

SURVIVAL TIPS FOR MUMS

PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR THRIVING IN THE
EARLY YEARS OF MOTHERHOOD

BY

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I wish someone had given me this book when I was just embarking on the adventure of motherhood. It manages to be positive without being dewy-eyed. It is funny, warm, honest and Christ-centred and in addition is superbly practical about everything from the indignities of pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding to the annoyances of nits and everlasting laundry. And yet it is neither prescriptive nor preachy, just very readable and helpful.

Ann Benton, author

Reading *Survival Tips for Mums* is like having a friend who's parenting alongside you, who can encourage you when you need a nudge in the right direction, help you through the challenges and remind you of the positives, particularly of the many blessings there are—even if sometimes they feel buried under the responsibilities of parenthood, nappies, the ironing pile ... As you read, Mums of young children will often find yourselves saying, 'so it's not just me!' Learn from an ordinary mum who's been there and learnt many helpful lessons along the way. Learn how to do family life well, by doing it as simply as possible. You will see that motherhood is a high calling—even if it's often lacking in glamour—or a wage. It's about learning to be a mum by grace, rather than by 'mumsnet'. These 'tips' are soaked in wisdom from God's word, and show that even for busy mums, it's not just possible, but vital to keep in touch with God, and to live with His perspective—the wisest tip of all.

***Julia Jones, Director of Women's Courses at London Seminary
and supporting missionaries with Grace Baptist Mission***

How does a mum of five children, pregnant with her sixth, find time to write a book? The answer is because she has lived what she writes and shares her fresh experience. Reading the book is like listening to Elizabeth chat about her reflections on being a busy mum over a cup of coffee. You will nod your head in agreement, smile as you picture her interacting with the children and grab a pencil to note down her wise advice.

Elizabeth is a young, lively, godly woman, living in the south of France, involved in mission work alongside her husband in a growing church. She writes with realism, honesty and frankness. You won't feel judged but rather inspired to persevere when you feel discouraged. You will be encouraged to care for yourself in every way as you are committed to loving your children well and creating a happy, healthy and God-honouring home. This book will give you fresh perspective and you will not only survive but thrive in the privileged role God has given you of being a Mum. I can already think of many mothers to whom I would like to give this book.

***Elinor Magowan, Pastor's wife, Women's Ministry Coordinator
for FIEC, formerly UFM Women's Pastoral Worker.***

Ever felt a little daunted when you hear about people like 'the young pastor's wife, living in a foreign country, speaking fluent French, bringing up six beautiful children' and you picture a 'perfect super-mum' who has it all together? The Proverbs 31 woman in person? Elizabeth's book blows this idea right out of the window as she shares her own struggles in learning the task of motherhood as we all do, one child at a time, one day at a time. It's a practical peek into her own home, amusing in places, but focused throughout on the grace of God in sending Jesus Christ, who, in redeeming us, also transforms every part of our lives. Elizabeth's informal style makes it feel like you're having a chat over coffee with an understanding friend, and its helpful layout means you can refer back to sections easily. It also oozes the wealth of sanctified common sense handed down from her own mother, something many young mums, including myself, wish we'd had.

I read it as a grandmother now, and would recommend it to all mums, because for all sorts of reasons, we all have those days when we struggle. This book takes us beyond surviving to thriving: physically, mentally, socially and spiritually. It doesn't send us on a parenting guilt trip but helps us in the wonderful privilege of introducing our little ones to the God who forgives, cleanses and restores us into a

loving relationship with him. 'He remembers that we are dust', but sometimes we forget it, and comparing our perfect ideas of what we expected 'mummyhood' to be like, with the daily reality of what we are experiencing, destroys our confidence and our joy. This lovely book helps us to avoid that temptation and keep our sanity and enjoyment in raising the children God has blessed us with.

