

She Did What She Could

By Marilyn Williams

“She did what she could”... five simple, yet profound words. As a young mom, I always compared myself to other moms—only to feel lacking. It did not seem to matter how hard I tried to be the best mom I could be, or how much I tried to be like every other mom, I always felt a deep and discouraging sense of failure. I tried everything—cloth diapers, nursing, homemade baby food, consistent walks everyday, “Mommy and Me” infant swim lessons, “Mommy and Me” community classes, preschool, home school, traditional school, homemade dinners and desserts, stay-at-home mom, working mom—nothing seemed to make a difference.

The only thing I felt I did consistently well was disappoint my two children. I feared I could never be the mommy they needed. My daughter was sensitive *and* strong-willed. What kind of combination is that? I did not have a clue how to reach her fragile and obstinate heart. My son was active, very active. I could hardly keep up with him; and when I did, he was able to wear my most unyielding discipline down to nothing. It seemed he could get away with everything, no matter how strong I determined myself to be. I feared he would turn out to be a lifetime criminal! I read every book on the market for parenting, attended seminars and tried to apply everything I learned. I gave them my all, but was that enough?

Feeling defeated in my mothering skills before I even started the day, I read a verse from the Bible one morning that caught my eye, “Why are you berating her...She has done a beautiful thing for me...*She did what she could.*” (Mark 14:6-8). These five simple words jumped off the page and into my heart like water for my dehydrated self-esteem. Could it be possible that my all really is enough? I was giving my children all I had to give, but feared I would still disappoint. Is there such thing as a mom who doesn’t disappoint? I pondered these thoughts and suddenly realized, “If my all was enough for the God of the universe, it should certainly be enough for me. It will probably not be enough for my children, but I was not the answer to their every fulfillment. I could only give them what I had to give; the rest was out of my hands.

It was as if someone gave me a shot of vitamin B and I was ready to keep climbing the mountain in front of me. Absorbing these verses into my mind, I decided to adopt them as my own motto for life: “*She did what she could, and that’s a beautiful thing!*” Instead of another opportunity to fail my children, I began to see the day as an opportunity to do my best and give my best. I stopped trying to be someone I am not, and began to embrace who I am. The freedom in these five little words resonated through my entire body and into my daily life. I said “No” to things I could not do, freeing myself up to do the things I could. My focus in parenting shifted from trying to meet every need of my children, to just giving them the best of me. I could not be all they needed; God would have to take care of that. Surprisingly, by giving myself permission to operate in my strengths instead of dwelling on my weaknesses, I began to be the mother they needed me to be. I guess God knew what He was doing after all!

Over the years, I have read many parenting books and have concluded that the best books are not formulas, but books that encourage you to be the mom you were created to be. Being the mom you were created to be is not selfish or insensitive to your children's needs. On the contrary, as you give yourself permission to be yourself, you will discover your understanding, as well as your ability to reach your children, increases. Parenting is not all about our children; it is also about our parenting. While it is easier to focus on our children's needs rather than our own personal growth, it often leads to repressed emotion and resentment. By denying myself the freedom to be myself and trying to measure up to my children's expectations, my frustrations and feelings of failure were leaking into all areas of my life. I was short-tempered, low on energy, and always looking to them for my daily grasp of self esteem. As my children grew to be teenagers and now young adults, I realized their resentment toward my smothering them in replacement for growing myself.

So I took those five simple, yet profound words to heart and began to put a little more focus on me, instead of continually hovering over my children. I began to change my parenting approach from nagging and begging, to role modeling. I was pleasantly surprised as my young adults found a new respect for the value of advanced education as they witnessed their mother gaining a better job and pay because of my devotion to finish my college degree. Originally, I thought pursuing an education would be too difficult because all of my attention and energy was focused on the children. I was right about that! But I finally enrolled in the "Mommy Track," one class at a time, giving myself permission to keep growing as a person while still mothering my children. I was still attentive to my children's homework and needs, but they were watching Mommy role-model her words. As I dared to be the mother and person I was created to be, I witnessed my children gaining permission to be themselves as well. Soon, our family transformed into its own unique and original design.

There is beauty in freedom, and freedom is formed by a grace to be yourself, to live the life you believe in, and to love others the best way you can. Five simple words have completely changed my life; I have become the "She Did What She Could" woman in my personal and professional life. As a writer and speaker, I experience this message liberating women around the world out of shame and into freedom to be themselves and do what they can do. It is especially freeing for parents who are in the midst of the biggest mountain they will ever climb, where most of the elements are completely out of their control. I have shared these five simple words in articles, books, and presentations; always delivering freedom from perfectionism and the devaluing of our everyday, ordinary activities. When women realize the power in doing what they can, they will find themselves doing more than they ever could! Standing at the summit of parenting, now as a grandmother, I look back on my winding path and realize I did what I could. I'm not perfect, but nothing is wasted. Every mistake I made as a mother and every area I fell short in has been a part of growing into the best wife, mother, friend, and human being I can possibly be; and in the end, that truly is good enough. In our fast-paced and high production society, we rarely feel as if anything is ever enough, but my girlfriends and I have adopted a new life motto: "She Did What She Could," and don't forget, that's a beautiful thing!