

Hard Seasons in Motherhood



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Natalie Bacon

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Hard Seasons in Motherhood

Hi there. Welcome to the *Design Your Dream Life* podcast. My name is Natalie Bacon, and I'm an advanced certified mindfulness life coach as well as a wife and mom. If you're here to do the inner work and grow, I can help. Let's get started.

Hey there. Welcome to the podcast. I'm so happy to be here with you today. I can't believe it's March, and it's going to be spring. In the south, I just love how spring almost arrives early whereas in the Midwest it's the opposite. It always arrives late. So I'm really enjoying the weather. RJ kind of getting out of that newborn phase, getting into the baby phase has been so fun. We've been doing lots of walks. It's just been such a magical time.

Hey if you are new around here or even if you've been around for a while, I want to invite you to grab the podcast directory. It's a free download, and I completely redid it. So even if you got it in the past, go get it again because it's new. It's improved. It's user friendly. I give you a list of the top eight episodes to get started with. Then I give you all of the episodes broken down by category.

I think it's really just gonna be a guide that will help you in whatever area you want help with and kind of give you the foundation of my teachings instead of trying to have to play catch up or figure out where to get started. It's over at nataliebacon.com/directory.

So today I want to talk with you about hard seasons in motherhood. How I teach hard seasons is very different than most people. I'm bringing this topic to you here because so many of you have wanted help with it and asked for coaching on it. So I thought I should do a podcast on it. What you will likely find is that my teachings here are different, but they are the most helpful.

So I think that most people who are so well intended and who love you and love me very much, they will give us actions to take when you say something like, "I'm having a really hard season. I'm going through a really hard season right now." They will respond with suggesting that you hire

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help or that you talk to your partner or spouse to carry the invisible load that you're carrying. Or they will tell you to say no more.

There's nothing wrong with this advice. It's just all action advice. So you say I'm struggling right now. I'm in a challenging season. And they give you actions to take. The problem with this is that it's only going to be useful if you change your thoughts. Because what makes something a hard season isn't what's happening in your life. It's your thought about it. That's what I want to talk to you about today.

Let's start with defining hard season. So there's no such thing as a hard season as a fact. So how it typically comes up is a client will say to me, "This is just a really hard season because of X, Y, and Z." Right? So fill in the blank there. Because I have two babies under two years old, or because I have four teenagers who are, you know, thinking they run the household. Whatever it is. So they'll say that the season is hard because of the circumstances, and then they'll ask for advice. This is typically what we do.

When you say it this way, you're saying it as if hard season is a fact. So it's just a fact that you're in a hard season because of X, Y, and Z. This isn't true. There's no such thing as a fact that is a hard season. Hard season is a thought. This isn't just semantics. It is everything. So I want you to think about what a hard season even is. If a hard season was a fact, it would be provable. It would be scientific. It would be something that you could get tested for.

There's no kind of way to test for hard season. It's totally based on interpretation. In fact, I'm going through a season right now with RJ as a newborn. I can't tell you how many people have told me that this season actually is one I'll look back on and want to go back to. Try to enjoy it because you'll actually miss it. They're sort of saying that it seems hard now, but really it's not hard. It only gets harder. That is just an example of how hard season is always relative.

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Now I'm not saying this to minimize what you're going through. I'm only saying it to help you see that you have a choice. So you can keep the thought that it's a hard season. I'll talk about that more later in this episode. The first part is just seeing that hard season is only one way to interpret the facts of your life.

So the facts of your life are whatever circumstances exist. I use facts and circumstances interchangeably. So you live in a house. You work full time and your husband works full time. You have four kids under the age of 10. You don't have additional help. The kids are in school. Your daughter was diagnosed with having anxiety.

The facts of your life will not be filled with opinions. So anytime we add any adjective to a fact, anytime we add judgement to a fact then we get into thought land, into thought territory. So when we say hard season, hard is always going to be up to the person who is defining it. Hard is a judgment. It's an optional judgement.

So to help you think about your life in a different way, in a little bit more mindful way, the first step is to separate out the facts. So if the thought that you have right now is this is just a really hard season, what are the facts? What season are you in? Define season. Is it that your husband is traveling a lot for work right now? Is it that it's your seventh year of marriage? Is it that your son was arrested or your dad got a diagnosis? Make season really facty. When did this season start? How will you know that it has ended?

