

THE
Cranky
MOM FIX

Get a Happier, More Peaceful Home
by Slaying the *"Momster"* in All of Us

Becky Kopitzke



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For Alisa

You always wore motherhood so beautifully

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Introducing Monster Mom

There's this woman who shows up at my house sometimes. She's crabby, critical, self-centered, frazzled, and she throws better tantrums than my toddlers ever did.

My children call her Monster Mom. *Momster* for short.

Sadly, she looks a lot like me.

We all hate her.

I remember the first time Monster Mom arrived—unannounced, uninvited, as she always does. My firstborn daughter was only three weeks old. Precious baby girl had the audacity to wake up screaming and demanding a diaper change *again* for what seemed like the hundredth time in only seven days. So with eyeballs burning from exhaustion and hormonal tears, I rose, stumbled to the nursery, scooped my bundle from her crib, and placed her gently on the changing table. She stared up at me with those glossy saucers, wide awake and needy. I sniffed—and my nostrils were accosted by the stench of a blowout diaper. We're talking 2 a.m., full-body bath, start from scratch with a new onesie, whoa momma, throw the old one away.

That was the moment something in me snapped and my sensible soul gave way to the Momster possessor. She opened her mouth

and growled—actually *growled*, Lord have mercy—at a helpless, beautiful, ginger-haired infant, my treasure from God.

“Grrrr!!! Why won’t you let me sleep? Mommy is so tired!!!”

Suddenly, as if someone had slapped me on the cheek, the sound of my own voice startled me and I crumpled over the changing table in a ball of weeping shame. I stroked my baby’s fingers and cried, *I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry*. Monster Mom had crept in and thwacked us both hard.

I wanted to strangle the blasted witch.

Unfortunately, though, she kept showing up. Over the years as my baby grew and became a big sister, Monster Mom gained twice the strength and cause for rebellion. Now she faced two children, two different personalities, two harried schedules to keep, and one worn-out mother body that just could not resist the overpowering urge to blow. Through sibling squabbles, disobedience, and back talk, not to mention those daily episodes of pushing my dawdling children out the door while barking classic parenting lines such as *“I told you to put your shoes on”* and *“School doesn’t wait for us, people!”* it came to pass that Monster Mom upgraded from visitor to resident, leasing a long-term agreement with my heart.

She burst on the scene whenever my kids bickered, begged, belly-ached, or whined.

She erupted from my lungs each time a Hula-Hoop popped me in the forehead. Or a Nerf bullet. Or somebody’s foot.

And she greeted my sweet children if they woke before sunrise insisting Oreos make good breakfast food. Of course, Oreos are fantastic any time of day—if you’re the mother. But everybody knows children shouldn’t eat cookies for breakfast, right? Or can they? What would a good mom do in this situation?

If I didn’t know the answer, Monster Mom did.

And I resented her for it every time.

Do you resent her, too?

Then listen close. I have good news for you, my friend. It just might be the very encouragement you’ve been desperate to hear.

I got rid of her.

That's right. Monster Mom doesn't live with me anymore. I'm proud to say I tossed her out on her prickly behind, and she has not unpacked her bags in my house since. Oh, she threatens to squeeze through the window from time to time, but now I know how to keep her out. I'm wise to her devices and have learned—the hard way—what it takes to beat them.

Do you want to know, too?

How can an ordinary, God-fearing woman manage to defeat that cantankerous beast who wears her clothes and steals her voice and crushes her child's spirit?

Is it actually possible to be gentle, patient, and unconditionally kind—even when the kiddos aren't?

And how in the world can we break the cycle of disobedience, punishment, frustration, and regret?

Ah. The answers lie in the pages of this book. And I'm so happy you've joined me here.

If you know Monster Mom like I know Monster Mom, if she invades your home and your aching heart, too, then *welcome*, sister. You have come to the right place. Together, over these next many chapters, we are going to discover how to tame that nasty Momster and reclaim true peace for your soul. It's going to be a beautiful transformation; I know this firsthand.

You will be kinder. You will be softer. You will enjoy your children more than you scold them.

And the entire family will reap the benefits.

Are you ready? I cannot wait to begin.

Taming the Momster



“Abominable! That’s what they called me! Don’t you think that’s a little harsh? I mean, how about the *Adorable Snowman?*” —*Monsters, Inc.*

1

Who's the Real Enemy Here?

Bedtime is my favorite time of day. The house is quiet, we gather around the bunk bed to say family prayers, then my husband and I tuck our two school-age daughters snug under their covers before retreating to the family room for an hour of grown-up reading, Netflix, or snacks nobody begs to share. Ahhhhh. Peaceful, right?

