

# Dear Younger Me...

Dear Younger Me,  
I wish I had known.....

When my sons were growing up, I knew that I needed to do what I could to help them become independent, well rounded men. They had chores; they were taught everyday tasks like cooking and cleaning. We took them to church and were very involved in the Boy Scouts right along with them. We were youth leaders at church in their teens. We had fun. We enjoyed one another.

We tried our best to prepare them for going away to college. We had the notion that once they were out and on their own, our relationship with them would be much different and we would not be as involved. Well that is partly true. They still come to us for input and ideas and opinions. We also go to them the same way. We also have learned that when they have problems, upsets or a crisis, it still affects us. We are still available for support, be a listening ear, offer guidance IF they want it and just being there. They are our best friends. We are close to their wives. We are blessed.

Dear Younger Me,

I do wish I knew then what I know now and have observed with so many of my younger friends. You are SO much harder on your FIRST child. I know I was and I do regret it. You want them to be perfect!! I watch it happen with so many of you!!! Another thing my Mom always told me:: a couple of things. 1. Beauty is only Skin Deep. And: 2. Pretty is As pretty does. I also watch this so much. Many have inward beauty and Grace which we need to be good people. Many have Never grown that inward beauty!! Beautiful on the outside. But shallow on the inside. We All need to strive to be beautiful people on the inside! To be what God wants us to be!! My Mother was the most beautiful person I've ever known\_ both inside and out!!!! As I have grown older, the little things are so important to me! Not the Big things anymore. Actions speak louder than words. I do cherish my friends, both young and old. Good friends are always there for you. I have learned, But always tried to be. A truly good friend. You don't know what tomorrow or the future holds, but Always be there when someone needs you! You truly go no where by Accident!!!

Dear Younger Me,

Do not allow yourself to compete with other mothers over the success of your children - their grades, their sports achievements, their accomplishments. Allow your children to be who they are and most certainly allow them to express themselves as youngsters. Get over the idea that your kids are a reflection of you based on their attire! Let them wear cowboy boots and a tutu to school if they want! Let them wear mismatching socks on occasion, and even go without the beloved hair bow! Your children are individual beings; embrace their uniqueness!

As they grow, do not hover over them. Allow them to fail. Do not fix their problems. Don't worry what other mothers are saying if your child fails English! Better to fail while they are young than later in life. Prepare your child for the road; Don't prepare the road for your child!

Dear Younger Me,

Be proactive, deliberate, and targeted about arranging opportunities to spend time with both your current friends and family and those who might become friends as well as people in the community to whom you'd like to give or from whom you'd like to get information. Phew-- a long sentence that simply says "reach out."

Meeting friends or family for a meal or coffee (or wine) or sharing participation in an event is easier; sometimes, though, we get caught up in busy lives and don't set aside enough time. Developing new friendships is important, but takes effort. Such time spent with friends and family is restorative.

Interacting with community members is harder. Don't let "but they won't want to talk to me" dissuade you. They do, and they will. Ask a school board member to lunch. Take a city councilman to coffee. Arrange to meet the executive director or president of the board of a nonprofit in his or her office. Make a difference by being involved in your community. Helping make your local community better-- being involved-- is worth the effort.

Dear Younger Me,

Oh the places you will go in your journey with God! You have lived a very blessed life. Two married healthy parents and a family that raised you in a good Christian home. You will encounter many unexpected challenges ahead that will turn your life upside down and test your faith. Do not be afraid and do not turn away from God. You have never been challenged in your walk with God before now. Do not steer off course or be afraid because God will be constantly holding your hand. You are stronger than you know. Feel comforted knowing that you can survive each hardship by turning to God with your heartache. There will also be wonderful blessings that come into your life during the storms. Focus on the positives and thank God for each blessing even though you will still be disappointed in the difficulties He gives you. An easy carefree life is not guaranteed like you expected. However, do not be afraid when you feel like your life as you knew it is over. Turn to God with your sorrow and thank Him for each day you are on this Earth. Health is a gift that is taken for granted. Thank Him for every blessing in your life and those gifts will outweigh your troubles. Hug your loved ones extra tight spending true quality time with them while telling them how much you love them. You will make it through all of what lies ahead by walking with Christ and trusting Him.

Dear Younger Me,

1. Stop apologizing so much.
2. Appreciate how you look right now. It's a lot better than you think.
3. Understand that sometimes boys are just clueless. They are not being intentionally clueless to hurt your feelings.
4. One cupcake/donut/piece of candy is not really that important.
5. If you have to ask yourself whether you should have one more drink, the answer is probably no.
6. If you think everybody is looking at you, you're wrong.
7. No matter how much you love your parents, they definitely love you more.
8. Sometimes doing the right thing is embarrassing and not cool. Get over that.
9. When you are arguing with someone, yelling rarely accomplishes anything.
10. Many of the smartest people are the best listeners.
11. Waterproof mascara is not worth the hassle of taking it off.
12. Just because you hated a book at age 20 does not mean you will hate it at age 40.
13. Arguing with your boyfriend/spouse after 10 p.m. is just completely counterproductive.
14. There is no substitute for a cake made from scratch.
15. Be careful when stating your opinion because it might change tomorrow.

Dear Younger Me,

I want to talk to you about that cheerleader in your high school class. The one who seems to have all the things you lack: confidence, social status and a cheerleading uniform. The one you wish you could trade places with, whose life seems so much better than yours.