If you think about the calendar year of seasons, how we have spring, summer, fall and winter, and they all start on a particular day on the calendar. Yet sometimes we don't experience it as such. So if I am in Charleston in February, it can feel like spring. Yet if I am in Chicago in May, it can feel like winter.

So seasons can change and shift and vary. What I would like you to do here if you are thinking the thought this is just a really hard season is to define what that season is. When did the season start and how will you

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know it will be over? So just like the calendar year, seasons will always end. That's what makes them seasons.

So define that and make sure it's facty. Don't put any opinions in the definition of your season. Just make it really boring. These are the facts. My kids are all in junior high. Whatever it is. Whatever the facts are about the season.

Then after you know exactly what season you are referring to and at when it will end, notice the main story that your brain is telling about the season. In this example, in the title of this episode, it's this is just a really hard season. That's typically how I hear it described. The season is just so challenging. This is a hard season. Notice if there's anything else your brain thinks about this season besides it being hard or challenging.

So when I did this and I was thinking about the newborn phase and how my brain wants to tell me it's a hard season, I came up with it's also exhausting. It's also busy and slow. Sometimes it feels overwhelming. So ask yourself what do you think about this season. That will give you the thoughts that your brain is thinking about the facts of the season.

What I want you to see is that these are just thoughts. They're optional thoughts. So if you think about this season as a movie, what would the title of the movie be? Would it be this is The Hardest Season of My Life When the Kids Were All Under Five and Didn't Go To School Yet?

Typically the way we think about seasons on default stems from social norms. So if everyone tells me how hard the newborn season is, it's very normal that my brain will adapt this line of thinking without questioning it. The work that we're doing here is simply just to question it. So I may decide that I want to keep that thought, that the newborn season is really hard, but the point is for me to do it mindfully knowing that here are infinite possibilities about how I want to think about it.

When you do this step of exploring what your thoughts are about the current season, approach yourself with curiosity. Are there any

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commonalities with how you think about this season compared to the last season or the season before that? Do you find yourself describing every season that you're in as overwhelming or stressful? Are you always wanting to get to the next season?

It's just something to notice about yourself. It doesn't mean you're doing it wrong. It doesn't mean you're a bad person. It just means that your brain has patterns that you want to become more aware of because then you have more authority over it and can change it.

So once you're clear about the story that you have about this season, decide if that's the story that you want to keep. Or if you want to change it, you can think something else. So as I mentioned in the beginning that we would get to this part later, you can decide to think this is a hard season. I want you to think that thought on purpose, and I want you to see if there's any room for you to add some thoughts onto that that make it feel a little bit better.

So if you think the thought this is just a really challenging season, how does that thought feel? Does it feel overwhelming? Does it feel defeating? What's the emotion that you experience in your body when you think the thought this is a challenging season? Dread maybe? Get really clear about it because that's the most important thing is how the thought makes you feel.

So your brain might be convinced that this is a really hard season, but you could add onto that thought so that it feels differently. For example, this is a really hard season and I can do hard things. This is a challenging season, and I don't wish it were easier. I wish I was stronger. This is a hard season, and I was made for this. I love adding that one on. I was made for this.

So notice how when you think the thought this was really hard season, that feels very different than this is a really hard season and I can do hard things. It's the same thought but different feeling. What I want to encourage you to do is tell the story of the season you're in in a way that feels the best it could feel.

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So for me when I think about the newborn season, I think this season is both easy and hard. This season is full of growth. This is a challenging season, and I was made for this. I feel really empowered when I think those thoughts. That only happens when I'm doing this work intentionally.

Because otherwise my default brain will go to this is just really hard. I can't do this. When is this going to end? I sort of add on this self-pity to my life, which I don't want to do. So it's not about negating the fact that sometimes what I'm doing is hard. It's about deciding on purpose how I want to think about the thing that is hard for me to do.

So I love the analogy of working out. So if I go to a workout class and it's really hard, I could think about how it hurt my muscles and it was horrible and I almost felt sick because it was so challenging for my body physically. I could really have this negative attitude about it. Or I could think that was really hard, and I'm getting so much stronger because of it. Bring it on. Let's go to the next one.

So do you see how that analogy is similar to your life? How any season that you're in is going to be full of opportunities and challenges. That's why you can always apply the inner work and decide to think on purpose instead of thinking what your default brain will go to.

