

SOLO
Mom

FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

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Foreword

Dear Solo Mom,

This book was written especially with you in mind. There are so many circumstances that may have led to you becoming a solo mom. Perhaps you are a solo mom by choice, by an unexpected pregnancy, through divorce, through the death of your child's dad, an absentee father, abandonment, or a myriad of other circumstances. Solo moms are mothers on their own, whether by choice or circumstance. But above all, every solo mom wants to be the best mother she can be, despite the challenges of parenting on her own.

Some obstacles in your path may seem relentless, unavoidable, and insurmountable. There can be a stigma that comes with being a solo mom, questions from others, financial challenges, dealing with an uncooperative dad, loneliness, grief, and complete exhaustion from juggling so many things. And, that is only a small taste of all the things you may face each day.

Yet, in the middle of all of your to-do lists, your little one tugs on your pant leg, looks up to you with those big eyes, reaches up little arms to be held, and says, "I love you, mommy." Or, what about that teenage boy that unexpectedly gives you a warm embrace? Your children, regardless of age, depend on you day after day, looking to you for guidance, support, and to provide for their every need.

You will fulfill many roles in your lifetime, but none will ever be more important than being a mom. It is a sacred and holy responsibility. Never underestimate the influence that one praying mom can have on her child. As you respond to the needs of your little one, you have the capacity to influence generations to come. Every day that you step up to bat, you are making a deposit and investing in the life of your child.

Solo mom, Jesus chose you to parent your child. Know that He has promised to walk this parenting journey with you. You are loved, cherished, and you are not alone. Go forward with God!

Blessings,

Pamela Consuegra, PhD

Chapter 1

Embracing the Term "Solo Mom"

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

"I have loved you with an everlasting love..." (Jeremiah 31:3, NIV).

Introduction

When you hear the term "solo mom," what kind of woman do you imagine? We want you to embrace the term "solo mom" for it truly is a term that represents strength, courage, and resourcefulness. Solo moms are intelligent, loving, confident, independent women who would do anything for their children. So, own it and keep doing the amazing job that you are already doing.

Perhaps you already own that term and have not personally experienced rude or judgmental comments from others; however, some have. Not every community judges. In fact, some are very loving and supportive. If that has been your experience, praise the Lord. You may be a source of special encouragement for those who find themselves in this situation because unfortunately, others have heard judgmental statements, seen eyes that bore through them, been the topic of gossip, and been hurt by it. It is for them that we include this chapter.

There may be some people who have made assumptions about your life, your financial status, or even your character, without ever knowing your story. This may seem unfair, and it is. But you cannot let someone else's uninformed opinion and misguided judgement define who you are or how you feel about yourself. It is their problem and not yours. They are at fault if this is the case. You can choose to educate others on the truth about solo moms. You can be part of revealing the true picture of the strength, resilience, and resourcefulness of solo moms.

Read the scripture verse again for this chapter: "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3, NIV). This verse reminds us that Jesus loves us all with an incredible everlasting love. It's His amazing grace that washes over us time and time again just when we need it.

What a wonderful truth; what amazing love. He sees your tears fall, He understands the pain you carry, and He sees you working hard to be the best mom you can be. While others may not see beyond what lies on the outside, God does. He is aware of your worries and your needs, and He knows the incredible love you have for your child.

You are Not Alone

How prevalent is being a solo mom in the United States today? Let's look at some recent statistics (Maggio, 2020):

- One out of every four parents living with a child in the United States today is unmarried
- One out of every five children lives with a single mom
- There are 15 million single moms in the United States
- 86% of single parent families in the United States are led by moms
- Of 22 million children living in single parent households, 19 million are living with their mom while only 3 million are living with their dad
- There are 300% more mother-led families today than there were in 1960

Solo moms are out there and visible and making a difference in society today. You are not alone as you represent a growing number of women who are impacting our world and next generation for the better.

There are a multitude of different routes that take one into single parenthood. For some, parenting solo is a path they purposefully chose. Others may have had difficult journeys strewn with heartbreak, abuse, loss, or grief. Some are parenting alone because their husbands or partners have died suddenly, some were cheated on, and others abandoned. Still others are parenting alone because they fled a domestic violent situation or a partner with addiction. The point is that every situation is unique and the reasons that led to becoming a solo mom vary from person to person.

The good news is that media, especially television and movies, is more apt to depict single moms in a positive context in today's world. However, many portrayals of mothers and women, in general, are unrealistic. They portray a picture of moms that is far from your day to day reality.