I want to tell you that, a decade from now, as you are about to walk into your 10 year high school reunion, you will run into her in the parking lot, where you will have a surprisingly candid talk with her that will forever alter your perspective. She will tell you how stupid she felt in high school because of her struggle with dyslexia, and how she lived in constant fear that others would find out what a poor student she was. She will also describe how grief-stricken and humiliated she felt when it came to light that her father had had an extramarital affair with one of your teachers. You will be stunned by the knowledge that this girl, whose life you envied, would gladly have traded her cheerleading uniform for things you took for granted: your success in school and your happy, stable home life.

I wish you could know, while you are still in high school, that the things you are so worried about, like not being in the popular group, and not making the cheerleading squad, are so insignificant compared with the things that some of your peers are dealing with. I also want you to appreciate all the good things you have, instead of focusing on what you don't have.

To be fair, I haven't known too many teenagers who aren't self-conscious and self-centered, so maybe you can't help yourself right now. Since I'm writing to you from the future, I know that you will someday learn to have compassion, realizing that even people who seem to have it all can be experiencing great pain. I also know that you will eventually learn to be grateful for all

that God has given you, even if it didn't include the ability to do a decent cartwheel during cheerleading tryouts.

Dear Younger Me,

If I only knew then what I know now.....

-Slow down and enjoy the world around you, especially your loved ones and the beautiful world God created. It's hard to hear His voice while rushing around on my own agenda.

-Enjoy your children, love your children; guide, guard, direct and protect them, but remember eventually they will take off for their own destiny. Nurture, develop and cherish your relationship with your husband. Intentionally work on it and help it grow. He'll be living with you a lot longer than your kids! Empty nesting is wonderful with the man you love.

-Allow your children to fail and to search for answers for themselves, even spiritual ones. It's better for them to struggle and live through failures in life while they are under your roof and you still have some influence on them.

-Schedule family nights and date nights regularly to keep relationships strong.

- Let your children see you praying, reading the Bible and worshipping. Show them this is an important part of your life. Talk about God often and in regular conversation with them. Seeing faith in action rubs off even when in teenage years they may deny it. It has been woven into their upbringing without them even being aware of it.

- Pray with your husband especially before making any big decisions. Things will work out better if you do!

-Find a prayer partner. It's an amazing way to be covered in prayer and closer to God.

Dear Younger Me,

God has blessed you with little angels to teach and love and lead - you were specifically chosen for these specific children! Here are a few things to remember:

- \* Enjoy your kids - play, cook, read, run, spin and dance! Laugh and have fun, be silly!!!
- \* Don't worry about a clean and uncluttered house! When they are gone, there is not much left to pick up! And, the house will be way too clean!!!!
- \* Teach them how to cook - yes it will be messy but it's fun and they will love it!!!
- \* Find a good babysitter and enjoy Date Night! At least 3 times a month! They will love it and so will you and your husband! When your kids fly from the nest HE will still be there. Keep your friendship with your husband strong! Your kids need to see what a loving and friendly relationship is like!
- \* Your kids do not have to look like they walked out a children's catalogue every time you leave the house! Let them wear that pair of baseball pants with boots or pink tutu!

- \* Get on the floor with your angels - play Barbies, farm. Legos, army.....
- \* Make and play with play dough - yes it messy - SO WHAT!
- \* Let your kids fail! That is life
- \* Say "I love you" both with words and actions! They are watching what you say and do!
- \* Pray with and for your kids! Let them say the blessing!
- \* Turn off the TV during meals!
- \* Do not answer the phone during meals! It is your time as a family! Now this doesn't mean you can't listen to the answering machine - if you still have one! This can be a funny dinner conversation!
- \* Don't fight their fights! There are always two sides to every story!
- \* Take care of yourself! Don't feel guilty if you go out with friends!!!!
- \* And one of the biggest things you need to try to do is put your phone away and turn their tablets off! If you are in the grocery store, it is a perfect time to teach them about life and health!
- \* Turn off the TV in the car! It breaks my heart to be following a car in town with the TV on! Sing, tell silly jokes, talk about what you see outside, have them recite the alphabet, Bible verses! There is so much to do in the short time you have these angels!

You got this, Sister!

Dear Younger Me,

Stop comparing yourself to others. Be yourself! Don't compare how you dress, don't compare how you mother, don't compare your marriage. Be you, be happy with you, and don't be afraid to be yourself. Don't rush to keep up with Joneses. All that will happen to you and yours will happen in God's timing. That being said, remember that everything is perfect in God's timing, and he makes no mistakes.

Think before you speak. Really take into consideration the words that are going to leave your mouth. Humor can be hurtful, even if it seems "cool" at the time. Don't be quick to judge, in your mind or out of your mouth.

And Younger me, be present! Be present with your husband. Be present with your kids. Be present with your friends. Be present with those hurting. Show up. When those who are struggling need you, be there. You may not have the right words to say but your presence will never be forgotten. Even when you are uncomfortable or selfish and don't want to go, do. Drop what you are doing and go. Be there! Be there for people, because you will need them there for you.

Be happy always and remember to turn to the Lord, our God, when you struggle. You can do anything with him. He makes all things possible.

