Single Moms #4: **A Penny for your Thoughts!**

**Scriptural Principle:** *“What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So, don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.” Matthew 10: 29-31 (NLT)*

**Synopsis:** What price do we place on time with our children? What is the value of each day spent together?

**Materials Needed**

* One Penny for Each Person
* One Jar filled with 936 Pennies
* One Empty Jar

**PASS OUT ONE PENNY TO EACH ATTENDEE**

**Activity:** A Penny for your Thoughts!

**Questions:**1. Without looking at one, write down everything you know about a penny.
2. Now, look at one and write down any further observations.

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| ***A Penny*** ***for your*** ***Thoughts!*** | *“What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So, don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.” Matthew 10: 29-31 (NLT)* | Think about how much you know about a penny. | PaperPens1 Penny for each participant | 1. Divide into groups
2. Brainstorm everything you know about a penny without looking.
3. Now, look and write any further observations.
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Our scripture tells us that, in Bible times, two sparrows cost one farthing. One farthing was worth ¼ of a penny so that means that one sparrow cost only 1/8 of one penny. A farthing was the smallest Roman coin in its time. It was essentially worthless. Imagine taking today’s penny and dividing it into 4 pieces. That’s how much a farthing was worth. That was the worth placed upon a sparrow and yet, Jesus said that not one of them falls to the ground without Him knowing and caring.

He is trying to make a point that if He cared for something of this little value, how much He must care for you!

Something worth 1/8 of a penny was considered priceless to Him. How much is a penny worth to you?

What do you do with pennies? Do you save them in a penny bank? Many times, we discard pennies. They weigh our purse or pockets down and aren’t worth very much.

1. The average penny lasts 25 years!
2. Pennies were the very first coins minted in the United States in March 1793.
3. There have been 11 different designs featured on the penny.
4. The Lincoln penny was first minted and circulated in 1909, the 100th anniversary of his birth.
5. Lincoln faces to the right, while all other portraits on coins face to the left.
6. In a coin toss, always choose tails. If you toss a penny 10,000 times, chances are slightly greater that it will be tails because the heads picture weighs more, so it ends up on the bottom more than 50% of the time.
7. The penny was the first U.S. coin to have the motto “IN GOD WE TRUST”.
8. Approximately 30 million pennies per day (1,040 pennies every second) are produced. Each year, the U.S. Mint produces more than 13 billion pennies.
9. Over two-thirds of all coins produced by the U.S. Mint are pennies. In fact, the penny is the most widely used denomination currently in circulation and it remains profitable to make. Each penny costs .93 of a cent to make, but the Mint collects one cent for it. The profit goes to help fund the operation of the Mint and pay the public debt.
10. More than 70% of Americans support keeping the penny in circulation. Elimination of the penny would lead to higher prices, since prices would then be rounded to the nearest 5 cents.

So, why are we discussing pennies and what does a penny have to do with parenting?

Pennies and Parenting?

**The Value of 936 Pennies**

A couple of weeks back I dedicated my son at church. As I, a single mom, stood before my church family and God, and vowed to raise him, by God’s grace and help, to know, love, and serve the Lord; he yelled at the top of his tiny lungs “Down! Down! Down!”. He flailed his surprisingly strong body in attempts to escape my grasp and reach the freedom of running wild in the sanctuary.

I held tightly to the frantic child, discretely stuffing animal crackers into his mouth as our pastor eloquently went about introducing the other families and children.

Just as our pastor instructed the church family to bow their heads in prayer over these little ones, my dear precious son lost any scrap of patience he had left and yelled–loudly–through the entire prayer.

Our church family has a good sense of humor. A good portion of them have, or have had, small children of their own–they get it–but as I carried my dismayed toddler off the stage, my face was flush with a hint of embarrassment.

At the end of these child dedications, gifts are always given to each family. Typical gifts and reminders of your baby’s dedication may be a parenting book, a children’s’ Bible, or a certificate, tied together with ribbons and handed to the parents.

This time, however, I was a bit surprised as the gifts were handed out to each family. For, into my hand was placed a jar full of pennies. A heavy jar full of pennies. A jar heavy with the weight of exactly 936 shiny copper pennies. My arms dropped a bit as I took the full weight of the jar between my hands.

“In these jars is a penny for every week you will raise this child.” Our pastor explained. And with his words the jar felt exponentially heavier in my grasp. One penny for each week from the day your child was born until your child reaches eighteen years of age. 936 weeks!

The pastor went on, “Every week, when you get home from church, remove one penny from the jar. And it will be a reminder of the time you have left to raise your child before they go out on their own.” I stared at the pennies, shiny and glinting within the glass jar.

They looked so many, yet, all of a sudden, so very few.

That jar of pennies still sits on my desk, staring at me. Our pastor had instructed us that, once we brought it home, we should start by removing a penny for each week old our child was. Ellison is one and a half. He was the oldest child being dedicated that Sabbath morning, so I had a lot of pennies to remove as so many weeks of his little life had already passed.