I think this is the difference between talking to your girlfriends and your peers about what's going on in this challenging season versus talking to a coach. Because I want my girlfriends to validate how I feel. I want them to agree with me and support me. I want them to listen and have compassion and sympathy. When I go to my coach, I want her to challenge me.

It's sort of like when I have a friend over versus when I have an interior decorator come to the house. I don't want my friend to tell me how to rearrange my furniture. I want her to say my home looks lovely or say nothing at all, right. My interior decorator, I want her to question how I have things arranged and to suggest that I could move things here and there. It would open up the space and all the different options.

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That's the difference between going to a friend and talking with her about what's going on in your life, and you want her to validate you. Then coming here or coming to Grow You, coming to Ask Natalie Anything, and then having a coach show you your mind and what's possible. What's possible is that you can think anything you want about the season that you're in.

So I love to think that things are easy, but I find that when my brain really thinks that things are hard and I try to just say, "Oh, no, they're easy." There's this conflict in my brain. So what I do instead is I add an and. So with kids it's like having kids at home is both easy and hard versus just me trying to say oh it's going to be easy. It's going to be easy. I can lighten up. This is so easy. Or on the opposite end this is so hard. This is horrible. When is this going to end? It's oh no. This is both easy and hard, and I was made for this.

So this is why it's important that you make your season really facty, and you separate out all of the facts of the season that define whatever season you're in. Then you can choose on purpose how you want to think about it. I would even do an entire journal entry about how you want to think about this season.

Decide on purpose how you want to show up. Get really specific. Now just I want to show up my best, but when you are at your best, how do you want to show up? When you're at your worst, how do you want to show up? When you make a mistake, how do you want to love yourself? When your kids do X, Y, Z that normally triggers you or irritates you, how can you pause? How do you want to show up? On the hardest of days, what's a thought that you can think? This was a hard day and I survived. I'm half mess and half amazing.

So I think that doing this work ahead of time instead of waiting until you're in the thick of it can be really helpful. I know for me having these sort of go to thoughts to try on that feel really good for me have been amazing. So I don't really call them affirmations because if you just repeat thoughts that I think that feel good to me, they may not work for you. They may not feel good to you.

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So you want to do what I call thoughts to borrow. You can try them on, see if they feel good to you. See if they feel open and slightly better than whatever you're currently feeling. Then you can keep them for yourself. So I love to think that I'm getting stronger. That I was made for this. I love to feel empowered. I love to add in like the and in the middle. So if I think it's challenging, I could also say and it's rewarding. And it's amazing.

So these are just different ways for you to think about the season that you're in that most likely is a lot different than what you're hearing from other people. Like I said in the beginning, most other people who are well intended will give you actions to take. Even if you search this online, the blog posts that come up will be full of actions to take. It'll suggest talking to a friend, going for a walk, exercising, saying no, asking your spouse or husband to share more of the load. All of these different actions that you can take to make the season less challenging.

What I want to offer to you here to kind of recap is that there's no such thing as a hard season. There's just the season you're in which is defined specifically by the facts that you're defining it by. Then you get to think whatever you want about it. If you want to think this is a hard season, think this is a hard season in a way that fuels you.

For me, I know I'm doing the season thing about my season right now of the newborn season. The newborn season for me is both hard and easy. I like to add on I was made for this whenever I feel like it's too much. Like oh no, I was made for this. So find what works for you. Define the season in a way that keeps you out of self-loathing, out of self-pity.

Even as someone who has been doing this work for years and has been coaching for years, I still saw my mind go to a little bit of that self-pity initially during the newborn phase. Because I've been able to apply what I've been teaching here, I've gotten out of it and I feel so much better. It makes the experience so much better. I'm not wishing it away. I view it truly as my mental gym right now. It's the new season that I'm in, and it's hard, and it's easy. And I'm getting stronger from it, and I was made for this.

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So know that you always have the option to think whatever you want about the season you're in. No matter what. Your brain will have default thoughts that probably were offered to you along the way by the social norms that we all are a part of. Yet you can pause and decide on purpose whether you want to keep those thoughts and keep that story or whether you want to change it and think something completely different.

The choice is yours. Make sure that you choose something intentionally that feels true for you, that empowers you in the way that you want to feel empowered. All right my friend. Take care. I will talk with you next week.

If you loved this podcast, I invite you to check out Grow You, my mindfulness community for moms where we do the inner work together. Head on over to nataliebacon.com/coaching to learn more.