Colette Harding, Pastor's wife, mother and grandmother

This is the kind of book that would be great to give to any expectant or new mum as well as those who want to remember what it is like having little ones, so they can better help and encourage mums in their church. Like the title suggests it is very practical, full of helpful tips and advice—from keeping spiritually healthy to what high chair is best to buy! But it is also interspersed with lovely relatable anecdotes that serve to show a glimpse of what Elizabeth's home and children are like and the chaos that can sometimes be found (like lollies dripping down table legs). I found it very reassuring and honest! I wish it had existed when I first started parenting but I have three small boys at home and am thankful for the advice I can use now and some of the tips for situations I haven't experienced yet. I can imagine pulling this book back out when I face those challenges, like the children getting chicken pox! With so much choice and so many voices in the world telling Christian mums what is best, it is helpful to have an experienced and godly mum share what she has found work and encourage mums to keep on keeping on in Jesus.

Sibyl Brady, Pastor's wife and mother of three small boys

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 Mum Diary: October 2018

Sleep deprivation?

Today I arrived at my appointment with a midwife and realised with horror that I was still wearing my slippers. I tried to hide my feet with my bag in the waiting room.

Introduction

From the moment you watch with bated breath while two little pink lines appear on the pregnancy test, your life will never be the same again. When I was pregnant with our first child we were living in a cosy little flat above the church where my husband was the assistant pastor. The kitchen had large windows looking out on a row of terraced houses, but all the other rooms had sloping ceilings, beams in funny places and only long horizontal slits to let light in. I put some pretty curtains over a low alcove to prepare a 'room' for our new baby. An elderly couple from church lived in a flat under ours and we shared a common staircase. They liked to have their heating on high and the warmth would waft up the stairs to us. I used to drape my washing over the banisters on a complicated assortment of hangers attached to airers. It dried in no time.

The days following the birth of a new baby are a strange and wonderful mix of joy, pain, exhaustion, excitement and change. When our baby was born, the flat was soon bursting with cards, flowers, presents and visitors—our church was full of very loving people. Someone wrapped pink ribbons around the railings outside. I remember the intense joy I felt

throughout that first week even though, physically, I was in a mess. I would look at my baby and think, 'Wow, I did it. I actually gave birth.' I had an episiotomy during the delivery, followed, of course, by a good number of stitches. It was a bad idea for me to be walking around making tea for visitors, but I did it nevertheless and subsequently got a painful infection in the wound. I struggled to position the baby for breastfeeding and had bleeding, cracked nipples. She was not getting enough milk because of difficulty latching on, so she cried all the time. I also wasn't wrapping her up warmly enough because I was trying to follow some advice that I had read about numbers of layers, rather than trusting maternal instinct. I had a total of eleven hours sleep in five days and my husband didn't get much more. I remember the midwife coming to see us and asking, 'Don't you have any windows you can look out of?' She wanted me to put my jaundiced baby in the sunlight, so I moved the Moses basket into the kitchen.

On day five, my mum arrived, which was when things started to improve. She made me lie down with my knees up to let the episiotomy wound heal. She cooked delicious dinners and held the baby while I ate them. She wrapped the baby up warmly and bought a curtain to block off the draught from the corridor at the cold end of the flat. I started taking antibiotics for the infection. The midwife who had been visiting me went on holiday and a wonderful new midwife arrived exactly one week after the birth. She showed me how to position my baby so that feeding wouldn't hurt. I had to go back into hospital for three days with our daughter because she was dehydrated and needed intravenous fluids. The Sunday church service was just coming to an end as the new midwife left. My mum went downstairs and asked the preacher to announce a message from the midwife: 'No visitors for a week!' Through all of this,

I was full of joy despite the tears. I had a clear sense that God was looking after us and we would be okay. And we were.

When my eldest daughter reached the age of ten, already nearly as tall as me and barely recognisable as the fragile, dehydrated baby I had cried over a decade ago, I decided to celebrate ten years of motherhood by sharing ten 'mummy survival tips' on Facebook. I was surprised at the positive reaction they received and various comments that I should write a book. Well, here it is! This book will not tell you how to raise children in a godly way. There are already many excellent books on biblical parenting available. I have noted my personal favourites in the resources section on page 168, along with other books and websites that you may find helpful. This book will also not tell you how to organise your home, though it does inevitably touch on these things. Neither will it answer all your motherhood dilemmas. There are many things I don't cover as I have never had, for example, a caesarean section, a tongue-tied baby or a teenager. It is written from, and therefore limited by, my personal experience.

