

An interview with Hettie Brittz, Author of *(un)Natural Mom*



While motherhood seems to come naturally to some, many women struggle with feelings of failure and inadequacy, believing if they could only be like *that* mom over there, their lives and families would be much better off. Rather than wallow in guilt and “shoulds,” renowned South African speaker, TV presenter and author, Hettie Brittz, wants moms to find hope and encouragement in *(un)Natural Mom: Why You Are the Perfect Mom for Your Kids* (David C Cook/August 1, 2016).

Q: In your new book, you describe yourself as an (un)Natural mom. What is an (un)Natural mom, and doesn't every mom feel that way at some time or another?

Absolutely. I am an (un)natural Mom because even though I wanted and planned to have children, when they arrived, I often doubted my abilities and made many serious mistakes that made me wonder if perhaps I should never have had children or if my children should have had a different mother. Nurturing instincts, the joy of breastfeeding and many other indicators of the so-called “Natural Mom” just passed me by. It took a while to notice I was not alone. Every mom wants to be able to admit some aspect of motherhood did not come naturally and not all motherhood duties brought her fulfillment, but society — even our church community — frowns on this confession. The *(un)Natural Mom* book gives you permission to admit this and to find what you ARE natural at!

Q: Having lived in different locations around the world, have you found expectations of a “natural” mother to be the same everywhere?

The natural mom is a cultural myth and, therefore, not universal at all. I've noticed in Africa the natural mom is not a hovering parent. She sits on a bench in the park knitting or visiting with friends while her child plays half-supervised on the monkey bars. In a Californian play park, the natural mom walks underneath her toddler as he clambers about on the jungle gym, believing scrapes, falls and scabs should never happen if she puts every focus on the child's complete safety and does not leave his side. In the Ukraine, natural moms are those who can recognize types of cries and movements to predict their babies' needs and are consequently able to potty train babies by ten months. Natural moms in Europe are those equipped with knowledge about neurological growth, potential psychological harm of discipline methods. In Egypt, natural moms spend the first hour of school in their children's classes up to the age of 9 or 10 because they believe separation causes permanent relationship damage.

Q: What are some of the natural mothering myths you talk about in the book that are universal to moms all over the world?

All moms are expected to be naturally maternal. They should aspire to motherhood and view it as a stamp of naturalness. They value when they can become pregnant easily and naturally, give birth naturally, breastfeed for as long as possible and be naturally fulfilled by motherhood. They should be as natural at nurturing as they are at discipline and at teaching their own children. They should all be excellent homemakers who only feed their family healthy, organic foods. The word “natural” now extends to every area of child-care.

Some moms tick almost all of these boxes, while many don't tick even two or three. We already recognize diverse talents, learning styles, dietary needs, temperaments and spiritual gifts within our (church) communities. I advocate we recognize the motherhood story of other women can read very differently from our own experience, without being wrong or unbiblical, and God's journey for her and her family is at the core of these differences. The essence of all these myths is we should all be the same. This is the myth that needs to be debunked first. The beauty of our diversity deserves a second look!

Q: At the beginning of *(un)Natural Mom*, you encourage mothers to take the Tall Trees Parenting Profile you created. What will readers learn about themselves by taking the assessment?

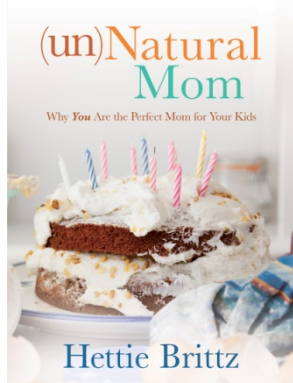
The Tall Trees Parenting Profile will give each mom a free test result after a fast and accurate online test that tells her instantly what category of tree, or mothering type, she identifies with.

In addition, it will give a three-dimensional view of her mothering roles as nurturer, disciplinarian and mentor. This extra information will help her understand why certain contexts are unnatural for her while she's a natural in others.

Once a reader has her profile results, she'll know which chapters of the book to focus on. There will be a mother like you in the four main tree type chapters or in the chapter about the hybrid moms, and as you read about her, you'll experience the affirmation you are not alone.

The book also gives a discount on the complete personalized report and growth plan if you want to download this from the Tall Trees website and study it further. It gives feedback in six additional areas that are too extensive to include fully in the book.

Take the Profile to Discover Your Parenting Style



Q: You categorize (un)Natural moms in four categories, comparing each to a tree. Why did you use a tree analogy?

