



The Intellectual Life of A Stay-at-Home Mother

Motherhood is not a retreat from intellectual life but a demanding school of attention, interpretation, and growth.

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PARENTING

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“I feel so sorry for you.”

My relative’s words took me by surprise. We were enjoying an afternoon together at a big family gathering, immersed in a conversation completely unrelated to her abrupt and pitying sentence.

“Oh?”

“You must be so bored,” she said with compassion. “You’ve spent so many years on your education—reading the most difficult texts, solving complex legal problems. I can’t

imagine how monotonous taking care of babies must feel compared to that. Do you ever miss the intellectual stimulation?"

Her tone was sincere. She genuinely worried I might not be enjoying my decision to put my legal career on hold—my decision to dedicate all my time and energy to my children. She wanted to make space for me to voice any frustrations or regrets.

But I had to tell her the truth: "Actually, parenting is the most intellectually stimulating thing I've ever done."

And I meant it.

My relative's words could have been my own five years earlier, when I assumed that life as a stay-at-home mother would be mundane, a waste of my potential, something I was too "smart" for.

At the conclusion of my bachelor's degree, I dove headfirst into LSAT study, then entered law school, and then enrolled in every possible extracurricular. I set the stage for an illustrious legal career.

When my husband and I decided to welcome our first baby into our family halfway through law school, I didn't expect much to change. Sure, I would have a child to take care of, but there was no way this little person [would derail me](#) from my ambitions.

Or so I thought.

Nothing could have prepared me for how wildly my first daughter would take over my heart and soul. As her birth approached, my legal career started to look less like the burning flame I thought it was and more like a meager candle—dim compared to the [roaring sun of my daughter's existence](#).

These feelings only escalated after Brea's birth. The sacred trust of introducing another human into this world enveloped me. When I should have been studying for law school, I immersed myself in parenting books, striving to refine my personal parenting philosophy. The insights I gained lit up my mind and heart more than any legal text ever could.

I hung onto my career as long as I could. I graduated from law school, studied for and passed the bar exam, and worked part-time for a year. But from the moment Brea took her first breath, almost any time spent away from her was maddening. Listening to her cry for me while I worked—even though I knew she was safe with my husband—tore me to pieces.

When our second daughter, Scottie, was born, I quit my job as an attorney and changed my legal license to “inactive” status. And I haven’t looked back. Yes, legal work was incredibly intellectually challenging, but I haven’t lacked for intellectual stimulation one bit. If anything, stay-at-home motherhood feels more intellectually engaging than my career ever did.

In the months since my well-meaning relative suggested motherhood might bore me, I’ve reflected continually on why my answer was such an emphatic “not at all.” These reflections have turned into a list of all the ways motherhood fills my intellectual cup. I made this list for myself as a reminder of all the ways my mind can expand, even when my days might look outwardly mundane. But I’ve also felt compelled to share this list with other parents, especially parents wondering whether stepping away from paid work will mean stepping away from intellectual life.

My goal is not to tell any family what to do. I firmly believe that every family should pursue a life that aligns with their talents, interests, and values, [in consultation with the Lord](#), regardless of societal or cultural norms. But I hope this list excites those who have chosen to parent full time: I hope it helps them revel in the opportunities that childrearing provides. And to anyone else, I hope it offers a different view of stay-at-home parenthood—the unveiling of a dimension beyond dirty diapers and dino nuggets.

Motherhood Engages the Mind through Interpretation

Consider Your Child’s Perspective

“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.”

[Matthew 7:12](#)



One of the most challenging yet rewarding intellectual opportunities parenting provides is the chance to grow in compassion.

It isn't easy, especially when your child is acting in a way that you could never imagine yourself acting. But asking yourself the right questions can get the gears turning:

- If I were acting the way my child is, why would I be doing it?
- If I were the child in this situation, how would I want an adult to respond to my behavior?
- What might be the good intentions behind this behavior?
- What unmet need might be driving this behavior?

As I have asked myself these questions, even some of my toddler's most confusing behaviors have become understandable. Perhaps hitting the baby is her attempt to get attention and connection. Sometimes "pushing my buttons" is really just her trying to find a way to play.

Compassion doesn't make harmful behavior acceptable. But it does help me understand and address the root causes of that behavior. And often, it turns down the emotional volume of the situation. It puts me into a collaborative, solution-oriented mindset rather than a defensive one.

Get Curious About Your Own Behavior

"But let a man examine himself." 1 Corinthians 11:28

As a parent, I've taken a page out of my toddler's book and am constantly asking myself the age-old question:

Why?

I've come to question everything that I do, especially when it's impulsive or reactive. I don't do this in a condemning way, but rather with curiosity and compassion. Where did I learn this response to a child's behavior? When did I learn that this is what a "good" parent does, says, or looks like? If I were to treat an adult this way, would that go over

well? If I were treated this way, would I feel inclined to trust and cooperate—or to resist and shut down?

As Roslyn Ross, author of “A Theory of Objectivist Parenting,” put it well: “Raising children is an act of philosophy.” When we become conscious of why and how we do the things we do, childcare can become an intentional expression of our most deeply cherished values.

