

# Back-to-School When You Just Can't Even

August. #holdme

Cue the month when moms everywhere start frantically texting to find out the scoop on new teachers and to see if Lunchables are really THAT bad.

Let me just say that school supplies are done sold out in this town and I have JUST NOW gotten my kids to sleep past 8 am. I'm SURE not ready to face the fact that we're about to start washing uniforms and enduring doing homework again. WHO WANTS TO SET AN ALARM WHEN YOU CAN JUST STAY UP LATE AND WATCH THE OLYMPICS?!

If you're like me and you'd rather sit at the pool than in the carpool line, then let me share my guide for back-to-school when you just can't even, because I.JUST.CAN'T.EVEN.

Now brace yourself, this may be my longest blog post ever, so if you're more of a print it out and read it type person, here's a downloadable PDF.  
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## Back-To-School When You Just Can't Even

### 1. Logistically:

Let's be real. The main hurdle we are all trying to mentally jump is figuring out how to feed all the humans who want to eat all the things all the frigging time. Here are my best attempts at keeping everyone fed (and as always, I can't recommend Plantoeat.com highly enough. I can literally drag and drop each of these meals onto the date we will have them, it spits out a grocery list and walah, meal planning done in no time flat.)

*-Breakfast:* I wrote about our favorite breakfast ideas last year and since then, the only thing we've added to our repertoire has been omelets for D who requires a high protein breakfast. Nothing says "good morning" quite like a salami, red pepper, cheddar and black olive omelet, amiright?

*-Lunch:* Here are my favorite life hacks when it comes to packing peanut-free cold lunch boxes for littles...and they do not require a Ph.D in Pinterest.

- Shishkabobs- Alternate deli meat, cheese, tomatoes, olives, etc on a shishkabob stick as the main dish and/or alternate strawberries, grapes and cheese for a snack.
- Soup- Heat your favorite soup piping hot in a thermos that won't leak and pack a spoon with some crackers, cheese, maybe a dab of sour cream or slices of avocado depending on the soup.

- Pasta Salad- This recipe is a crowd-pleaser at my house and my kids devour it in their lunches.
- Roll-ups- Take deli meat and slices of cheese, roll them up and seal with a toothpick.
- Wraps- Fill wraps with chicken salad, deli meat, breakfast burrito or taco-type fillings.
- Potatoes- Bake potatoes the night before or cook in the microwave the night before, cover with foil and wrap in a small towel or oven mit. Send to school with salsa, butter, sour cream, bacon bits, cheese or other topping in small containers.
- Corn Dog Muffins- This recipe is a fun spin on corn dogs and our Walmart is now carrying nitrate/etc-free hot dog options! Just don't forget to include ketchup or mustard based on your kids' preferences.
- Frozen Yogurt Tubes- What genius thought to freezer a tube of yogurt? Probably the same genius who thought of these incredible mason jar lunch ideas...
- Not Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwiches- I've ordered a jar of Wow Butter for my religious peanut butter eater, we shall see if she can tell a difference...anyone else out there use it?
- School Lunch- AND WHEN YOU JUST CAN'T EVEN...ORDER THE DANG SCHOOL LUNCH.

We use these reusable containers because they have a great ice pack that snaps on easily, fit inside my kids lunch boxes (which are awesome because they are huge, sturdy and easy to clean--unlike the ones I've bought from Walmart) and they don't stain or smell gross even after 3 years of use. My friend Kristi wrote a great post about packing waste-free lunch boxes, turns out she uses the same Land's End lunch boxes we do!

*-Dinner.* A few weeks ago I had a lightbulb moment when I realized that if I just started cooking double dinners and freezing one of the meals, then I could have at least 10-15 meals in the freezer by Fall. I got so giddy about helping my future self that I just kept going. Pork butts, stuffed shells, crockpot taco bowls, soups, marinated chicken, steak and seasoned ground beef all ready to go! I even took all the old bananas that I've tossed in the freezer over the past few months and made big batches of Butterscotch Banana Bread and muffins to help make school mornings yummiier and easier. I'm so excited about my freezer slowly filling up that I have to confess it as idolatry every time I open the door. I am actually not joking. Ask the poppyseed chicken casserole I just added to the second shelf of my freezer turned confessional. back-to-school when you just can't even

### **Two logistical side notes:**

The first year we lived here we were still mid-renovation on the annual meet-the-teacher/turn in your school supplies night so I payed a precious college girl \$10 to pick up all my kids supplies when she was at Walmart getting groceries any way. She had a blast picking the stuff out and I could focus on thing on the homefront. I highly recommend delegating the things that someone else could do!

Buying my kids alarm clocks and watches with timers was the best thing I could have done for all manners of timeliness. "You have 5 minutes left in the pool." No whining,

crying, fussing. Just boom. 5 minutes. They are climbing out. "You can go to the neighbor's house for 30 minutes." Magically the child turns up on my doorstep at the right time. Buy the clocks! Wish I would've done it earlier!

*How will you logistically make back-to-school work for you? I'd love to learn from you!*

## **2. Physically:**

This is the area I meet the most consistent resistance so I am trying to automate things and not allow myself the chance to make excuses in four areas of improved physical health. Even though it feels like I just can't even, my goal is to move forward in the areas of exercising, sleep meal planning and, well, just listen to the podcast.