The Tall Trees Parenting Profile actually recognizes 14 possible tree types, but there are four main categories that can combine very diversely in the make-up of each person. Hardly anyone is a clear-cut "type." Boxes and labels can be harmful and even offensive. In my research about temperament and personality I came across labels I wouldn't want to wear, but still, labels are part of how we gain understanding of one another. "Mother," "teacher," "Christian," "vegetarian," "recovered alcoholic" or "engineer" are all labels that can help me anticipate, consider and embrace the needs of others.

The tree analogy wants to do this. It wants to recognize diversity first. No two trees are alike, after all! It wants to acknowledge we can grow and change, look different when planted in sun or shade, go through seasons, mature and be more fruitful in our natural environment and less fruitful when we're outside of our "sweet spot."

When I know your natural design I can support you, love you and defend you when the world tries to bend you out of shape. I can adjust my expectations to what you can naturally contribute as a parent. The profile included in the book is therefore a relational and survival tool, not a diagnosis or a limiting label. It can be compared to the label on a shrub you buy from a nursery that tells you to plant it in semi-shade or full sun, water it once a week or daily, and which color flowers to expect. By calling you a particular tree type or combination, we say you aren't a fruit salad tree. You don't need to be great at everything. We each have specific fruit according to our design. This design is not flawed. It is purposed, valuable and to be embraced.

Q: What are the four categories of trees? Why are some people a hybrid of more than one tree?

The Tall Trees Parenting Profile is based on the many fourfold personality theories found in literature, studies of personality, behavioral and learning styles, and observations of parenting practice. At the heart of the T2P2 are four tree types: Palm Tree, Rose Bush, Pine Tree and Boxwood Tree. Palm Trees are jovial individuals with a love for people and the exciting opportunities life offers. They help us stay mindful of the bright side of life. I associate them with beach parties and exotic vacations.

Rose Bushes are born pioneers who tend to lead the way *their* way. Fast and determined, they ensure nobody stagnates. Their roses are proof of their productive drive, while their thorns represent their tendency to be painfully honest.

Pine Trees balance out these extroverted tree types by being all about peace and harmony. Don't pines even smell of peace and calmness? They provide the safe places and listening ears.

Boxwood Trees are the quality controllers. Like the perfectly pruned plants, they aspire to fitting the mold. They believe there is one right way to everything, and they strive to follow it.

Most people are a combination of two. A smaller percentage is close to one "pure" tree type, while the exceptions among us are a combination of three trees, with even a bit of the fourth tree mixed in! I believe our

design fits our purpose, and therefore a person with a calling that requires an adapted style that can fit many diverse requirements is usually equipped with a broader personality style. Those who are created for a specialized area often test as one dominant tree type.

Q: Society places certain expectations on women regarding what a good mother should do in raising her children. Have you found the church has an even higher standard of those expectations?

Yes, I do believe Christian women are held to both their culture's standard as well as the standards of Biblical times. It obviously becomes especially tough when our church culture clashes with society's demands, especially in the area of training and disciplining our kids. In church I find we are often measured against the mom in Proverbs 31 who cooks, sews, trades, designs, runs an international business, does leather work, is both a morning person and a night owl and is adored by her children and her husband. This is daunting! In addition to her as an example, we may be compared to a mom who adopts orphans, homeschools, bakes for the church fair, serves at Sunday School and sings in the worship team. Instead, we should be reminded the Church is a body with its members designed to have different gifts.

I believe this passage was actually meant to inspire a son to look for a virtuous wife, never to become a checklist for you and me to measure our worth against. Every God-fearing woman should be praised, whether she can prepare the perfect roast or not. The heart is always God's standard rather than the skill set, is it not? We may do well to study the diverse godly women in the Bible for the virtues of the heart instead of judging them and ourselves by our talents.

Q: What are some of the stereotypes by which Christian mothers are judged, and how do those make it more difficult for her to embrace her God-given temperament?

Christian mothers are expected to be extra family-centered, which I agree with in most respects. However, the stereotypes that slip in here are if she is truly a godly woman she will be ready to start a family immediately, will be in favor of large families, will not seek fulfillment outside of the home and will sacrifice what some call "her dreams," as these are viewed as signs of selfishness. If she has challenges becoming pregnant, giving birth naturally or with aspects of raising obedient and talented children, question marks may be placed on her faith. Some may wonder if there is sin in her life causing the family-life challenges. If she does not enjoy the mothering tasks that are idealized, but thrives as a business woman, follows a career in a traditionally male dominated field or remains a single parent after a teen pregnancy, she is viewed as worldly.