With so much love,

Slightly older and wiser, but still yearning for more knowledge, Me

**Dear Younger Me,**

**Read this daily. It will cut down on a lot of little worries that popped into my heart. God has us on a path, he is in charge. Let HIM in your heart. God is a good guy:**

**"Learn to enjoy life more. Relax, remembering that I am God with you. I crafted you with enormous capacity to know Me and enjoy My Presence." -Jesus Calling**

*Dear Younger Me,*

*Worry and anxiety have been a plague for as long as I can remember. Sitting here at 40 years of age, I've realized that most of the things that you have worried about never happened. The things that do happen that you've worried about tend to not be as bad as you thought they'd be, or ended up having an outcome you wouldn't have expected. You've never changed anything by trying to control a situation, so stop being so controlling! Try to relax and enjoy the small moments more as the small moments are what matter! It's very cliché (and something I need reminding of to this day) but I truly believe that giving God the wheel is the only real answer to any problem, worry, or moment of anxiety!*

*Love ya,*

Dear Younger Me,

Looking back on the ways I have matured over the years, I wish I had implemented a few thoughts a little earlier in my life. Having a perspective of whether something is **eternally useful or useless** would have helped me stress a little less about some of the smaller irritations we run into each and every day. I have found that when I face a problem if I ask myself if it is **eternally useful or useless** I don't stress as much. This question puts the problem in the perspective God has

toward something and helps me focus on **His** priorities instead of mine (or the word's). This has been helpful for all areas of my life.

I have also found that it is fine to mess up when you are raising your children. I was able to apologize to my children many times, for mistakes I made and we all seemed to get through things in one piece. No one is perfect and we certainly won't do everything perfectly and it is ok to tell your kids if you made a mistake. I think it shows them that they can make mistakes and can tell you about them as well.

Lastly, I wish (and I am still working on this) I would take more time to think before I speak. Being cautious and careful about what we say goes a lot farther than having to apologize for careless words!!

I hope these reflections are an encouragement.

Dear Younger Me,

Life will be challenging, but it will also be a glorious, amazing journey that you are blessed each day to be on. To my adolescent self, please know that this stage in your life is short; love yourself more than you think anyone else possibly could and take the time to ask yourself who you are and want to be. Know that your life ahead is worth the hard work, sometimes agonizing stage, of adolescents. To my 20 year old self, take the time to evaluate your decisions and set the course for the life you want to lead. To my 30 year old self, life doesn't have to always be perfect. Take the time to live in the moment without anticipating and living in the future so much that the present passes you by.

Truly savor each minute of your beautiful life and enjoy the ride!

Dear Younger Me,

I was thinking to myself the other day, and now that I am "old and wise", I keep wondering what I would change if "only I'd known then what I know now". As I mused, 10 personal commandments would have helped guide me better in life.

1. REALLY put God FIRST in my life!
2. When my parents got a divorce, I would not have blamed myself for it.



3. I would have listened to my grandmother more closely and more often.
4. I would have spent more time with my dog, Patsy.
5. I would have learned at an early age to pick my battles instead of fighting over things that either have no solution or would mean little or nothing in the future.
6. I would have learned to pray sooner instead of trying to heal myself with eating so much ice cream as a child!
7. If I had known God had my husband in mind for me as my spouse, I wouldn't have wasted so much time looking for the "right" guy all the time.
8. If I'd known being a parent was going to be such a hard job, I would have tried to trust my instincts instead of Dr. Spock!
9. I would have taken more time for "me" instead of taking care of everything and everybody else first!
10. I would have taken more time to "breathe in Holy Spirit"!

Even with all these afterthoughts, life is good and heaven looks bright!

*Dear Younger Me,*

*I wish my younger self knew how to truly turn everything over to God. I was raised to pick myself up by the bootstraps and fix things! Turning everything over to God is such a relief! It's not easy at first but it gets easier with practice. And sometimes I feel the need to take these things back - play with them for a while. But I realize that I need to let it go. I had to go through a couple of really tough times to realize that my plan wasn't working. God's plan does and will work. That's my advice to my younger self. Life could have been so much smoother. I'm grateful I know this now.*

Dear Younger Me,

Realize your worth.  
Stop thinking that your self-worth comes from romantic relationships.  
Stand up for yourself.  
Be brave!  
Don't be afraid to be totally and completely YOU! Love all of the  
quirk and crazy.  
Learn to say, "I love you."  
Know that you are loved.

Sincerely,  
Me

**Dear Younger Me,**

**I was blessed when I was raised with two amazing parents! My dad was always encouraging all of us to work hard to do our best. My mom was always showing us how we can help others, even quietly. My mom would always get up early to read the bible, she dropped things from the bible in her talking. If I got in trouble, I couldn't go to church. My dad was on a football team that was National Champions, but taught us all that giving your care and love to others is important. Parents and grandparents can talk to teach us, but their life was full of what they did with our amazing God. I was blessed!**

Dear Younger Me,

I would have worked harder at letting my children fail & recover themselves.  
I think it would have helped their self confidence.

I would like to have been more vocal in sharing my faith with those close to me. I have tended to try to teach mostly by example.

I would try to be more open & vulnerable with my close friends

Dear Younger Me,

Having recently dealt with a close friend's health crisis she has continually advised me:

ONE DAY AT A TIME

It reminds me we all must follow this proverb and learn to live in the moment relinquishing the anxiety and stress of the unknown.

Therefore claiming: THIS IS THE DAY WHICH THE LORD HATH MADE I WILL REJOICE AND BE GLAD IN IT - Psalm 118:24 and by practicing this scripture you will be reaping the benefit of the old adage: THIS TOO SHALL PASS.

Each day is a gift - find the blessings in each day. They are there waiting for you to discover!

Gus McRae said it best in Lonesome Dove:

Lorie darlin', life in San Francisco, you see, is still just life. If you want any one thing too badly, it's likely to turn out to be a disappointment. The only healthy way to live life is to learn to like all the little everyday things, like a sip of good whiskey in the evening, a soft bed, or a glass of buttermilk!