It's the ten minutes *before* bedtime that break me.

Can we stay up a little later, pleeeeeease, Mom?

But I don't want to brush my teeth!

I'm still hungry. I want a snack!

She's bumping into me! I can't wash my face when she's bumping into me!

Oh, Mom, can you sign my homework and get me a glass of water and find my book and my flashlight and, hey, I don't have any clean socks for tomorrow, can you wash some quick, please? Plus, um, I kind of forgot to tell you . . . I have a spelling test in the morning and I haven't studied for it. Sorry.

Heaven help me. At the end of the day, I feel less like a mom and more like a wild horse tamer. *Do this, don't do that, just CO-OPERATE already, dear children,* and maybe we wouldn't have to

battle each other's wills night upon night. After nagging my girls to put on their pajamas, set out tomorrow's clothing, brush their hair, and floss their teeth—which you'd think I shouldn't have to tell them in the first place, since we do this *every single night*—a certain thought creeps into my head and threatens to park there.

If only my children would behave—then I wouldn't have to be such a crank!

Have you thought that, too?

Whose Fault Is It?

When the Momster arrives, it's easy to blame the kids for letting her in. I mean, there has to be a cause behind our exasperation, right? It must be because the children disobeyed, dragged their feet, didn't listen, wouldn't share. It's all their fault, I tell you! Show me a cranky mom and I'll show you a kid who made her that way.

Except, as my grandmother used to say, that's a bunch of bologna.

Our kids don't make us cranky.

We do.

The first step to taming the Momster is knowing who your real enemy is. It's not your kids. They're on your team. According to the Bible, the real culprit is your very own heart: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

Human hearts are unreliable. They lie to us. Until the day we reach heaven, our hearts are contaminated with original sin—impatience, irritability, selfishness, folly. So when circumstances threaten to draw those sins to the surface, our faulty hearts would have us believe *feeling* cranky requires *acting* cranky. We think we have no choice.

But we do.

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Proverbs 4:23

Choose Love

When my younger daughter was two, she discovered she could pitter-patter out of her toddler bed, trip the threshold from bedroom to hallway, and roam free. At which point she viewed nap time as merely optional.

“Go back to your room. It’s time to sleep.” I stood at the baby gate with fists on my hips and my mouth screwed tight. My daughter clasped the gate with both hands and batted her lashes.

“No!” A half-smile teetered on her lips. I stepped over the gate, wrapped her fingers in mine, and led her back to bed.

“Sweet dreams.” I pulled a blanket over her limbs and left the room. Three seconds later she yanked her covers off and followed me down the hall.

“Go back to bed.” We resumed our standoff at the gate. “I am not joking.”

“No!” she barked.

“Okay, that’s your choice. You’re on your own now.” I spun on my heels and stomped out of sight toward the family room.

A moment later, I heard a whimper in the hallway. Then a rattling sound. *Crash! Boom!* I ran through the kitchen to find my toddler scampering toward me. The little stinker had busted down the baby gate!

“That’s it, young lady!” Anger burned into my temples and blew steam out my ears. “I’m throwing away your stuffed animals!”

Like a mad woman, I huffed from room to room, swiping every fuzzy dog and bunny in my path. When my arms were stacked with plush toys, I sped toward the garbage can. My daughter wailed at my heels, and the Momster gave me a fuming pep talk.

She wants a fight? I’ll show her a fight. Pure defiance, that’s all this is. Stay strong. She needs to learn to obey. It’s my job to teach her! To discipline! To establish authority! If I fail to squash nap-time arguments, what’s next? Breaking curfew? Robbing banks? Heaven help me, I will not let my child grow up to be an outlaw!

“Mommy, I want you!”

What did she say?

“Muh-muh-mommy! I-I-I! Want! You!” Gulping for air between sobs, my daughter sputtered this desperate plea.

Not “Stop.” Not “No, don’t throw away doggie.” Again she hiccupped, “*Mommy, I want you!*”

What kind of outlaw says that?

I froze, turned around, and released the stuffed animals into a heap on the floor. My baby girl’s cheeks were streaked pink with tears. She lifted her open palms to my waist.

“Mommy,” she whispered now. “I want you to hold me.”

Instantly my anger deflated and I slumped down to grab her. She nestled her head in my shoulder and closed her eyes. I clutched her warm body to mine, kissed her spongy cheek, and rocked. Within two minutes, she fell asleep in my arms.