Temperament knowledge helps us understand the diverse aspirations, fears and difficulties moms experience on their journey, the decisions they struggle to make and their responses to family problems. Temperament differences do not excuse sin but rather give us tools to guide all moms closer to the blessing of authentic Biblical parenting.

Q: You write that you believe each (un)Natural Mom is exactly the right kind of natural for her child. Can you give an example of what you mean?

I believe God is a Master Designer in every aspect of Creation. His sovereign power and his all-knowing wisdom in combination mean He knows what every mother will need, what every child will become and what every family will go through; I believe He equips them all accordingly. This includes giving them gifts as well as providing them with grace for the tough patches in which they won't feel equipped.

I am not a natural nurturer, but two of my three children, due to their own make-up and personalities, don't need a lot of fussing and TLC. All three kids, however, have some sort of attention problem. God always knew our ministries would mean we raised our kids in transit and needed to homeschool them. Thus, what I needed to have the most, he gave me. He made me a Box-Rose natural teacher, trainer and disciplinarian.

When I listen to moms who are my opposite — the Pine and Palm Tree moms — their children, challenges and stories differ vastly from mine. One of my mothering role models, a Pine Tree Mom, has children with an array of allergies and health issues. She is naturally equipped for the long road of constant care with patience, a desire to nurture, cooking skills, and a calmness and surrender to her circumstances. She's the perfect mom for her children.

Q: You talk about unlearning ingrained habits through bypassing the obvious confrontations. Tell us more about what you mean and why it can offer hope to a frazzled parent?

A frazzled parent who is fully aware she has made mistakes and is stuck in unhelpful patterns is likely to be defensive when we offer a list of have-to's and how-to's to her load. Already sensitive to criticism, even our well-meant advice can be experienced as judgment. When we choose to help her recognize the things she is doing right, rather than the things she is doing wrong, she'll become more open to growth. If one wants a tree to bear more fruit, one can't just pick more fruit and prune back branches; one needs to increase the fertilizer as well! This is our strategy to help unnatural moms become more natural.

First, we help her find her natural mothering strengths that are listed clearly in the book and personalized even further in her Tall Trees Profile Report as her "Forces within" and her "Fields of Greatness." Empowered by these truths, she starts recognizing she does many good things too. These affirmations give her the inner strength to stand up and try new things. She does this through the energy and joy she derives from having her core needs fulfilled. We call these her "Fertilizer." Her family can even help her by reading what she needs to flourish. Once she is out of her winter season, she'll have the capacity to change, try new habits, learn and grow.

Q: Conflicts often arise among moms with differing parenting styles. How can knowing their mothering style help women with opposite temperaments get beyond the differences and be sources of encouragement for one another?

Oh, if we could stop comparing ourselves with others, what joy we'd find *and* give! When someone else's actions differ from ours we assume their values and intentions differ from ours too, or we feel judged! Sometimes our actions as parents do reveal our values, but often these are simply style preferences due to temperament differences.

Take, for example, the potential misunderstanding when a laid-back Pine Tree Mom and her pro-active Rose Bush friend take their kids to the park together. The Pine Tree moms tend to avoid conflict, which can be a positive sometimes. She is not quick to get involved when kids start misbehaving. The Rose Bush Mom flies off the handle to intervene with force at the first sign of trouble. The Pine Tree sees the Rose Bush mom as aggressive and interfering, while the Rose Bush Mom assumes the Pine Tree mom does not care about her child's misbehavior. Later, when the kids suddenly need to visit the restroom, the Pine Tree mom is quick to respond while the Rose Bush mom asks them to hold on to let her finish a text message she needs to send. The Pine Tree thinks she's selfish, while the Rose Bush Mom feels the Pine Tree Mom is a hovering parent.

With temperament insight in one another and permission to be themselves, the Pine Tree mom may have leaned over to her Rose Bush friend to say, "Please go break them up gently, will you? I hate being the bad cop." The Rose Bush Mom may have answered, "Of course, I don't mind! Will you walk both to the restroom after snack time so I can finish some work?" These moms have many ways in which their strengths could be used to serve the friendship and their children. None of us have everything our children need. The very mom who is our opposite is sometimes our saving grace.

