

Moms: Move From Vanquished to Victor With These 4 Truths

"What would you do differently as a mom, Cheri?"

I hesitate, look around the table at the five women gathered for a mom's night out, and realize I'm among friends.

"Pretty much everything!" I say, only half in jest.

"There are three general types of feedback people can give each other: affirmation, coaching and evaluation."

Everyone nods; they've all read *Thanks for the Feedback*, too.

I continue. "What I wish I'd done was spent their first 10 years giving them very intentional coaching in all key areas of life. Then, by the time they were teens, the foundation would have been well-laid, and I could have focused more on affirmation. Unfortunately, I fell for the self-esteem movement of the '90s."

All five women roll their eyes in sympathetic understanding.

"I did it the wrong way around: I affirmed my kids' every waking moment but failed to coach and, as necessary, correct. As a result, they're 24 and 26 and still trying to figure out how to launch independent lives."

As our conversation continues, each mom shares her own regrets.

By dessert time, our list is long indeed.

The Overwhelm of Mom-Guilt

I've seen plenty of social media memes urging us to "Live with no regrets."

But I have yet to meet a regret-free mom.

Most conversations I have with mothers of any age or stage quickly turn to how overwhelmed they are by Mom- Guilt.

A few years ago, I posted this question to my Facebook page:

"I'm working on a project and need some examples of negative self-talk that parents use against themselves. (i.e. "They deserve a better mom than me...") Give me your best imitation(s) of those inner critic, mom/dad guilt voices!"

In less than an hour, almost one hundred women (no men) had left comments like these:

- "If I were a better Mom, I wouldn't have such a hard time breastfeeding—or I'd produce more milk." Or "This baby deserves a better mom—one who isn't feeling weepy or crabby every day."
- "What will people think if my child keeps _____?" (Fill in blank with crying, sucking his thumb, whining, talking in church, carrying her blankie, refusing green vegetables and so on.)
- "At this rate, we'll be *Jerry Springer Show* regulars by 2020."
- "If I were a good mom, my child would ... take school work more seriously, be better organized, have more friends, play outside more, not be failing his class, not be working on his project at 10:00 the night before it's due."
- "Whatever I do, it will never be enough."
- "They would choose (another mom's name) over me for a mom if they had a choice."

My Most Overwhelming Regret

I resonate with every single concern voiced above.

But my most overwhelming regret is that I didn't take care of

my own emotional and spiritual health when my children were little.

I met my husband when I was 18, just six months after being discharged from the eating disorder unit of a neuropsychiatric hospital. We married young (21) and had children right away.

I knew the eating disorder I'd struggled with for five years wasn't fully resolved. But I did what so many women do: I believed I could put my own needs high on a shelf for the next 20 years, raise my children and then pick back up where I'd left myself off.

Of course, it didn't work that way.

My kids grew up with a mom who was barely surviving. Oh, how I wish they'd had a mom who was intentionally thriving.

Giving Our Guilt to God

Over the holidays, my 26-year-old daughter, Annemarie, and I sat at the kitchen table, drinking tea and chatting about how God is working in our lives.

As I shared some of the self-care and boundary-setting decisions I'd recently made, Annemarie responded, "I'm so proud of the choices you're making, Mom. This is such incredible growth for you."

"I just wish I hadn't waited so long to deal with my issues," I said, deflecting her praise with guilt. "I wish I'd made these kinds of choices 20 years ago."

Annemarie reached across the kitchen table, put a hand on mine, and her next words took my breath away:

"Mom, you need to know that the 6-year-old in me is watching you, too."

For so many years, I thought it was too late. The damage was

done. It was too late for me to change, to become a better mom, to be the kind of mom my kids needed and deserved.

But my daughter's words told a different story. They reminded me that God really can "restore ... the years that the locust hath eaten" (Joel 2:25, KJV).

Today, if you're a parent who feels overwhelmed by regret, here are four truths you need to know:

1. You're not alone.
2. It's never too late.
3. You can change.
4. Even the smallest change you make makes a difference that matters. {eoa}

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