My daughter wasn’t looking for a fight after all. Quite the opposite—she wanted love.

Booger. What had I given her instead? Rules. Rants. Scolding. The Momster was so bent on showing the kiddo who’s boss, I lost sight of that fundamental need to let love lead my actions.

Loving parents set limits, yes. We must respond to rebellion with consistency and a firm stance. I get that. But sometimes I act very unloving when I lay down the law. Biblically speaking, the law was always meant to point us to Jesus. And Jesus embodies love.

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

1 Peter 4:8

You and I are raising families, not military units. So before we lash out in angry discipline, consider we have a choice: law or love.

Yes, sometimes love looks tough, like a time-out or taking the keys away. “Because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in” (Proverbs 3:12). But more often I think love can look like hugs, tender words, and respect for the stuffed-animal kingdom.

It is entirely possible to feel frustrated without resorting to *acting* frustrated. The first step is deciding whose side you're on.

“The Devil Made Me Do It”

As Christians, wholly surrendered to Jesus, we serve a victorious Savior. Jesus already defeated Satan when He won the battle for our souls on the cross. So I don't put a lot of stock in the devil's schemes. He's a loser and he'll only ever be a loser. However, that doesn't erase the fact that he's still out there.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Ephesians 6:12

Does that sound spooky to you? Let's unpack it a bit.

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood . . .” That means people (i.e., our children). Once again, our kids are not the enemy.

“. . . but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” That would be Satan and his loser cronies. Yes, demons are a real thing, and God warns us to be on guard, ready to defend ourselves against their lies and temptations. Even the staunchest believers can trip up if we're not careful. But thankfully we don't have to do it alone, nor do we have to be afraid. God gives us the wisdom, power, and protection to face anything the devil throws our way.

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield

of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Ephesians 6:13–16

Faith is key to defeating the Momster. Our hearts are prone to believing the devil's claims that cranky is okay, it's normal, it's therapeutic. But God knows better. He is the definition of love (1 John 4:8), so it's no wonder Satan wants us to act anything but loving. Don't let the enemy win. Choose whose side you're on and stick to it. Faith in Jesus wins every time.

You Are Responsible for You

Why do we harp on our kids? Why do we set rules and correct their behavior and follow them around the house barking at them to pick up their socks and apologize to their sister? For many of us, the root is much deeper than a mood. Underneath it all, we simply, desperately want our kids to turn out okay. And perhaps we fear they won't.

As moms we feel enormous pressure to produce “good” children, do we not? We want our kids to listen in school and make wise friends and grow up to be the kind of adults who work hard and pay their bills and go to church on Sunday. Naturally we're deeply concerned about their development, their behavior, their obedience while they're still under Mom and Dad's roof, while we have the chance to mold them and shape them and teach them right from wrong. It's our job, right?! It's all up to us! I mean, isn't our children's success or failure in life actually a reflection on our performance as parents?

Well . . . not entirely.

Mostly not.

Our children belong to God first, and it's true we do have a responsibility to raise them right, to “bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). There are examples

in the Old Testament of parents whose wrongdoing led to a child's demise, and God did indeed hold the parent responsible. We'll talk more about that later.

Yet ultimately, regardless of our parenting prowess (or lack thereof), we cannot make our children's choices for them. They are individuals with their own free will, their own unique DNA, and their own God-ordained internal wiring, which may or may not download everything we've been programming into them since the day they were born.

We can train them to obey. But we cannot obey for them.

We can demonstrate how to love. But we cannot love for them.

We can teach them to follow Jesus and live out our own faith in front of their beloved faces every day of their childhood. But we cannot choose Jesus for them. And if you ask me, that is the greatest kicker in all the universe.

What more could I possibly want for my kids than a saving relationship with the one true God? And yet it is the one thing I cannot give them. They must choose it for themselves.

As parents, we do the prep work. We pour our sweaty souls into the job of raising godly kids. But in the end, the result is not up to us. Our children will make choices, some wise and some not, and in the end their lives are also not their own.

They belong to God.

And He decides who they will become. Not us.

In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.

Proverbs 16:9

The very best we can do for our children is to point them to Jesus and pray they will grab hold of Him. Meanwhile, in our quest to train and disciple our kids, let's make sure we're not diluting our own witness by defaulting to those ugly Momster habits. One day, when this life transcends and we stand before God in heaven, He will not ask us if our kids are riding our coattails. They are

responsible for their own salvation. And we are responsible for ours.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

2 Corinthians 5:10



Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psalms 37:4

The Bible is the central tool in our Cranky Mom Fix toolbox. The better you get acquainted with your Bible, the more you'll discover who God is, what He asks of you, and how His truth and grace can help you slay the Momster. The closer you grow to God, the more your desires will become like His. In other words, you'll want for yourself whatever God wants for you. And that is a powerful way to live.