Some solo moms admit they do not tell people they meet for the first time they are a single parent, for fear of being labeled or judged. There may also be critical remarks made by relatives, colleagues, acquaintances, or church members. Others

say they have been dropped from their social circle or are no longer invited when other families get together for meals and outings, including social events at church. After all, you may be a “bad influence” on their kids, and they do not want to be seen hanging around you. One single mom stated, “Women at church do not trust solo moms in the presence of their husbands. People do not know how to talk to me, so they stop trying to relate at all. It can be lonely at times.”

Let’s repeat what we said earlier: God does not give your neighbors, friends, family, or even your church family the role of judge in your life. Embrace the term “solo mom.” It represents strength, courage, and resourcefulness. Solo moms are intelligent, loving, confident, independent women who would do anything for their children.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Think of a time when another person reflected God’s amazing love to you.
2. How did that make you feel?
3. How did you respond?

Setting Boundaries

As a solo mom, you deal with so much and the last thing on your to-do list should be dealing with the misplaced judgement of others. Yes, it is hard to listen to hurtful words and at some point, you may have stopped being shocked by the rude things people say and how some people treat you differently.

Perhaps it is time that you set some appropriate boundaries and know who to let in, and who to keep out. Here are seven tips for putting those boundaries in place:

Stop the negative self-talk. Do not let the criticism of others affect how you talk to yourself. Stick some positive affirmations on your bathroom mirror, read them at the start of each day, memorize them, and repeat them to yourself if those negative thoughts begin to creep in.

Focus on good friends. Think about your true friends and surround yourself with them. Do not surround yourself with so-called “friends” who continue to fill your ears with negative talk.

Focus on what you got right for today. It is easy to make a list of all the things you wish you could change about the day; however, why not focus on what you got right? Think about the successes in your day, recount them each night before you go to bed, and thank God for each victory.

Honestly express your thoughts. Do yourself a favor and clear out all your frustrations in your heart and mind. Talk to one of those good friends, write

in your journal, blog about them, or go to a counselor. Let go of all the negative thoughts and feelings, clean them out, and try to replace them with positive practices that refuse to let them back in. Honestly expressing your thoughts and confronting your feelings is a good step in addressing them so you can move forward.

Be self-aware. If you are experiencing negativity, stop and think about what is causing that feeling. Is it bad friends? If so, you need to stop hanging around them. Are you watching too much media that continues to portray negative images? If so, turn off that television. Are you spending too much time sitting around and engaging in negative self-talk? If so, it may be time to get up and use that energy for more positive things. In other words, try to identify the things that are leading to your negative feelings and emotions and replace them with more positive activities.

Go outside. Negative talk from others or from yourself will eventually bring you down. Hit the reset button by going into nature. Go out into the fresh air, breathe deeply, walk, talk with the Creator, and you will feel the anxiety begin to melt away. Exercising in the fresh air is one of the best things you can do to begin to look at things in new ways.

Know when to walk away and speak up. You can choose who to spend time with, who you are going to listen to, and what subjects you will allow conversations to cover. You can say “No” and you can walk away. If someone says something out of line about your family or your circumstances, tell the person to stop. Sometimes a person needs to be confronted in order to stop their rude comments.

Do not allow your energy to be drained by what others think of you. Keep your focus on being the best mom you can be. Take things one day at a time and thank God for the blessings you have in your life. Repeat God’s promises and reminders of How much He loves you.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. What is your favorite Bible verse that speaks of God’s love to you?
2. Write the Bible verse out and place your name in it. For example:
“For God so loved (YOUR NAME) that he gave his one and only Son, that if (YOUR NAME) believes in him, (SHE) shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV).
3. Claim this verse that mentions your name, cling to it, and put it in a place where you can read it every morning. Remember that Jesus loves you so much that He died for you. And, He would have died if you would have been the only one!

Admit When You Need Help and Get it!

Healing years of emotional pain from the past does not happen overnight. We all want immediate results but please understand that this process is a journey. There may also be barriers that prevent someone from getting professional help such as time, lack of insurance coverage that means out-of-pocket expenses, or childcare.

There are times when talking to a trusted friend or a minister may be exactly what you need. However, there are other times when talking to a family member may not be in your best interest and you may need more intensive, objective, and professional help.

Here are some signs that you may need outside professional help:

You cannot remember the last time you had a good night's sleep. The constant cycle of a lack of sleep is a clear sign that things are not working, and you need outside intervention. Your health will soon deteriorate, and this will only make matters worse. You cannot be the best mom for your kids when you have not had adequate rest.

