

Mental Health and Single Parenthood: Releasing Bitterness for Betterment

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For most of my years as a mother, I've balanced single motherhood, special needs parenting, and the "glamorous" lifestyle of a mompreneur. Even in the midst of raising a teenage son with a dual diagnosis of Down Syndrome and autism, plus an 8- and 5-year-old, I've done it all with minimal to no help. Let's be completely transparent: I've struggled with exhaustion, stress, depression, and even feelings of bitterness that the other parent has chosen not to be involved.

My story is not unique, and in my day-to-day interactions on social media and face-to-face dialogues with other single moms, I find that the same struggle exists. For any parent, whether mom or dad, it can be draining and emotionally difficult to reconcile the fact that you are handling a role meant for two.

Balancing a Role Meant for Two

Children are a gift from God, and I think God knew it would "take a village" to ensure that children reach their full potential. For the Word tells us that "if one prevails against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken" [Ecclesiastes 4:12]. However, for me, divorce and single parenting have become an unexpected reality, where feelings of shame, guilt, and fear often came with facing the throes of parenting alone.

Parenting is often hard and filled with joy and challenge. I found myself desperately trying to strike a balance in co-parenting, or juggling the tough role of super-parent in the midst of an absentee parent. What I learned is that I am not alone. And neither are you.

When I was at the peak of my struggle, I'd find myself ruminating over the thoughts of why.

- Why was I the only one sacrificing?
- Why didn't they feel the same responsibility and love as I felt as a parent?
- Why haven't they matched my level of effort?

Yet, I found myself in a tailspin that drained the energy, spirit, and life out of me. This led me to spend more time in a state of bitterness than in the sacred place of gratitude that God was providing, protecting, and preserving my family in spite of the lack of presence of two parents. I knew at that moment that in order to breathe new life into my circumstance, I had to re-center my focus and, at my darkest hour, literally lean on God.

The Shift: From Bitter to Better

You see, God commands us to "...not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" [Matthew 6:34]. He further instructs us in the following, "If it is possible on your part, live at peace with everyone. Do not avenge yourselves,

beloved, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written:
Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" [Romans 12:18-19].

Oftentimes, I found that my bitterness led to verbal sparring matches with the other parent. Although my goal was to just get my point across because "If only he could hear me and understand me, then maybe something in him would click." But, let's be honest: when has action born out of frustration and anger ever produced a good result, right? Therefore, I had to take time to deal with me before addressing the issue again, but most importantly, I made room for God to do His work in both of us individually. If you think about it, God is the only one that can deal with and turn the heart of individuals. Today, I advise so many parents on the importance of doing only what is in your power to do and then waiting on the Lord to do the rest. It has been my saving grace in some of my most trying times as a single parent.

If you are a parent like me, who is doing it all on your own, it is my hope that you can find peace in the midst of a difficult situation. It's not to say that you won't feel frustration or that times won't get tough, but God wants you to demonstrate resiliency, which will allow you to walk this Earth with a clear mind while he works behind the scenes on your behalf. Remember, that your #1 priority is to be a living, breathing example to your children of love and forgiveness.

So ask yourself:

- ☐ What calming techniques can you implement in times when you become frustrated, angry, or overwhelmed?
- ☐ What issues or thoughts do you find yourself holding on to and what can you do to release your mind from ruminating on these thoughts?
- ☐ What is hindering you from finding peace? Who can you talk to who can provide a safe space for you to talk and share?

Scriptures to meditate on:

James 1:2-4 (NIV)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Exodus 14:14 (NIV)

The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.

Colossians 1:9-11 (CEV)

We have not stopped praying for you since the first day we heard about you. In fact, we always pray that God will show you everything he wants you to do and that you may have all the wisdom and understanding that his Spirit gives. Then you will live a life that honors the Lord, and you will always please him by doing good deeds. You will come to know God even better. His glorious power will make you patient and strong enough to endure anything, and you will be truly happy.

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*Golden is a guest blogger for the **Mental Health and Congregational Care Affinity Group**, a shared effort between National Benevolent Association and Disciples Home Missions (DHM), in response to the passing of GA-1523 “Becoming a People of Welcome and Support to People with Mental Illness and/or Mental Health Issues” by the 2015 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). For more info, please visit www.nbacares.org/mental-health.*