At the end of each chapter, I encourage you to spend some time digging into the Bible to learn more about the concepts we explored in these pages. The following questions are designed to make it easy for you to align your personal Bible time with what you're learning in this book. You might want to keep an accompanying journal or notebook to record your answers and reflections.

The Cranky Mom Fix is a helpful guide, but nothing compares to God's original Good Book. His words are so much smarter than mine. Let's dig in.

1. Read Jeremiah 17:9. According to that verse, what adjective best describes the human heart?

God's Word says the heart is *deceitful* above all things. Has your heart ever led you astray? Think of a time you made a poor decision because your emotions influenced your actions. The first step to taming the Momster is recognizing that our *feelings* cannot be trusted to guide our behavior. God's truth can. That's why we must place God's truth above our cranky emotions in the heat of the moment. In the next several chapters, we're going to discuss a series of practical strategies to do just that.

2. *Deceit* means to misrepresent or conceal the truth. Read John 8:44. Who is the Father of Lies? When we allow our heart's frustrations to spew onto our children, we are essentially believing the enemy's lies, such as:

- I'll feel better if I yell.
- All moms get cranky, so it must be an acceptable part of the job.
- I deserve to be left alone. (See Romans 6:23 and Psalm 103:10. What do we really deserve?)

3. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Proverbs 14:1: "The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down." What are you hoping to "build" in your house/family? Write a list of benefits or godly traits, such as, "I'm hoping to build . . . *honesty, integrity, acceptance, kindness, gentleness.*" Now review that list and determine which areas you believe are currently lacking most.

4. What does it take to be a "wise woman"? See Proverbs 1:7 and 19:20. What/who is our source of wisdom? God and His Word! We can gain this wisdom several ways, including:

- Studying the Bible (which you are doing right now!)
- Seeking out wise counselors and mentors

- Praying! See James 1:5. Pray for God to grant you wisdom and to reveal any blind spots in your behavior that may be foolish rather than wise.
5. Read 1 Corinthians 10:12. In what ways can we get too comfortable in our faith or family life? Have you ever assumed you're not susceptible to the devil's temptations? How does this verse challenge your thinking? Revisit Ephesians 6:10–17 and ask God to give you a renewed passion for protecting your heart.
 6. Read 1 Samuel 2:12–36. This passage tells the story of Eli, whose sons were wicked and offended the Lord by abusing their office as priests. Eli loved God and hated evil, yet he failed to raise godly sons. Therefore, God punished the whole family, including Eli.

At first blush this appears to contradict our discussion about parents and children being held responsible for themselves before God. However, a deeper look into this passage reveals Eli was a passive parent. He did not follow God's instructions to train his sons in the Lord. Indeed, we see he made three grave mistakes:

- *Failure to discern.* Eli confronted his sons only after he learned about their bad behavior from other people. He never detected it himself. As parents we ought to be watchful, devoting the time and attention necessary to know what our children are doing and believing. Eli did not; therefore, God held him accountable for this error.
- *Failure to discipline.* Even after confronting his sons, Eli did not discipline them for their actions. A loving, intentional parent will exercise his or her authority to correct and redirect a child's poor choices.
- *Failure to divide.* Finally, after Eli's sons continued down their wayward path, Eli failed to draw a line between what he stood for and what his sons stood for.

The lines were blurred. He knew his sons were disrespecting the house of God, and yet he allowed them to continue serving as priests. As people of God, our kids must know where we stand on topics of moral value. We can still love them, but we must cease to enable their poor choices. In the end, God held Eli responsible not for his inability to guide his sons, but for his *unwillingness* to do so.¹

What does this tell you about God's call on your life as a mom? What are we responsible for? What are we not responsible for?

7. If you read through the Old Testament accounts of Israel's kings and judges, often a ruler's mother is named. In an age when women were typically held in lower esteem, this is remarkable. Why do you think the Bible cites mothers? What does this say about our role in the family and in God's kingdom as a whole?
8. See Psalm 51:10 and James 3:8. Who is the only One with the power to transform your heart and tame the Momster? (Hint: It's not you or me!) That, sweet mom, is why you are reading this book. Together we are seeking God's wisdom and guidance for real help and lasting change that only He can give!