Your networking is not working. Every attempt at talking to a friend or family member leaves you feeling more discouraged. Perhaps they are too close to the situation and unable to be objective. It may be time to bring in a neutral party.

There was/is physical and/or emotional abuse. There is no way you should allow this behavior to continue without getting help and finding safety immediately. Physical, emotional, and verbal abuse should never be tolerated. It is not how God would want His daughter to be treated. And, even if it is not occurring in the present, you may need professional help to overcome the effects past abuse. Also, your child may benefit from counseling if this has been your family's experience.

You are afraid to say certain things in your family. When you do not feel comfortable sharing your feelings and thoughts without being demeaned, criticized, judged, or bullied, something is terribly wrong. You need a safe place to talk. It is time to get outside professional help.

You deny, excuse, or choose to ignore the signs of problems such as drug or alcohol abuse. Substance abuse is an indication of greater problems than simple emotional distress or fatigue. It is not uncommon for some of these substance abuse issues to occur when you have been dealing with tough circumstances. Perhaps you excuse your behavior by saying things like, "I can stop anytime; I am not addicted; I will stop as soon as my parenting situation stabilizes." This is the height of denial, and a key indicator that outside help is needed. Once again, your child may also benefit from counseling if this has been your family's experience.

You have recurring thoughts that your child would be better off without you. These kinds of negative thoughts are a result of much deeper problems that need professional help. All of us have occasional thoughts that perhaps we are not the best parent. However, when it becomes a daily obsession there should be deeper consideration as to its reason and impact. Having these types of negative thoughts is a key indicator that you need professional intervention.

Perhaps one of the best things you can do is to honestly evaluate your own situation, consider the above indicators, and determine if you need professional outside help. Remember, getting professional help is not a sign of weakness. Instead, it is a sign of great strength. Why can't we always solve our own problems? The reason is all too simple. Sometimes we lack the skills, resources, abilities, or understanding. If you needed new eyeglasses, would you break the bottoms out of two glass bottles, get some wire, and make your own because you did not want to pay a professional to make them? Would you perform a root canal on your own molar with your new power drill? Would you take out your own appendix? Of course not. So, why is it that we are reluctant to seek professional help when we need it? Ahh, here we have that word again...STIGMA! Are you going to let that rob you of taking a step forward? This one step forward could be the thing you lack to put you on the path to health and wholeness.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Who do you talk to when you need a listening ear or advice?
2. Do you think someone in your family is always the best person to talk to?
3. Can you think of a situation when it may be better to talk to someone outside the family?

Here are some benefits to seeking a licensed professional counselor:

They are objective. They can offer suggestions and give options you may want to consider. They can see things that others who are too close to the situation may be unable to see.

They are not emotionally involved. Getting advice or talking to family members is not always best as they may be too emotionally involved. An outside counselor may offer suggestions and options which are not shaded by anger, resentment, past history, or personal gain or position.

They are trained and skilled listeners. Professional counselors are trained and give you the opportunity to express deep-seated feelings, concerns, emotions, and attitudes in a setting of safety and understanding without

fear of reprisal or condemnation. They are skilled listeners and trained to help you uncover your feelings in a way that will enable you to move forward.

They can give you biblical insight. When you go to a counselor that looks at things through God's Word, they invite God into the meeting with you. They place themselves in His hands and ask for His leading and direction regarding your particular situation. A biblically-based counselor will bring to your sessions the power of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and prayer. That is a winning combination that will have a positive impact on the outcome of your situation.

They can give you the benefit of their experience. They have dealt with others who have been down the same road you are now traveling. Their experience and road map will be invaluable as they guide you into considerations and options that you can use to make decisions for your future.

They are completely confidential. A licensed counselor is required by HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) to keep your information private. A counselor will know how important it is for you to be able to speak freely with complete confidence that you will not hear the information you are sharing repeated anywhere else. That reason alone makes this a worthwhile endeavor.

They can use tools and skills that are a result of their training and experience. They have skills and tools that are not going to be available to you and your family if you try to work things out on your own. It is a mistake to assume to have the same expertise and training as they do. They have insights and options that will illuminate the problem in ways you might never have considered.

They can offer accountability. Yes, you need to be held accountable. It is not enough to talk about the problem. There must be a sense of accountability and progress. A professional counselor will lead you through a process of going over options, and accountability for action regarding those options, that will create the confidence that you are making positive headway with the problem. They will give you action steps to work on in each session. These steps will put you on a positive path to moving forward.