Q: What about the mom who is the perfectly pruned and punctual Boxwood Tree, but longs to be the playful and positive Palm Tree? Is it possible to embrace one's own temperament while learning from the strengths of the others?

My first question to a mom who'd like to be more like someone else is always: Name your top three strengths. She usually can't. She is too much in awe of someone else to see her own virtues. When any type of mom truly understands the beautiful ways in which she reflects the heart of God to the world and to her children, she stops trying to change. She starts trying to grow. Growth is different to change in the sense a tree does not change from being an apple tree to being a pear tree or a fruit salad tree. It just becomes a bigger, healthier, more fruitful apple tree, doesn't it? The Boxwood Mom needs to make peace with herself through the discovery of how God loves her and uses her for good. From that contentment, authentic positivity will automatically flow to others.

Q: What is the call to (super)Natural Motherhood? How does it relieve the pressure of perfection?

The call to (super)Natural Motherhood is a call to trust that God has not made a mistake in choosing you to be the mother to your children. When we answer this call, we agree God has a magnificent destiny for our families. When we answer the call, we say yes to a journey that may be tough at times. God calls us out of a place of trying to be everything our children need, to a place of acknowledging we are not perfect. We choose to be authentic and to let God provide for the areas where we struggle. A (super)natural Mom therefore admits her failures and cooperates with God, believing He has equipped her for her task. She trusts He has made her an integral part of the salvation story God is writing in her family and in the world.

A (super)Natural Mom does not believe the lie that the shortcomings in herself and her children are clear signs of sin or proof of doom and failure. She faces those shortcomings honestly, humbly and courageously. She trusts God through the shame, pain and ridicule that comes from those who can't understand her journey and her choices. Hannah in the Bible was accused of being drunk when she was praying for a son, and Mary was suspected of promiscuity when she fell pregnant out of wedlock. An embarrassed mom is in good company and better positioned to become a (super)Natural Mom than the mom who thinks she has it all together.

Q: Explain what you mean when you wrote, “Every (un)Natural Mom needs to crack in order to become a (super)Natural Mom.”

While society tells us to pull ourselves together, the Biblical message is to be broken. Paul calls us vessels of clay. We are meant to be fragile rather than proud and tough. In our brokenness we become those who can pour out treasures to our children and to the rest of the world. This “cracking” comes when we get to the end of ourselves. Salvation comes only to those who know they need saving. In the same way super(natural) motherhood comes to the mom who knows she needs God to help her in her parenting task. She cracks as an act of surrender.

This is not the kind of cracking that depresses us and leaves us feeling burnt out or useless. It is the cracking that frees us from our constant striving and helps us surrender our children to God. A (super)Natural Mom then stops trying to make her children's future bright; instead she rests in the knowing God will do it. She stops fighting for favor in this world and figuratively dresses her children in God's favor first by making their spiritual wellbeing her first priority. She knows even her failures in doing the basic things won't stop God from keeping all the promises He made concerning her life and the lives of her children.

Q: There may be some mothers who, despite the understanding God has given their children the exact mother they need, struggle with how to let go and trust God to work through them. What encouragement can you offer those moms?

The Bible has many examples of mothers who had to let go: Hannah had to give young Samuel back to the temple when he was just weaned, Moses' mom had to give him up to save his life and Mary had to let her son walk a journey of incredible suffering. These mothers from the Bible set us an example of surrender and great courage. Also listen to the testimonies of mothers who have had to see children go through drug rehab, crises of faith or the death of a father. Let them tell you their story, and if you are one of them, tell other mothers what you have learned on your journey. God is not scared of the realities of life. Give up the unrealistic ideal and embrace your reality. My prayer is that God will teach you to see the beauty in it.

Q: What is your hope for the readers of (un)Natural Mom?

I pray every mom will discover the unique beauty of her mothering style, encompassing her flaws as well as those traits reflecting the heart of God. It is my hope this book will help all moms to embrace an important truth: From crib to college send-off, even the mom who feels ill-equipped for this important job is more than enough for her family. I trust she will be perfectly content with making the best of the aspects of motherhood God has gifted her with. She will no longer compare herself with others but will celebrate who she is and will let other moms be themselves too. Through such a mom, God will write a beautiful story into her household and into the world.

Keep up with Hettie Brittz by visiting www.hettiebrittz.com or following her on [Facebook \(HettieBritzAuthor\)](#) or [Twitter \(@hettiebrittz\)](#).