

What Every Jesus-Loving Mom Needs to Tell Herself

Dear Future Me,

I wanted to write this letter to you, hopeful that you aren't as hard on yourself (now that your kids are all grown up) as you were when you were a mom of young children. I hope you give yourself more grace and remember motherhood well. They say hindsight is 20/20, but when I look back on memories from my teens, 20s and early 30s, it's hard for me to remember things clearly sometimes—how I responded, how I felt, what my thoughts and actions were in the moments in between the big milestones and memories. And since your children are grown up now as you read this, Future Me, I know you may wonder if you were the best mom you could have been.

So Future Me, I want to tell you that being a mom of three young children was difficult, wonderful, unpredictable, unexpected and absolutely one of the best things you've ever experienced. You were not a perfect mom, but you never aimed for perfection. Sometimes you were tired, yes, imperfect (of course), but each morning you got out of bed and strove to tackle the newness (and sometimes the monotony) of each day with love, grace and creativity. You aimed to be a mom who pleased God and loved her children well. Your burning desire was to teach them, to serve your family, to make things fun, but also to instill in them a love for Jesus and kindness toward others.

Future Me, you may remember the season when you struggled to maintain your joy as you constantly battled a strong-willed child/future leader. It caught you off guard, yes. There was indeed a learning curve as you got to know your future leader and devoured everything you could read on how to parent lovingly and consistently through that trial. You made some

mistakes. There were times you weren't sure you had what took to raise someone so strong, intense and independent. But your foggy memory might try to convince you that this was your experience the entire time your kids were young. And in actuality through lots of prayer, persistence, love, reading, support from an amazing husband and friends, you got through it. There were moments in this tough season that were scary and uncertain. But there was also so much joy ... so much laughter ... so much hope so much gratitude.

When you looked upon each of your children, you tried to will your brain to remember, to etch into your memory these moments, facial expressions, funny and precious things they'd say, and the sound of their voices at every stage. And you worried you'd forget.

You managed the different personalities of your children with a special appreciation and love for each one. They kept you on your toes with their many changes, but you counted yourself blessed to be able to be there for them physically and emotionally as you didn't quite get to experience in your own childhood.

You snuggled, hugged and kissed their sweet faces often. Oh how you loved to love on them! You soaked them in as if doing so was drinking from the fountain of youth itself.

I know you, and I know what you're thinking: "I should have gotten down on the floor and *played* with them more." Guess what: You did that sometimes. Maybe you could have done it more. But, girl, you tried and you had a lot on your plate.

You were the reader of bedtime stories.

The helper with homework.

The cooker of dinner.

The preparer of healthy snacks.

The washer and folder of endless loads of laundry.

The manager of schedules.

The shopper of food.

The article reader and saver of anything helpful having to do with parenting, children, crafts, social media apps, movies and cultural trends to be aware of.

The taker and organizer of photos.

The journaler of important milestones.

The cleaner.

The teacher of how to do chores.

The doer of hair.

The listener of silly stories.

The answerer of both deep and funny questions.

The constant reminder to be gracious, kind, generous, and forgiving.

The comforter of broken hearts.

Future Me, as a mom, you were a healer of boo-boos with your ouchless antiseptic spray, Arnica gel, Band-Aids, essential oils and children's Tylenol. You were the parent they called upon in the middle of the night due to stomach aches, headaches, growing pains or bad dreams. You rolled out of bed each and every time, always surprising yourself how you could be so loving and gentle with them at 2 a.m. and 4 a.m. when you were so. Very. Tired.

You helped them study multiplication, sight words and super-reader books though at times you thought you might fall asleep (or die of boredom) because the day had been so long already,

and you had poured out so much of yourself. You helped with homework and school projects—but just the right amount of help because you didn't want to be a mother who did everything for their kids for fear of them failing. You believed failure was a good thing, a teachable moment, and something you and your children could go through and learn from together. Plus, you found something truly special in a project that was the result of a child's imagination and ability and not your own.

You worried for them, every time they climbed a tree or played too rough, or went to school, or when others were unkind or cruel. You wondered if they would remember everything you taught them when faced with peer pressure or the opportunity to stand up for someone else or to fight for what was right.

You prayed for them. Before they were even born, you prayed for them. You prayed out loud every single drive to school. You prayed before bed. You prayed throughout the day. You prayed that they would be strong and healthy, students of God's Word, courageous and kind. You prayed that the seeds of faith that were being planted in their hearts would never be snatched away. You prayed that they would be wise to the schemes of the enemy and the world. You prayed they would be set apart for the Lord and choose the narrow path (Matt. 7:13-14). You prayed they would follow God's plan and purpose for them, and that they would have a relationship with Jesus who would be both their Lord and their friend (John 15:15). You prayed for God's protection and guidance.

Future Me, remember that you sang to your children. You put music on often. You had spontaneous dance parties in the living room. You tried to incorporate biblical lessons and Jesus in your everyday life. You did silly voices. You tried to make things fun. You were amazed by the way they talked. You tried to always speak to them in a kind and loving manner—even in discipline. And of course you weren't perfect at this. Yes, there were times you were grumpy, and tired and human. Yes, there were times you wondered if you were doing

the right thing by working part-time, and not homeschooling, and not changing the family's diet to vegan and gluten-free.

But Future Me, in this moment where I (Past You) am feeling patient and gracious with myself, I wanted you to know that you were a great mom.

Let me repeat that in case you still haven't learned to accept compliments: You were a great mom.

You did your best by the grace of God, and you never gave up. You loved your children well. May God bless you with fond memories of this wonderful, unpredictable, crazy, awesome season of life. {eoa}

Angie Merrill is a mom of three, a wife, a writer and a follower of Christ based in Los Angeles, California. She aims to help parents of strong-willed children stay calm, connected and creative as they joyfully lead future leaders. You can learn more about Angie on her blog, .