Dear younger me-

*\*Before you marry if you have the means to travel...DO IT*

*\*Take learning another language more seriously!*

*\*Get married later in life ( after 27) you will learn the most about yourself in the 5 years leading up to that.*

*\*Be independent and spend time with yourself - and in the word.*

*\*Make your own money and keep your own bank account*

- \*Look in the mirror and be happy with what you look like
- \*care less about what others have and more about how you can give back with your talents
- \*Teach your children about the value of money at an early age. Teach them to save as well as wants versus needs!!
- \*Teach your children to live on a budget before they leave the nest!!!!
- \*Get out of Gods way....he knows what's best!
- \*Embrace trials and tribulations- there is always something positive when it's over.
- \*Love spending time with family--- even if they have flaws!

Dear Younger Me,

Don't judge! You don't know what makes people act the way they do. You don't know their story so always try to be compassionate towards others.

It's okay to say no. When you spend so much time volunteering, your family and your well-being can suffer. Don't spend so much time worrying about what other people think of you. You are a child of God and just love yourself.

Dear Younger Me,

I wish I had known how fast time flies and had enjoyed each moment more as it was happening instead of reflecting back on situations.

I wish I had enjoyed every moment of my children and let all the housework go when they were young.

I wish I had known that we will have hard times and and good times they are all are times of growth in my life.

I wish I had trusted that God uses all things for good.

I wish I had faith at a younger age. I was in my 40's before I learned that God is with me through everything in my life and will be there always.

I wish I had known how much I would miss my parents after they were in heaven. I would have spent a lot more time learning from them.

I wish I had known how important it was to be involved in my children's school activities. I was working and could not always be there.

Always have girlfriends – they will always be there for you when your family is not available or they are in crisis.

Always have enough money of your own to do as you please without “permission” from anyone.

*Dear Younger Me,*

*Always say hello to people, even if you are not sure they remember you. Everyone likes to be acknowledged. Try harder to remember names but if you don't, it's okay to ask. Most people have a hard time with names. Sincerely listen to people, be present in the conversation. Always keep ice tea, an apple, almonds, and a good cheese in the refrigerator. The shelf life is long so you will always be prepared to open your house for impromptu get-togethers.*

**Dear Younger Me,**

**People matter more than things, or tasks, or time. No matter what is going on in your life at the moment, if a friend asks you to go for a walk, or coffee, or whatever- do it! You can't get that time back, but those other things can be shelved for a while.**

Stop worrying and being so afraid of something happening to your kids. It's out of your control anyways so let your children be free to experience adventure and discover who they are and what they are capable of doing.

Always, no matter what, be nice and kind to everyone you meet. You absolutely never know when your paths might cross again, even years later. This has happened to me so many times in my life and I was glad that, most of the time, I behaved graciously.

Dear Younger Me,

Subscribe to the principal of enoughness. Consider at what point your needs are sufficiently met, your desires sated, the quantities of possessions adequate. There is contentment to be found in relaxing into enoughness, in resisting the urge to compete materially.

Dear Younger Me,

Even as cliché as it is...the days may seem long as a young mom of babies/little ones, but they really pass by in a blink. It is a time in life when some days go SO slow (especially the window of time from 5-7pm :)) but when you look up years have jumped forward and your children are taller than you are and you have been married for more years than not! It is such a blessing to have little ones at home. I wish I could go back in time and be there again with renewed patience and appreciation for my children and their little brains and personalities. And, oh to hear their little voices again!

Make a point of getting out of the house with your spouse! It is for sure not an easy task and even though you may feel too exhausted to do so, it really is energizing to be alone with your spouse, away from children and out on the town or even just running errands. Setting aside time together as adults really does help renew that relationship and keep you feeling human!

Remember that as a wife and mother you must still be fed spiritually. It is a demanding role that can leave you feeling very weak and tapped out at times after doing so much for others. Even though you WANT to do for others it is important to not overlook your own basic needs. Keeping yourself spiritually fed can be a life changer for your entire family!

No need to stress over buying the right developmental toys for your children - they honestly only want to play with pots and pans, plastic containers, wooden spoons and measuring cups :)!!!

*Dear Younger Me,*

*Always remember these three things :*

*God is always with you: Trust Him*

*Humbly ask for His guidance each day*

*Do not forget that you cannot do anything well on your own!*

*Dear Younger Me,*

Our Lord has engraved you in the palms of His Hands. He says, "Beloved, I have called you by name; you are Mine! You are precious and honored in My Sight." He also says that "He has plans for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future."

You are my younger self; your journey through life has already begun and you have many rivers to cross and many mountains to climb, many joys and many sorrows ahead in your future. I want to focus on three of the most important virtues you might consider cultivating:

1) **COMPASSION:** We will be judged by our Creator by how we relate to others, not by things we have, level of education, or bank accounts. Jesus commands us to love one another. Be inclusive, not exclusive. Love always wins over hate. Be kind, do good!

**SERVICE:** GIVE BACK to society; serve those less fortunate than yourself. Give spiritual nourishment, be an encourager. Jesus says, "if you love me, feed my sheep." Service goes hand-in-hand with **COMPASSION**; it is Love in Action!

2) **HUMILITY:** I know it's a difficult concept, but you are **NOT** the center of the Universe - God is! It takes many people most of their lives to realize that. More than any other single way, the grace of **HUMILITY** is worked into our lives through the discipline of **SERVICE**. And **HUMILITY** is not possible without personal integrity. "Humility is the foundation of all other virtues; hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance." St. Augustine

In closing, choose a mentor; find a "tribe"...a group of women who are loving, compassionate, encouraging believers who will empower you with wisdom and confidence on this journey ahead of you. Enjoy your relationship with Jesus. Have fun. Laugh a lot! Develop that rich sense of humor that you possess. God has a sense of humor...just look at us!!

