because we all need a little bit of Tender Love and Care, here's a Self Check up:

- 1. Are you getting enough sleep?
- 2. Are you eating Well?
- 3. Are you being physically active?
- 4. Do you take regular breaks from stressful activities or events?
- 5. Do you have some time alone with your spouse?
- 6. Do you laugh every day?
- 7. Do you express your fears, feelings or frustrations with somebody? out loud?
- 8. Do you let somebody else take care of you when you need it?

Some ideas for you:

- Go have a nice dinner out with your spouse
- Get a manicure or pedicure, or get your hair done
- Go out with a group of friends
- Attend a support group meeting
- Go to the church service this week
- Go to the movies
- Find professional help for yourself as a parent if you feel you need it.

