

Episode 161

Overcoming the Pressure of Unrealistic Expectations in Motherhood

Life Repurposed Podcast
michellerayburn.com/161

Host Michelle Rayburn

Michelle Rayburn [00:00:01]:

Today's episode is all about reframing expectations, specifically when it comes to Motherhood. As we navigate the challenges of raising children, we often find ourselves grappling with societal pressures and realistic standards.

Michelle Rayburn [00:00:17]:

We might also come face to face with our own beliefs and realize we set the bar to an unachievable level, or we might be expecting something outside of our control. Let's dive in and discover how we can release these expectations to create a more hopeful and fulfilling parenting experience. I chose this topic today because I'm recording it on the release day of my new book, which is called *Life in the Estrogen-Free Zone: Humor and Heartfelt Wisdom from Boy Moms*. It's a compilation with 19 authors, and we're all moms of sons. We all bring a unique experience to the mix. And I knew that if I was going to write a book for boy moms, I couldn't have it just be my experience because they're all so different.

So I put out a call for submissions and had a bunch of authors respond, and these are the chapters that I chose to be part of the book. There are 30 of them. So in this book, we offer a refreshing perspective on the joys and the challenges that for some of us come with being the sole estrogen ambassador in a household full of testosterone. Through amusing anecdotes, relatable tales of mischief, and practical biblical insights, All of these moms shed light on the roller coaster ride of boyhood. That release of the book got me thinking about expectations. Back in the day before children, I'll call it BC, I thought I'd have at least a boy and a girl and go from there. I imagined putting pigtails in my little girl's hair and shopping for cute clothes. And then I realized when I found out my second baby was on the way, and he was a boy, that maybe the perfect picture of parenthood wasn't exactly what I needed. I also have discovered since having 3 granddaughters that I am not very good at doing girl hair. I know I can learn, but I'm not there yet. So I had to pivot and reframe my expectations.

When I realized that I was going to be a mom of 2 boys and I was not thinking about having more children. So I had to ask myself, will I be content with how God had planned out my family, or will I wrestle with it? And I'll skip to the end of the story and tell you that I have been very happy and content with that. And I know that in that pivotal moment, it could have gone either way. I've never looked back and wished that God had done it differently. I love being a boy mom. I love both of my sons. I've realized that I've also had to wrestle with expectations more

than once in the parenting journey. I know this is not a parenting show, but a lot of you listening are moms. So I want to talk about this. I want to talk about expectations specifically for moms. So let's look first at reframing expectations. From an early age we were bombarded with stereotypes and predefined roles. And these can lead to unnecessary stress and disappointment. But it's essential to recognize these expectations and ask ourselves whether they truly align with our values and God's plan. There are several reasons why a woman might need to reevaluate her expectations about herself and about motherhood. These reasons can vary from personal growth to the changing dynamics of family life. So here are some of the common reasons that you might relate to.

The first is changing life circumstances. Life is constantly evolving, and a woman's circumstances can change significantly over time. These changes might include career shifts, marital status changes, financial situations, or the addition of more children to the family. Every new phase requires a reassessment of priorities and expectations.

The second is personal growth and reflection. As we grow and mature our values, our beliefs, and our goals may evolve. Motherhood is a transformative experience, and over time, we might realize that our initial expectations no longer align with our current values or aspirations.

The 3rd is comparison and social pressure. Social media has really upped this a lot from where it was when I had my kids 30 years ago. The pressure to conform to societal norms and the constant comparisons with other mothers can lead to unrealistic expectations. Realizing the detrimental impact of these comparisons may prompt us to reevaluate our own expectations and redefine success on our terms.

The fourth one is parenting challenges. Parenting comes with unique challenges and unforeseen circumstances can arise. These challenges might include dealing with a child's special needs, developmental delays, maybe unexpected life events. In these situations, we may need to reevaluate our expectations to accommodate the evolving needs of our family.

Number 5 is self-care and well-being. Neglecting self-care and personal well-being can lead to burnout and exhaustion and I have a feeling most of you listening have experienced this to some degree. Recognizing the importance of taking care of ourselves can prompt us to reevaluate our expectations and make self-care a priority.

Number 6 is perfectionism and guilt. Striving for perfection and motherhood can lead to feelings of guilt and self-criticism. We may need to reevaluate our expectations to embrace imperfection and show ourselves more compassion. This is something I've talked about often on the show because I always call myself a perfectionist in recovery, I guess. A recovering perfectionist. Somebody who is really working on showing myself that compassion.

The last one is embracing flexibility. Life is unpredictable and motherhood often requires flexibility and adaptability. Reevaluating our expectations can help us embrace the idea that parenting may not always go as planned and that being open to change is essential. I've found that to be true in my own life as my children's personalities and needs, and all of those things

came into the picture, and I couldn't just plan my way out of everything and paint this perfect picture. Life is so much more unpredictable than that.