Have an awesome life. You are beloved.

Dear Younger Me,

You're stronger than you think and you're braver than you know, but sometimes strength looks like unflinching tenderness and bravery looks like walking away with tears in your eyes. The world is full of sharp edges and broken pieces, and everyone is searching for a soft



place to land. Be that soft place... your love is a needle and thread stitching back together unraveled pieces. And patchwork is always, always beautiful.

If God is a Father, surely he has a mother's heart. And each person we see – every disrespectful teenager, every person on a street corner, every impatient person in line, every refugee, every irritated driver, every prisoner, every telemarketer-calling-at-dinner, every immigrant, every person from “the other” side of town – is someone's baby. Love them like they are yours.

Be the kind of person who doesn't fret about the social circles you aren't in, and instead look for ways you can draw a wider circle in your own life. Pull up another chair. Sit at the tables with people who sit alone. Look for the outsiders in any room and make a beeline for them. Smile more. Laugh. Tell people what you like about them. Be specific. Don't forget that everyone feels insecure sometimes and no one's life is perfect, so don't compare your insides to other people's outsides. Everyone feels safer behind masks (and some of us have prettier masks than others), but everyone is hungry for authenticity and vulnerability. So as often as you can, take your mask off. More often than not, someone else will say “me too” and take their mask off, too. And giving someone the chance to say “me too” is one of the greatest gifts you can give. It always helps someone feel a little less alone.

Spend some time with 5-year-olds. Walk slow. Look at the bugs and the clouds. Think about whales and volcanos and galaxies and tidepools and sunsets and faraway lands and let your heart be filled with wonder at the vast goodness of God. Ask lots of questions. Imagine what it would be like to walk in “their” shoes. Practice empathy.

Don't be afraid – not because everything is always going to be OK, but because you're never, ever alone. Learn what it feels like to hold His hand and don't ever let go. Even as life gets more complicated, it remains quite simple. Love others. Love God. Rejoice.

Dear Younger Me,

- \*Slow down and be present not perfect for your kids!
- \*Don't constantly rush your children, let them stop and smell the flowers!
- \*Never criticize your children or put your children down in front of others. Be positive in your discipline.
- \*Spare the rod and spoil the child!
- \*Sit down for dinner as often as you can. Ask each child to tell what the best, worst, most exciting part of their day was
- \*Try an ice breaker (who was your favorite person today, tell me the best thing or worst thing about, mother, dad, sister, brother, grandmother...) at dinner every night or as they go to bed.
- \*Give them your full attention when they first get out of school and fully listen.
- \*You have to really pull info out of your boys, listen very carefully during carpool!
- \*Be selective in your volunteer jobs, learn to say NO to many and YES to a few!
- \*Please don't let your children form cliques! These cliques seem to end up hurting almost all of our children at one time or another.
- \*Teach your children love, acceptance, courage, inclusiveness and tolerance and never to leave someone out, make fun of someone who is different than them or hurt someone else's feelings.
- \*Your husband and your children are your first priority, there will be time later for friends.
- \*Family is important! They can impart a vast amount of experience and wisdom.
- \*Do not overcommit you or your children, let them be kids and enjoy the experience.
- \*Teach your children the importance of writing thank you notes.
- \*Don't ever say "My child would never do that!"
- \*Make friends with the parents who share the same value system as you have. That way you will usually be on the same page.
- \*Never, ever have the philosophy " Popularity at any price."
- \*If your schedules are too busy for date night, meet for lunch and keep up your relationship! He will be the only one left at home after your kids are gone!(same for romantic interludes)
- \*Make sure you raise your kids in the church! Sunday school, youth group and mission trips were how my kids survived. If they grow up knowing each other, they will never be too intimidated to be around their church friends. They all don't have to go to the same school, but if they are friends at church, they will be life long friends.
- \*Try to keep your rules the same with all your kids. Don't get tired and let the baby end up going to the football game when she's 6, when you didn't let the first born go until he was 12.
- \*Want what you have, don't have what you want!
- \*We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.

Dear Younger Me,

1. Try not expecting so much from the first born. It is hard and probably impossible because the first child is your first time to be a parent and you are learning but looking at the difference between my first and my 4th—I wish I had been a little easier on the first.

2. Make time for yourself! Exercise, quiet time, travel with girl friends, hobbies etc.. I feel like if I had done that starting when I was young I would be better off now. I also think it would have been good for my relationship with my kids and husband to have that time to focus on me. We as moms invest so much of ourselves in raising kids and making our husbands happy that we forget about ourselves and what we need.
3. I would have kept a journal about raising my children. I would love to look back and see all that has happened. Plus they would love having it and reading it today. Also take lots of pictures. You will cherish those later on!
4. Spend one on one time with each child away. A day trip every once in a while or even just dinner out with just one of them would have made each of them feel special in their own way. When you have a lot of children its hard to have alone time with them separately and I think that is very important even though I did not do it a lot.
5. Have more family get togethers. Family should come first if you want your children to be close.
6. Send your children to Sunday school every week. Even if they don't want to go they will get something out of it and it will make them better adults when they get older.
7. Eat dinner as a family as many nights a week as you can at the dinner table. That is when you communicate the most. If you do that with your children then they will do it with their children and I believe that is something that is not done that much anymore.
8. Pray before each meal.
9. Have weekly date nights with your husband. I did not do it but wish I had.
10. ENJOY your children everyday because it is so true that each year goes by faster and faster and then they are gone. I know they can be a handful and a challenge at times but you will cherish the time you invested in them when they are gone.