1. The gym where I take classes 4 times/month (#budgetprobs) allows you to book workouts in advance so you're guaranteed a treadmill and rowing machine. If you don't show or cancel last minute, they charge you \$8, so as you can guess, I will never miss a workout with this kind of accountability. DUH. Why have I not been "booking" workouts for the last ten pounds years? This works so well, I am making it my goal to take a class at that gym once, "book" a walk with a student/friend once, and do a 21 Day Fix video twice each week. Here's to working exercise into the nooks and crannies!! The other day, my friend Amanda and I literally worked out with 4 children running, screaming and giggling around us and today, D had a long soccer practice so I jogged the field and got in a VERY sweaty workout! It takes a little creativity and lazy genius to make this work...but it's cheaper than therapy!
2. Most people have a wake-up alarm, but do you have a bedtime alarm? I have implemented one and it's been really helpful in getting me to the bed. I wash my face, etc. when the kids do so I'm all but ready for bed. (Brushing my teeth wakes me up and randomly makes me super hungry for Raisin Nut Bran, so the closer to dinner I get that done the less likely I am to have a second supper.) Then I can enjoy a little downtime and adult conversation before I crawl in bed, read and pass out. I'm not lying or trying to sell anything, but on the nights I remember to apply essential oils to the bottoms of my feet I wake up so much more refreshed in the morning!
3. I am also such a big fan of meal planning but lately I've been going to the grocery store wayyy too much. I am trying to schedule meals for 2 weeks at a time instead of 1 to eliminate a few grocery store runs.
4. Lastly, if you've been married for more than 6 months, listen to this podcast. The end.

*Okay, so how are you pursuing physical health during the craziness of back-to-school?*

### **3. Mentally:**

This year I am homeschooling D part-time and working part-time so I knew the being in a weekly Bible study wouldn't be an option for me, so I took the plunge and signed up for a mentally stimulating, soul-feeding online class called Overflow. I've loved popping in my earbuds to listen to the sessions and having an excuse to buy school supplies that don't involve unicorns or super heroes.

Eddie has taught us about the practice of Morning Pages and Bullet Journaling so far and I've got to tell you, between these practices and Emily Freeman's audio meditations, I'm the most mentally refreshing I've been in quite a while.

In general, this year has been one of intake vs. output. I've read more books, listened to more podcasts and practiced more of a listening posture than one of production. It's been uber restorative for my personality and temperament.

*What mentally refreshes you? How will you make space for that this Fall?*

### **4. Spiritually:**

All summer I have struggled to consistently spend time with the Lord, so in that regard, I am actually looking forward to the rhythms and routines that back-to-school brings. I long to get into a better spiritual groove.

But since reading Sacred Pathways by Gary Thomas, I've been encouraged that connecting with God doesn't have to look the same for every personality or in every season of life. I have spent too much time wishing I still lived on Buffington Avenue as a sophomore in college where I could blare "Give Me One Pure and Holy Passion" (with a side of 50 Cent, don't let me fool you) and spend hours reading my Bible.

Hopefully that season will return (with less explicit lyrics) as my kids grow, but it's taken some serious soul-searching and wisdom seeking to figure out how to grow spiritually while at the same time raising small humans.

It looks like taking a prayer walk or bike ride around the neighborhood with or without the children. It's fully engaging in our family devotions at the breakfast table. And sometimes that's it.

Other days it's the great read-thru-the-Bible option on the Redeemed Girls app and prayerfully brain-dumping in my journal during Morning Pages.

And then when I really want a soul treat, it's enjoying 15 minutes of a FOCUSED15 Study by my friend, Katie Orr.

After reading Sacred Pathways and thinking through ways to automate the choices of how, when and where to spend time with the Lord when I feel like I just can't even, I feel like he's unearthed a lie that I was believing. The lie whispered condemnation over my spiritual life and said that connecting with God was just one more area of life I wasn't tending faithfully and couldn't fully nail the way I wanted to. Like if I wasn't being faithful, then why bother? But thank the Lord He is faithful even when we are faithless because He cannot deny Himself. So I can come to Him and fall apart vs. coming put together. And you can too.

What are some sustainable spiritual care practices you can put into place this Fall?

## **5. Socially:**

Guys, I have discovered the opposite of FOMO (the fear of missing out) it is this fabulous state of mind called JOMO. When we were in Orlando it was almost like a relational sabbatical. There was literally so much joy in pausing precious relationships, filling our tanks and being able to come back with greater love with which to invest.

Obviously not everyone gets assigned to live away from home for 5 weeks, but for me, it looks like taking screen-free Sabbaths where I socially disengage and enjoy missing out. There's no fear in love because perfect love casts out fear. If my social life is undergirded with love then I can't miss out.

*-Do you need more engagement? Could you plan to have one family over each month?  
-Do you need less socializing? Or different more meaningful connections? Plan for that.  
-Is your social life undergirded by fear or love?*

## **6. Emotionally:**

I am more of a do-er than a be-er so I can often rush past emotional health markers. i.e. not crying for months on end probably isn't normal or emotionally healthy....

I forget that the first three weeks of a new school year will likely be tumultuous. Adjustments. Expectations. Adrenaline burning day and night. Everyone just needs a heaping dose of grace and some healthy emotional boundaries.

- I will reject the lie that my children's performance determines my worth.
- When under pressure, I will not act deranged nor will I hiss at my children and give myself a sore throat.
- I will build margin and Sabbath rest into our schedule.

- I will breathe, smile and seek eye contact while I help us all verbally process our emotions through games like mad/glad/sad, etc. at dinner and during dates with each child.

We will keep our foundation strong by prioritizing family nights and State of the Unions where Joel and I have space to ask each other:

- How did you feel loved this past week?
- What does your upcoming week look like?
- How would you feel most loved & encouraged in the days ahead?
- How would you best feel pursued in sex/intimacy this week?
- How can I pray for you this week?

My mentor, Aimee wrote an excellent piece on creating a place of respite for yourself during back-to-school craziness.

*How will you seek emotional health this Fall?*

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***Because even when we feel like we just can't even...He is sweet, tender and oh so sovereign.***

***We can fall apart and know He fully loves and receives our mess and I am so glad.***

***Aren't you?***