So as we look at these 7 things that I just listed, ultimately reevaluating expectations about ourselves in motherhood is healthy and necessary. It allows us to grow, to adapt, and to find a sense of balance and fulfillment in our roles as mothers while still nurturing our own individuality and well-being. It's essential for us to remember that it's okay to reassess and to adjust our expectations as we navigate this beautiful, challenging and transformative journey of motherhood.

It took me some time to realize that I was holding on to some unrealistic expectations. One was when I realized I didn't want the career and daycare model I always thought I wanted. Becoming a stay-at-home mom was not really in my original plan. but I struggled with juggling a career in home life. And so I let one go for a while, and I knew it wasn't going to be my family that I let go. So my husband and I figured out how to make it without my career, and that was a huge change for us because it was a big income change, and I'll get to that in a few minutes. when we talk about the impact.

So that leads us perfectly into talking about the impact of unrealistic expectations. What happens when we set unrealistic expectations for ourselves. Well, it can have a profound impact on our well-being and on our parenting experience. So here are some thoughts on how self-imposed unrealistic expectations can affect us.

1st, self-criticism and guilt. A mom who sets unrealistic expectations for herself may constantly criticize her own efforts and feel guilty when she perceives herself falling short. This self-imposed pressure can lead to feelings of inadequacy and negatively impact her self-esteem.

The second way it affects us is with burnout and exhaustion. Trying to meet unattainable standards can lead to burnout and exhaustion because this constant need to be perfect in all aspects of motherhood can leave little time or energy for self-care and personal well-being.

Another consequence is comparison and jealousy. Unrealistic expectations can drive a mom to compare herself to other mothers and even feel jealous of their perceived successes. Now remember, a lot of it's perceived especially because of social media. The comparison trap can erode our confidence and create unnecessary competition among us with our friends. So if you have mom competition going on, that might be an effect of unrealistic expectations.

The 4th thing that it can affect is our mental health. Setting these unrealistic expectations for ourselves can contribute to feelings of anxiety and stress and maybe even depression. The pressure to be a perfect mom. I'm gonna put that in quotes can be overwhelming and have detrimental effects on her mental health.

The 5th thing that is a consequence is missed moments of joy. When we are consumed by trying to meet unrealistic expectations, We may miss out on the joy of everyday moments with our children, and the joy of having a relationship with the Lord too. we get distracted by all those things. And so we might neglect spending time with our family. We might neglect spending time

with God. and the constant pursuit of perfection can overshadow the simple pleasures and connections that make motherhood special.

The 6th one I've already talked about a little bit, and that's neglecting self care. Moms who set unrealistic expectations for themselves may neglect self-care and even some of their personal interests because they believe that taking time for themselves is selfish. And this is a limiting belief I had for a long time. I can't take time for myself. That's selfish. And then it leads to meltdowns and almost like this forced in self-care where it's like someone around you says, you need to take a break. It also can lead to feelings of resentment and this develops, in the long run, almost like a dissatisfaction with what we're doing.

The last one, number 7, is difficulty asking for help. When we're burdened by unrealistic expectations, we might find it challenging to ask for help or even to delegate tasks because we fear it might be perceived as a sign of weakness or inadequacy.

I can relate to several of these, but that last one I really can relate to I've tried to be stoic and have it all together. And if somebody says, do you need help? I say, no. No. I've got this. And then inside, I'm often one difficulty away from a meltdown. And so this is often coming from this outside pressure of appearing as if I have it all put together and as if I am somehow perfect, which is just ridiculous to think of. But That is almost the message that I've sent with saying, no. I don't need your help.

So how do we counteract these struggles? Well, it starts with setting realistic expectations. So here are some ways to overcome those self-imposed unrealistic expectations. First, we can practice self-compassion. Be kind to yourself and recognize that no one is perfect. Embrace -- and see them as opportunities for growth and learning. This is really the heart of the life repurposed podcast and the books that I write. It really is about seeing that imperfections are opportunities for growth and learning.

Another thing that we can do is set realistic boundaries. Instead of just realistic expectations, we need boundaries. When we establish those realistic boundaries and we prioritize activities that bring us joy and fulfillment, and we learn to say no to tasks or commitments that overwhelm us, we then start to experience a lot more of the fun side of life. The people around us enjoy us more, and there's not so much pressure. And so boundaries has been a lesson that has come hard for me, and I'm still like, a work in progress on it, but there's so much freedom. It sounds so contradictory, but there is so much freedom when we have boundaries. because it allows us to be in control. So boundaries are a good thing. They're not always something that takes away our freedom.

Another thing that we need to do is celebrate achievements. Ignore and celebrate your accomplishments no matter how small they may seem. Give yourself credit for your efforts and your progress. It might be you got a drawer cleaned out that day. It might mean that you took some time for yourself that day it might mean that the kids all got dressed. I don't know what your achievement might be, but celebrate what it is. Don't overlook it and don't write it off. I've done that so many times where it's like, that's just part of everyday life. Everybody should know

how to do that thing. Right? And that's not necessarily true. Some days for me, the achievement was that I got to take a shower.