If you think you need outside professional help, the most important thing to keep in mind is to seek a counselor that is a good fit for your needs. Every situation differs and counselors specialize in various areas so take the time to discover what they are. A good counselor will also respect your religious beliefs. If prayer is important to you, seek a counselor who understands the importance of prayer and in letting God lead in difficult circumstances. It is OK to not accept someone whom you feel is not a good fit for you.

God Chose You!

All moms have felt inadequate at times, regardless of their situation. All moms have yelled, said the wrong thing, wished for a do-over, or lost their patience. And every time the guilt comes crashing down we are tempted to think that, because of our perceived deficiencies, we are going to ruin our child forever. This is not unique to solo moms; rather, it is something all moms face, sooner or later.

It is far too easy to think that someone else would do a better job of raising your child. But here is the beautiful part! NO mom is the perfect mom. We all have flaws. We all have our good days and our not-so-good days. There will always be days when we wish we could rewind the clock and have a do-over.

Living in a culture driven by constant connectivity and social media does nothing to help the situation. All we need to do is scroll through Facebook, Instagram, or Pinterest and we are reminded how “perfect” all the other moms out there are. There are the moms whose kids always looks picture perfect, whose hair and makeup are daily done to perfection, whose homes are spotless, who make delicious homemade meals, and do craft projects with their kids each afternoon. Just keep in mind that things are not always as they appear. Things that look perfect on social media are not perfect in reality.

We are here to remind you that what you see on social media is not reality, sweet mom, and perfection is not something God ever intended you to work so hard to achieve. He has chosen YOU to be your child’s mom. I promise you that God makes no mistakes. “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you were born, I set you apart” (Jeremiah 1:5, NIV).

God chose you to be a mom to your child. He could have chosen anyone, but He chose YOU! Imagine that God wrote the following letter to you:

My Beloved Solo Mom,

You are chosen, you are enough, and you are mine. My love for you is fierce. I am proud of you. I see your heart, the way you seek me, and your devotion to raising your child. Well done, my child.

My child, you are a delight to me. I chose you at the foundation of the world and I have sanctified you for great purpose. Beloved, I stand, ready to join you on your parenting journey. The path may be blurry before you, but it is in my sight and I can see the finish line. I will carry you when you are weak, give you strength, and you will not fall.

Beloved daughter, you are enough. I have chosen you to parent your child. You belong to me and I call you worthy. My promise is to give you hope and a future. Do not waste the blessing of time by worrying about tomorrow, for I have already taken care of your needs.

With my limitless and everlasting love, I will meet the needs of your child also. I am sufficient. Their identity is in Me, their provision is in Me, and their future is in Me. I have set them apart for a great purpose. I have tremendous plans for your child's future.

Watching you raise them delights me. I have chosen you to raise this child. You are the warrior fit to sharpen them, instruct them, direct them, prepare them, train them, and prepare them to face the world. No weapon formed against them will prosper, for they belong to me.

My darling daughter, do not forget that you are a treasure to me. You are of inestimable value and I will never stop loving you!

*My Beloved, you are mine forever.
Your Heavenly Father*

Conclusion

Dear solo mom, God is faithful and will stay by your side as you go about raising and pouring into the children He has entrusted to your care. Take comfort in these words from the Psalmist: "I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With Him at my right hand, I will not be shaken" (Psalm 16:8, NIV). Keep your eyes focused on Jesus.

What amazing grace and what amazing love Jesus has for you. He equips you with courage and strength to know when to walk away and when to stand up. He will never leave you alone to figure out the issues of life without His guidance. All He asks is for a heart surrendered to Him. His promise is to join you on this parenting journey and give you strength and wisdom as you face each new day.

Help is available so do not be afraid to reach out and seek it. Most communities have resources available even if you do not have adequate health insurance, so be sure to explore the options available to you. Professional counseling may be just what you need on your journey through solo motherhood.

Do not forget to keep the end goal in mind as you press on. Every day that you step up to bat, you are making a deposit and investing in the life of your child.

Your work as a mom now will continue to pay off for generations to come!

Finally, in God's sight, you are precious, honored, and loved beyond measure. He treasures you and He loves you with a love that has no limit. So, solo mom, embrace that term because it is descriptive of a woman who gives so much to her children, contributes so much to society, and is deserving of so much more.

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