Dear Younger Me,

**If only I knew then what I know now I would have re-defined what it meant to "have it all".**

From the bottom of my heart and many years in the game of life I offer this: **THE LUXURY OF TIME IS THE SECOND GREATEST GIFT OF ALL. .second only to God's love.**

Compared to the finest house, the biggest car, the most exciting vacation in the most luxurious place on earth, beautiful clothes, breathtaking jewelry, success in all its

forms....TIME is the more precious gift.

My life journey has provided multiple opportunities to attend classes (probably more than 100 hours) focused on the corporate version of time management. These forays into self-discipline were required, primarily, to assure that my professional accomplishments met the outcome goals set by the corporation.

Looking back I wish all those hours in class had been focused to valuing the luxury of time. If only I could have been gifted with foresight. . .instead of hindsight reflected below.

I would have kept a journal. . . every day. . . just brief jots -- noting what I had done with MY time. . . MY 24 hours, the precious gift that I now know I squandered. My journals, sketchy as they are, reveal to me again and again that the 'hard days' passed with little stored memory of them, that 'good days' always came, that in the end life has been a bountiful journey. Think about this: Health and nutrition are receiving great attention in today's world. How many times have you seen or heard the suggestion to keep a food diary as the absolute best way to avoid obesity and diabetes, or so we are told. Why not an account of how you've used time - the priceless, irreplaceable gift that, if properly used, can build a framework for celebrating your best life.

I would have devoted more time to building a marriage that focused on 'relationship'. After all, relationship is what's left when the children leave home. (My journal reveals that I often felt as if I'd entered a world in which all my time was spent meeting the needs of others. The 'relationship' was sacrificed to good housekeeping, food preparation, clean clothes, dirty noses, being 'on time'...no matter what! and all the other 'duties' of family life. . . the endless "today" list.)

I would have included in my goals for 'mothering' my children, the importance of valuing time and the use of it, and I would have used our time together differently.

I would have found more appropriate ways to guard my personal time. I would not have sacrificed personal time to serve on six (6) boards simultaneously! (All good causes; all at the request of friends who expressed appreciation for my board leadership skills and "hooked" me (because of my needs for affirmation, perhaps?)

I would have followed the urgings of an FPC Women's Retreat speaker/leader who espoused the philosophy that women should seek a 'focused' life rather than a well-rounded life. (I'd like to hear her again; I'd like to be in a small group, even today, that motivates and supports women who want to grow their passion for the 'focused' life... a life beyond an hour at the soup kitchen, followed by 90 minutes sorting books at Friends of the Library, on the way to the United Way Board meeting, followed by choir practice, an evening analyzing reports for an upcoming finance committee meeting, and making cookies for tomorrow's lunch boxes.)

I would have read more and nourished my spiritual journey with Nouwen, Tournier, Gibran, and others; the books of Luke, and the Psalms. (Dr. Spock would not have been my 'bible' for my first ten motherhood years.)

I would have sought more "older" women to mentor me. Fortunately, God has sent into my life several truly inspiring older women who "adopted" me along their way. I owe much to these dear friends, all of whom have left an indelible imprint and memories of their blessings.

I would have sought friendships with more "younger" women. My daughter's friends

have shown me the value of intergenerational friendships. I'm convinced that's my best hope for avoiding becoming boring!

I would have set aside time to be thankful. My journal tells me that I have had many more good days than disappointing days. God was clearly at work in the intersections of my life; His plans for me have always been "more" than I could have ever dreamed or planned for myself.

I would have given more hugs. . .(but only to those who like them, of course).

I would have written more "thank you" notes. **I would have written my mother often to thank her for the values she instilled in me.** So much of "the who" I am has been shaped by the goodness of others. As my earthly journey is winding down, I find myself writing short notes to lots of folks who would have no idea of their impact on my earthly passage. My debt to others is beyond my capacity to repay. I support the 'pay it forward' philosophy and hope this letter will fit that category.

My hope for today, and all the todays that lie ahead of me, is that my life will reflect to others God's love, THE GREATEST GIFT OF ALL.

"May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, my rock and my redeemer." (Psalm 19:14)

Dearest Younger Me,

First and foremost, you are so precious. You are worth so much more than you believe or even know. There's a verse I'd like to share with you: 2 Timothy 2:20-22

In a wealthy home there are dishes made of gold and silver as well as some made from wood and clay. The expensive dishes are used for guests, and the cheap ones are used in the kitchen or to put garbage in. If you stay away from sin you will be like one of these dishes made of purest gold – the very best in the house – so that Christ himself can use you for His highest purposes. Run from anything that gives you evil thoughts...but stay close to anything that makes you want to do right. Have faith and love, and enjoy the companionship of those who love the Lord and have pure hearts.

I want to encourage you to keep your eyes open. Staying away from sin can also mean you need to stay away from friends who will not keep you accountable to who you want to be in God's eyes. It is OKAY not to be friends with everyone. Conversely, it's OKAY if there are women who don't like you. That doesn't mean you aren't a daughter of the King and every bit as precious as you were before you knew that person didn't like you. When we are told to love everyone as Christ loves us, that doesn't mean you have to be

people's doormat or even friends. You can love people and not interact with them. I think my bottom line here is that your standard should be God's standard. Keep your cute nose in that scripture! You will find amazing, joyful, fulfilling friends (I promise!) who not only want the best for you, but will love you enough to speak the truth when you screw up or stray off the narrow path. Hold those friends close to your heart and nurture those relationships. Having a smaller group of friends who fit that bill will feed you daily. Pray for them and their families.