So many, in fact, that I have yet to do it. I haven’t removed them; not a single one. Maybe it’s because I haven’t made a spare moment to sit and count them out, but more so I suspect it is because my heart is afraid to feel the weight of 76 pennies being emptied from that jar, never to return. 76 pennies for the year and a half (76 weeks) that have passed by all too soon.

Or, maybe I am afraid to begin removing pennies because I know that, with each penny I remove, that little glass jar will only grow heavier. More imminent. More immediate.

936 now…then 935…then 934…and so time slips away penny by penny, cent by cent.

I ask the inevitable question–how was each cent spent?

The truth is that a penny does not have much value today. What can one cent buy? In fact. Many pennies are so worthless that we empty our purses or pockets of them and don’t even worry too much when one is lost in a couch cushion.

And, since one penny represents an entire week, if we are to divide a penny into seven parts, one part for each day in the week, what worth is it then?

Further broken down, a day can be divided up also–into moments.

Some days I feel like I have spent my whole penny, an allowance meant for a week, in a single 24-hour period.

In a weak moment, I can feel like I blow through 5 pennies. One slip of the tongue, one impatient reaction, one missed opportunity to speak a loving word, one fatigued mama feeling the whole weight of failure; it can leave me wondering if I have just screwed up a whole week of parenting; or if my actions, or reactions, will stick with my child for a lifetime.

I know they will. How I spend each penny will shape the rest of their lives; they’ll carry the effects of my “spending habits” with them for the rest of their days beyond our nest.

One thing is certain, no matter how I spend each penny, I purchase with it a pile of lessons in motherhood. I know this because after a long day, when he is finally sound asleep, my mind finally able to rest from that little voice asking, demanding, quarreling, loving, thanking, and apologizing; I don’t put those voices out of my head.

I replay them. The conversations of the day. The requests, the new words, sentences, questions, and understandings. Every “I love you”, “Thank you, Mama,” and “I’m sorry, Mama.”

And, then, I replay my own voice from the day, its tones, the harshness, the apologies, the love, and the laughter.

And my eyes, although so very weary and longing to shut, they often scan back through the moments spent with that little boy I grew and bore from my own body. And I do a recount.

I do a recount of the moments from our day. Then back through the week. Then back to last week. All the way back to our trip to Florida in August. Then back to Colorado in May. I keep looking back and recounting the pennies.

And eventually I find myself staring at brand new, just-from-the-womb, wrinkly, pink, perfect face with the deepest blue eyes you’ve ever seen, staring back up with those first, “Oh, hello Mama!” expressions.

I pour over the stories spanning from two pink lines on my pregnancy test, to first kicks, to the first time I held him; to the sleepless weeks following, to his first birthday. These pages in my memory bear witness to how each penny has been spent.

And that is when I get it---A jar full of 936 pennies! The pictures in my mind, the voices, the words, the memories of each week, each day, each moment from the maternity ward until now–I see them well spent.

Despite the days I lost a penny in the couch, or spent one frivolously, or got to the end of the day and wondered if I would ever get things right, or if I would get to the end of 18 years and be full of regret–grace begins to wash over me.

Those fears wash away in light of it all; in light of the 76 weeks I have already had with my dear, sweet, loud toddler. 76 pennies now spent!

When I back up and see all those weeks as a whole, I see a grand display of God’s grace; His grace that covers a multitude of wrongs; His grace so much larger than all of my tongue slips and raised-voice moments.

This realization leads me to add a new jar to my desk. Only this one is empty–for now; awaiting its own pennies. I set the two jars side by side, and I begin to count.

I count out 76 pennies, one for each week of Ellison’s life so far. I count them out from my first jar and I deposit them into this new jar.

This new jar that represents the investment of a lifetime–no, truly, the investment for eternity.

This is when I realize something monumental to motherhood– that as I withdraw those pennies from that jar on my desk, they are not being lost, misplaced, or tossed out to never see again. They are being invested. They are creating something new, something of great beauty, bravery, and Kingdom importance.

They are building my son into who God has created him to be.

Now, I finally see the Eternal Value of $9.36.

One of the great plights of being a single mom is how quickly this phase of life seems to slip out from our grasp.

Regularly I hear from strangers, “Enjoy it, it will be over before you know it!”

Although some days of navigating small children through early years seem endless, I know they will be over before I know it. And that is the beauty of these two jars now sitting on my desk.

One reminds me of how fleeting these days are, and the other assures me that they are being invested in something of eternal value. Whoever said that a penny cannot buy anything these days?

Oh Lord, help me to realize that parenting as a single mom is a day by day investment in eternity- one penny at a time!

Back to our Scripture for today: *“What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So, don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.” Matthew 10: 29-31 (NLT)*

You are more valuable than a whole flock of sparrows and yet, God sees every single sparrow that falls to the ground. Your child is more valuable than a whole flock of sparrows.

God knows the value of one copper coin. He Paid for you with His blood.

One penny a day! How will you spend it?

How might understanding the importance of 936 pennies impact parenting?
What may need to change? Discuss!