Motherhood Engages the Mind through Attention

Journal

“I will remember the deeds of the Lord.” Psalm 77:11

A journal has the power to romanticize the mundane. I use mine to catalog the moments that make each day sparkle: the hilarious things that Brea says, the way “mama” was Scottie’s first word, the memories of pen pal-ing, fort building, and flower picking—all collected into my own little whimsical volume.

A journal is also a tool for mental rehearsal. In mine, I reflect on my most challenging moments as a parent and write out how I intend to respond to similar moments in the future. Writing out a game plan makes it easier to act in a way that I’m proud of once I meet the heat of the moment.

Indulge in a Sense of Awe

“O how great the goodness of our God.” 2 Nephi 9:10

Albert Einstein [said](#), “The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious.” Nothing is more mysterious or beautiful than a newborn baby. When my first daughter was born, I was constantly awestruck by the miracle of her existence and the mystery of who she was and who she would become. Even the tiniest developmental steps felt like magic.

As our kids get older and our families grow, it can be easy to lose this sense of awe. But the truth is that every child at every age is just as worthy of wonder. Our kids are

constantly changing, each day unveiling another piece of their unique spirits. Reminding myself of this truth helps me see beyond whatever the stresses of the day are and instead bask in the blessing of watching my children unfold right in front of me.

And often it is my children's examples that remind me how else I might indulge in the awe and wonder of life. Hearing my kids point out all the wonders they notice as we go on walks or drive through town reminds me how much I've been taking for granted, and how much I could be using my brain to celebrate beauty instead of lamenting inconvenience.

Practice Presence

"Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." Matthew 6:34

Amidst the modern world's accelerating pace, parents have the opportunity to slow to the (literal) crawl of brand-new people. Our children show us the pace that humans are biologically wired for.

I enjoy practicing the art of being present without preoccupation. Finding moments to be with my children without any ulterior motives—no desire to teach, distract, entertain, or manipulate. Just taking them in; learning their hearts.

Motherhood Engages the Mind through Growth

Make Talent Development a Family Affair

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Matthew 5:16

As parents, we sometimes obsess over stuffing our kids with a toolbox of talents. We simultaneously enroll them in ceramics, violin, gymnastics, and lacrosse, hoping our children grow into prodigies or Olympians.

But what if talent development were more of a team effort? What if it were less about parents managing their children's careers and more about spending quality time

together—time that is genuinely enjoyable and talent-enhancing for both parent and child?

For me, this looks like letting Brea measure and stir, sharing my passion for cooking delicious, healthy food. It's challenging myself to improve my own lackluster drawing skills while Brea hones her mastery of the crayon. It's reading a novel while nursing Scottie, with Brea nearby, flipping through picture books. It's my husband taking Brea to the skate park in the evenings, letting her zoom around on her scooter while he practices skateboard tricks.

Set Flexible Goals

"Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope." 2 Nephi 31:20

In our efforts to help our children "become something," it's easy to forget that we, too, are still in the process of becoming. Setting personal goals has been integral to my own sense that I am still "myself" as a parent.

Yet parenting requires flexibility, and one of the biggest learning curves for me has been learning to pursue my goals and plans even when they inevitably get derailed. Sometimes, a dirty diaper demands to be changed before a podcast episode can be recorded or a 5K can be run. The good news is that [flexibility is a hallmark of mental health](#). While goals can foster self-improvement, learning to navigate unpredictability also boosts self-efficacy.

Strengthen the Muscles of Your Character

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Galatians 5:22-23

I have grown to enjoy practicing all the traits I want to embody—patience, kindness, confidence—especially when they are tested. I have come to see each tantrum, "power struggle," and milk spill as a workout for my character: an opportunity to dig deep and be the person I want to be, even when resistance is high. Although none of us will be perfect when we do this, each challenge is an opportunity to get stronger.

And when we are not in the midst of a “character workout,” we can work to cultivate our internal dialogue. I am learning to speak to myself with compassion and empowerment—the exact same way you would want your kids to speak to themselves.

See Through the Savior’s Eyes

Most poignant to me is how parenthood has driven me to the Savior. I’ve gone beyond asking, “What would Jesus do?” and now contemplate, “How would Jesus see, think, and feel in this situation?” I can think of nothing more intellectually engaging than trying to mirror the mind and heart of Jesus Christ.

I am only two and a half years into my journey as a parent. I don’t have it all figured out.

But this is why parenting is so intellectually fulfilling for me. Each day meets me with an abundance of lessons to learn. I get to figure life out, all over again, alongside my children. [Teaching my kids](#) what it means to be human is cracking me open and forcing me to learn the same lessons. It is challenging, humbling, and more rewarding than I could have ever imagined.

And while I am confident I’ll one day return to the legal career that once filled my intellectual cup, I’m more than satisfied with the overflow God is pouring in during this crayon-filled season.

About the author



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Brooklyn Bird is a Florida mom of two and temporarily retired attorney. A lifelong lover of words, she studied editing and publishing before law school and now squeezes in writing projects between reading books to her daughters. Brooklyn hosts Walk Beside Me, a Christ-centered parenting podcast.