

# THE GOOD ENOUGH MUM

By Karen Steward

Recently I was reading an article on the Faith@Home Partner church website for Mum's called "The Good Enough Mom", by Dr Jill Slattery<sup>1</sup> and it reminded me of another article I read several years back in the Parenting magazine called "The Good Enough Parent" by Rosemary Ann Ogilvie<sup>2</sup>. At the time I remember thinking that this is a message all Mums need to hear.

When I was a young Mum, a few good years back now, there was a magazine that came to our churches that constantly reminded us of what it was to be a good wife and mum. This amazing woman baked her own bread, sewed all her children's clothes, held regular family devotions around the table, cooked nutritious meals on a beautifully set table every night of the week, her home was immaculately presented, attended to every need of her husband and children and so the list went on....

While I am sure that the intentions of this magazine were admirable, often after reading it I can remember feeling condemned rather than uplifted and inspired.

Now as a grandparent, I wished I had heard the message of "The Good Enough Mum"<sup>1</sup> back then. Sometimes I think God should have made us grandparents first and then parents!

Understandably, most mums I know want to be the best possible mums to their children, to give them the best start in life. I know I was determined not to look back on those years that the children were at home with any regrets.

Are there things now that I wish we had done differently? Absolutely!

The task of parenting is simply too huge for anyone to do perfectly all the time. No one has all the energy, patience, creativity or time necessary to handle every parenting situation in the best possible way.

I have noticed how we mums can put incredibly high expectations on ourselves. Yet it seems the best parenting outcomes occur with parents who

strive not for perfection, but simply to be 'good-enough'.

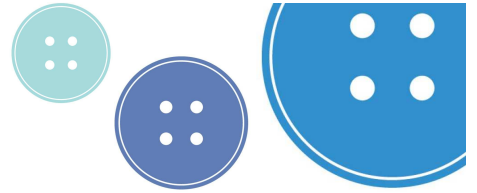
British pediatrician Dr Donald Winnicott<sup>2</sup> coined the term 'good-enough parent' in the 1960s to describe the types of parents who take good care of their children, but don't rush to fulfill their every need. Dr Winnicott<sup>2</sup> felt this style of parenting taught children resilience - a belief that researchers have since validated with their discovery that babies and young children raised by super parents suffer 'baby burnout', experiencing significant fear of failure even at age three or four.

When young children are governed by hectic schedules, they are so busy 'doing' they don't have the chance to discover the joy of simply 'being'. These children are unable to entertain themselves, and tend to lack confidence and self-esteem. In preschool and kindergarten, they're sometimes the children who are afraid of trying new games, and the ones most likely to be overwhelmed by schedule changes.

While the desire to be attuned to your children's every thought, need and feeling and give them everything they want is natural, such actions appear to be counterproductive.

On the other hand when you encourage your kids to do more for themselves, when you don't shield them from every little difficulty, hurt and unhappiness they experience, when you teach them that sometimes they simply have to do without, they'll be happier and more flexible, and you'll be happier and less exhausted.

Good-enough parents also recognise that parenting mistakes are opportunities to teach children that we all make mistakes, and when they do, it's a matter of admitting them, putting right what we can and asking for forgiveness. In this way, when your kids mess up, you have modeled to them how to say sorry, go to God for forgiveness and to move on. It is about creating a safe environment where it is ok to make mistakes, where together you are all continually learning and growing into the best versions of who God has created you to be.



Good-enough parents know that while raising their children is a serious business, humour can be the best medicine and the best antidote for many of the things that go wrong. The parenting role becomes incredibly hard work if you can't laugh at yourself.

And finally, becoming a good-enough parent does not mean lowering standards for the things that really matter, such as courtesy and manners, consideration for others and spiritual values. In a good-enough household, all members of the family work together to develop rules and standards, and set consequences for failing to adhere to these standards - consequences that the parents apply consistently.

Since we can't be perfect parents, what are the basics that God requires from me as a Mum?

What is "good enough" to Him?

Dr Jill Slattery<sup>1</sup> says it boils down to answering these two simple questions:

### 1. Am I seeking God's wisdom?

It is His wisdom that provides us with the insight, the grace and the tenacity to mother well.

### 2. Am I loving my kids?

Jesus boiled down all His instructions to - loving God and loving others (Matt 22:36-40). His love expressed through us will cover many parenting shortfalls.

Just being a "good enough mum" isn't a cop out. Instead it is my acknowledgement that I can't be God - all sufficient, all knowing, ever-present to my children. In trying to be "supermums" we sometimes forget that the Lord has not called me to be perfect, but to faithfully journey with Him, trusting that He has chosen me as the right Mum for my precious children and will be there as "my helper" to nurture and train the children that He created and loves dearly.

It is about walking together with our children on a journey of faith, modeling and talking about it in a way that our children can see how the Lord is there for us all in the ups and downs of life.

It starts with us living an authentic faith between Sundays.

My advice to new Mums would be "to relax more and enjoy your children, to worry less and to trust more." Believe me, we have them for such a short season.

This is the plaque that is mounted on my new Faith@Home NZ office wall:



Mums, I couldn't have put it better myself!

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*Karen is the Mum of two grown up married children and the "Nonna" of four grandchildren with another to be born next month.*

*She has been on staff at Gateway Church as the Children's Ministry Leader for over 25 years. Karen was recently appointed as the National Leader for Faith@Home NZ, currently a part-time position, a ministry of Willow Creek Association NZ.*

*For many years Karen has felt the need for churches be more intentional about encouraging, training and resourcing parents in their primary role of spiritually nurturing their children. Both in her own church and nationally she now has the opportunity to help grow, develop and sustain what we believe to be this "God-breathed" Faith@Home movement.*

<sup>1</sup> Article: "The Good Enough Mom" by Jill Slattery, found on the Mums channel of Faith@Home Partner Churches, Dec 25, 2012. This article originally appeared in Thriving Family Magazine, Summer 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Article: "The Good Enough Parent" by Rosemary Ann Ogilvie. Parenting Magazine, Summer 06/07, Pages 15-17.