Keep God in your marriage. Living your life with your very best friend is so great! But sometimes, it's not all great. You are human and so is he; you will irritate each other from time to time. When you have God as a part of that relationship, He will see you both through when you don't have the strength or the patience. Keep God in the loop through prayer, alone and together. He is the greatest comforter there is. Oh, and don't go running to Mom as much with your little complaints: she holds a grudge much longer than you will. The second time you call her and everything is cool with you and Paul, she will still be indignant on your behalf. She does a great job of getting over it, but it's not fair to Mom. Use your journal more!

Laugh. It's good for your heart, it's good for your marriage, it's good for the kids. God put us here to love Him and love our lives and love each other. Not everything is life and death.

Be thankful. There is a difference between mercy and grace and in this life, we get both. Grace is when we get what we don't deserve and mercy is when we don't get what we DO deserve. Your life will be overflowing with both. You can never say thank you enough for your abundant blessings in life. While I'm on it, pray more for the kids and their future spouses. Participate with them in more mission and outreach experiences, no matter how uncomfortable it will be. You will hesitate to do a lot of things because you think one of your children will make other people uncomfortable. Remember, the more you help him experience the world, the better his social skills will be. Actually, that could apply to all four of the kids, so do more with all of them. Not just mission and outreach kinds of experiences, but groups of any kind. Be brave. The girls especially will remember every time you are.

Pick the brains of women who are older than you. There is so much more you can learn sooner along the way if you just ask for advice from women who have already experienced something. You can save yourself a lot of trial and error that way. Also, they usually know amazing things and better ways of doing things than you do. Pay attention!

Be kind to yourself. No one will ever cheer you on like your parents and Paul. If you undo all of the good stuff with negative thoughts, where will that get you? Just don't do it! And remember, when your kids come along, no one will cheer them on like you and Paul do either, so remember that, too. Don't lie to them, but lift them up with your encouragement, prayers, kindness and love every chance you get. They just blossom under that kind of care.

I do love you. Grace and peace to you on your way, darling girl.

“Dear Younger Me”

I love the song, “Dear Younger Me” by Mercy Me, the lyrics are so beautiful and meaningful. If I were to write my younger self, it would be something like this:

TAKE A CHANCE

SURRENDER ALL TO OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

AND RECEIVE THE FULLNESS OF HIS JOY AND MERCY.

I would say Seek Him Now with all that I have and all that I am. Love and Worship Jesus and be blessed; enjoy His love, His joy now and forever. None of the precious blessings so dear to me: celebrating almost four decades of marriage to an incredible man, watching your amazing child grow into an incredible adult and falling in love with a wonderful person. The absolute and undeniable joy of being a grandmother and knowing that their parents are teaching their children to know and love Jesus Christ.

Most of all, I would tell Dear Younger Me, that the greatest treasure of all is knowing that you are a beautiful child of God, you are loved, receive this gift NOW and REJOICE!

Dear Younger Me,

You are going to love Midland. It's population is only 30,000 and it has no majestic mountains or babbling brooks, but the friendly CAN-Do people are the BEST.

Are you concerned that you only know 3 people in the whole town?

Pat's college debate partner with whom he'll practice law...

An acquaintance from UT/Camp Mystic....

And the Rev Matthew Lynn of First Presbyterian Church... Now there's an inspiration.

Watching Dr Lynn LIVE his faith and inspire others to Live theirs, will make Baptist Pat

want to become a Presbyterian.

Theologians often argue about Grace and "works". Paul said we are saved by Grace alone; the book of James suggests that "faith without works is dead".

There's really no contradiction. Consider: God made Heaven and earth, deemed them Good, created male and female in his image, and loved us so much he sacrificed his

son to save us. So, yes we are saved by God's Grace. But our response must certainly be a life of grateful service.

Early on Joan, you'll meet a few Professional Christians. Those folks who talk a good game, carry their Bibles with them, have a fish symbol on their Cadillac, and think people are sick or poor because their faith was weak or they didn't pray hard enough.

They talk of being saved, but the only thing they save for is a cruise or a designer dress.

Don't be discouraged. Look at the works God inspires at your church: Who started the clinic for expectant Mothers who have no economic resources? Who heads the United Way? Who tirelessly works to improve education for all Midland's children by serving on the school board? Who has the vision and tenacity to imagine and build a first class retirement facility for all faiths? Why members of FPC, of course. These Christians weren't all hat and no cattle, but people who LIVED what they believed.

Now you're not expected to bring world peace by breakfast tomorrow. But remember small things count. No encounter is neutral. Every person you meet is influenced by you. Every day, every action shows what you really believe. Your warm smile, your comforting phone call, your work at the Breaking Bread Kitchen, your helping a child find his lost dog, letting a car enter the crowded traffic lane at 6pm, taking supper to a new mother are small kindnesses. However they illustrate Micah 6:8, "act justly, love mercy, and walk humble with your God".

Often you've threatened to write "Wisdom from Unexpected Sources", because people are teaching Biblical Truths to you by attitude and action:

Parenting is not a competitive sport ... Happiness is a choice.....  
Leave things better than you found them.... It's easier to give than receive....  
To whom much is given, much is expected.... Amazing what can be accomplished if you don't care who gets the credit.....