I grew up in London before heading to Aberystwyth University to study Fine Art and French. During this time, I met my husband on a French-speaking beach mission in Belgium. I was immediately struck by his love for the Lord, his sincere prayers, his ability to interact with children and his broad shoulders. We were married two years later. God has given us four daughters, one son and there is another little one on the way as I write. Two of our children were born in England and three in France. My husband has been the pastor of a small French church since 2010. Although we were both sent out as missionaries through the organisation United For Mission (UFM), I have always considered my main role to be that of supporting my husband in his highly specific calling, taking

care of the home front in order to free him up for ministry. While I am very involved in the life of our church, in practical terms I am a full-time mother and homemaker. I was six weeks pregnant with our third child when we packed our boxes and moved across the channel. When our son was born, I had a three-year-old and a seventeen-month-old who was not yet walking. Learning to be a mother of three in a new country, far from the support of family, was extremely challenging. For about a year there often seemed to be at least one child crying. Over the last ten years I have always had at least one child in nappies, normally two, sometimes three. Finding easier ways of doing things has been a constant goal.

While my perspective on what it means to be a mother comes from the Bible, much of what I share in this book is not about right or wrong. God's unchanging Word gives us timeless wisdom on how to be good parents. The Bible's underlying principles of the value of motherhood can always be relied on, but the way we live these out will look different in each generation and culture. Whether you wean your baby by feeding him purées or go down the fashionable baby-led weaning route, is not a question of moral absolutes. Beware of books that try to make spiritual issues out of subjects that are actually cultural preferences. God is a God of abundance and choice. He has given us imaginations, creativity and the freedom to choose between different ways of doing things in many aspects of life. Your newborn will not be doomed to a life of self-gratifying disobedience if you decide to demand-feed him instead of schedule feeding. Neither will he grow up to become a rigid, legalistic or emotionally insecure character because you use a feeding schedule. The practical tips I give come from the viewpoint of a European, 21st century Christian mother. Some of these tips will no doubt be out of date in

Europe in a few years and may not work in other cultures even now. So please don't feel that you must put everything that I say into practice. Each child is unique. What works with one may not work with another. It is not my intention to judge people who do things differently.

This book is divided into two parts. The first part looks at ways in which mothers can take care of themselves mentally, physically, spiritually and socially so that they are better equipped to serve their families. Motherhood requires us to pour ourselves out for the good of others, but you can't pour anything out of an empty bottle. When the Son of God came to earth as a baby to be our Saviour, he grew in a balanced, healthy way. 'And Jesus increased in wisdom [mentally] and in stature [physically] and in favour with God [spiritually] and man [socially]' (Luke 2:52). It is good to keep an eye on your children to assess how they are developing in these four areas,¹ but you need to make sure that amidst all the demands of daily life with small children, you also make time to fill up your own tank. Looking after yourself in these four areas will help you to look after your family. I am not promoting a Christian-coated version of worldly self-centredness. The world tells us to look out for ourselves first and foremost. 'Me-time' is a popular expression, while adverts tell us to indulge ourselves 'because we're worth it.' Let's be clear from the start, those who follow Christ are called to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24). Faithfulness as a mother (or in any other calling) will involve suffering which no amount of practical advice can remove. My aim in giving ideas to help you thrive is not to encourage self-preservation for its own sake, but rather to equip you to continue living in sacrificial

¹ See Ann Benton, *Aren't They Lovely When They're Asleep: Lessons in Unsentimental Parenting* (Christian Focus, 2007).

love for God's glory, over the long haul, instead of facing burnout at the first hurdle.

The second part of the book provides an A–Z of practical tips and ideas to help you in the daily tasks of being a mum. Motherhood is an adventure. I still have a long way to go and a lot more to discover. I don't always have it all together. There are still times when I lock myself in the bathroom and cry. I have, however, learnt some things which have helped me to survive the journey so far, during what is sometimes called the 'heavy-lifting' stage of parenting, and it is those things that I want to share in this book. I hope that you will find some of them helpful too.