Another thing that we can do is seek support. This really goes ... it's the counterbalance to the not asking for help that I just talked about. Seek support. Reach out to friends. Reach out to family or support groups. where you can share your feelings and experiences. Sometimes that's online, sometimes that's in person. Often talking to others can offer a fresh perspective and reassure insurance and just press the reset button. Get us back to a place where we feel more positive about things.

Another one is to focus on self-care. Prioritize self-care activities that nourish your mind, your body, and your soul. taking care of yourself allows you to be a better and more present mom for your children. For me, self-care is not you know, there's there's activities that I would love to be able to do on a regular basis, like getting a massage or going to a spa. I don't do those things very often. partially because I live in a very rural place. And so that's not just an everyday practice for me. Self-care for me looks like going out in the hammock with a book and just spending some time under a tree in the shade and relaxing there. Sometimes it involves soaking my feet for a little bit. Sometimes it is watching a TV show.

I have so many different things that are part of self-care, so only you know what feels like self-care to you. The final one here is to reevaluate priorities. Look at your values and reflect on those and your priorities as a mom, as a woman, as a wife, as perhaps a business owner. and consider if your expectations align with what truly matters to you and your family.

So I said I would come back to talking about my career as a registered nurse. And I talked about this in the last episode with Mikaela Albertson who's a medical doctor and she talked about what it was like to step away in a bigger capacity to be home more, step away from her career as a doctor. When I decided to leave my career as a registered nurse, it meant reevaluating priorities. It meant giving up 2 thirds of our income. So that was a change in our goals related to things like house, car, status, even clothing, all of those things.

When you have to give up part of your income in order to achieve a goal, it means other goals change. It's sort of like a domino effect. You can't have it all. So for me, that was a big step that we took and Even though I was confident in taking that step, it there was some stress that went along with it. And now, I don't want you to think it was all perfect from there either. Let's get to the truth. I replaced those desires with new expectations. So I found myself overcommitting as a volunteer saying yes to too much. And so it's been a learning process for me, and I'm sure it is for you in setting boundaries, figuring out your goals, all of those things. So again, I could easily fall into perfectionism and just figure out a new expectation and be unrealistic about that. So it's always looking at my expectations and reevaluating.

By acknowledging and addressing self-imposed unrealistic expectations, We can cultivate a more balanced and positive approach to motherhood, which leads to a greater fulfillment and well-being for ourselves and our children. By releasing expectations, we become more comfortable with our authentic selves. And we empower the other people around us to discover their authentic selves. I found that when I'm more comfortable with me and how God wired me and

how he made me, I'm much better at letting other people be who God made them to be. my husband, my children, the people I know. So when we release expectations, it has an effect on the people around us as well.

Let's wrap this up. What rigid expectations do you have for yourself or for your children? What would happen if you embraced hopeful and compassionate mindset. What if you focused on your children's growth, on acceptance, and the joy of seeing them become their true selves? As we come to the end of this episode, I want to leave you with a powerful message of self-compassion and empowerment. I have a special heart for boy moms just because I am one. But being a mother is a journey filled with highs and lows, triumphs, and challenges. It's time to take a deep breath. Let go of the weight of unrealistic expectations and embrace the beauty of your life. You are not alone in this journey.

We all face moments of self-doubt and pressure to meet unattainable standards. But remember, you are enough just as God created you because he is enough. He didn't make a mistake when he created you. embrace the imperfections, the messy moments, the lessons learned from mistakes because they are stepping stones to growth and resilience. As a mom, you have the power to shape your family's world with love, understanding, and compassion. But to care for others, you also must care for yourself.

Prioritize self-care and well-being. Take the time to recharge and nurture your passions as a happy and fulfilled mom It creates a warm and supportive environment for your children to thrive. Lighten the burden of comparison and judgment. Each mother's journey is unique, and there is no one size fits all approach to motherhood. Embrace your path, your values, and your choices with confidence. Let's rewrite the narrative of motherhood together. Free from the constraints of unrealistic expectations.

Embrace your children for who they are. supporting their passions and dreams no matter where they may lead. Celebrate their journey of growth knowing that your love and guidance will help them come the best version of themselves. Thank god for equipping you with his power to create a home filled with hope, acceptance, and joy. embrace this powerful role with open arms. And remember that self-compassion is the foundation for nurturing a compassionate family.

Let's take this charge and embark on a chapter of motherhood, one that is grounded in self-love, authenticity, and the joy of living life repurposed. Thank you for joining me on this journey today. If you loved this episode, you're going to love *Life in the Estrogen-Free Zone*. And you're going to find a link to that book in the show notes at michellerayburn.com/161, or you can just search for *Life in the Estrogen-Free Zone* by Michelle Rayburn on your favorite book retailer platform. Okay. Who am I kidding? For most of us, that's Amazon. but wherever you shop for books, you will find that book online.

Thank you so much for being with me today as I'm celebrating the launch of that book next week, I have a really fun guest interview, so I'll see you then. You've been listening to life repurposed. If you'd like bonus resources sent to your inbox each week, be sure to sign up at michellerayburn.com.