Remember, everything you have: good health, friends, IQ, family, personal attributes, possessions, are all gifts from God, you are just the loving caretaker. So live with a heart full of appreciation, knowing you are deeply blessed.

Blessings, your (really, really) older self, Ancient Joan

P.S. If you stood before a Grand Jury, charged with being a Christian, would there be any evidence to indict you???

Dear Younger Me,



Live life so that everyday you can look back and say you have no regrets. If something needs to be done, do it; if something needs to be said, say it. Be and Do your best in everything.

*Dear younger self,*

*Wow! You are in for an adventure. So hold on! God has great things in store for you and until you have experienced them for yourself, there is no way to describe what a special plan He has for your life.*

*You will experience the greatest joys. You will experience great grief. You will feel great love. You will feel great pain.*

*Never stray from God and his plan for your life. Sometimes when life is good, it's easy to forget how much you need Him. The hard times are trying times that draw you nearer to God. After all, it's in the valleys you grow. Think of hard times as a time to grow and learn. God will hold you close. God is great and has great plans for you.*

*Let not my will, but Yours be done.*

Dear Younger Me:

It seemed to take forever to reach the age of twenty-one! Twenty-one was a magical number for me. Twenty-one was the year that I would have beautiful skin, no more zits, I would know everything I would ever need to know to live a nice life, I would never have to cry again because I would have life all figured out, and I would fall in love. Wrong on all counts! The issue of skin...well, the zits diminished but they have been replaced with lines and wrinkles and brown "age" spots. At twenty-one, learning is really only beginning; I became aware that the more I knew, the more I didn't know. I learned that I really didn't know much about anything. On the issue of never crying again, well the tears were just beginning. I am just a crier, can't help it. Yes, I did fall in love shortly after arriving at age twenty-one with the man I have been married to for thirty-eight years but the surprising thing was that I was going to fall in love so many more times... with two adorable baby boys, with so many friends along the way, with daughter-in-laws and then with the grandbabies, two baby boys and two baby girls. And, they stole my heart and have completely run away with it.

So upon confessing my confusion about life, here are a few things that I have learned since the age of twenty-one that might help you out on your journey through life.

There are some incredible people, mature people, who will help you to become an adult. They will treat you as an equal in your job, in your neighborhood, and in your church. Recognize their generosity in accepting you. They will reach old age before you. Be a friend to them as they were to you. Spend time with them even after your paths don't cross anymore. Learn from them how to treat young people, how to respect them and appreciate their enthusiasm as well as their ideas of how to do things differently.

God gave you a brain and he gave you a heart. He gave you the ability to make decisions and to take ownership of them. Just because you are young doesn't mean you are wrong. Do not let anyone intimidate you. Don't worry about making mistakes because you will make some along the way. If a decision proves to be a wrong one, try something else. A mistake is not a mistake if you learn from it.

God has given you the heart of a teacher. You are lucky in that you get to help shape God's little children. They are all precious in his sight. Be the best teacher you can possibly be every day; they deserve nothing less. I know you think you will always be a teacher to the littles but you will eventually land in Middle School. Oh yes you will...and you will love it! Yes, life will prepare you to spend your days with 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders so do not worry about that. It is a funny thing about the students you teach, you meet up with them years later in the oddest places. The DPS officer who stops you for speeding turns out to be a little boy in your first Kindergarten class and several of your Middle School students will become your colleagues.

God will give you another very important job; you will be a mother to two boys. There is no greater calling than being a mom. From the day they are born, it will be your job to raise them up to love God, to be independent, responsible, and productive citizens

and you only have a little over 18 years to get it done. You will never regret the time you spend with them. Cherish it all. It is definitely the hardest job you will ever do. The days are long but the years are short. You have one shot at this, there are no do-overs. Never underestimate the importance of your presence in their lives. Pray...a lot. Be so grateful for your husband who understands boys much better than you ever will. Slow down and don't be in such a hurry to get everything done. You do not have to be perfect. Your kids don't care if you are perfect, they just want you to be their mom. You are not called on to make life easy for them or to be their best friend. Set a good example. Be honest with them. Never pass up an opportunity to tell them you love them. There will come a day when they will pack up and leave home; you have been preparing them for this. Prepare yourself for the empty nest, as well. This is as it should be, there is a life after the kids leave. Embrace it. You have a whole lot more to give back to the world.

An early childhood professor in college taught me "Say what you mean and mean what you say" when you are teaching children. In saying what you mean, you must think about what exactly you want to communicate and choose the best words to get your message across. Think before you speak. This will serve you well in communicating with everybody, not just the kids. In living with a husband and two sons, never assume they will pick up on hints of any kind, no matter how clever the hints may be nor how numerous. If you rely on hints or hoping they will just "get it," you are in for a big disappointment and lots of frustration. Be direct. Say what you mean and mean what you say. Speaking is only half of communicating. Listening is the other half. Work hard at listening. Listen to the words that others speak but also listen to the words they don't say. Listen to their body language, listen to their moods. Sometimes there are no words that need to be spoken. Don't fear the silence. Sometimes your presence is all that is needed. The older you get, the less you really need to say. We have a saying in our family when someone is talking too much and saying nothing..."Shut up and get in the back!"

Put your pen down and stop writing the script for your life. Oh, you don't think you have a script until suddenly life is not happening as you thought it should. I am reminded of what Steve sometimes says at the end of his sermons, "You go nowhere by accident, everywhere you go, God is sending you." So true! Wherever you find yourself, you are doing mission work. When you find yourself tending to two little, rowdy boys or teaching a roomful of 7<sup>th</sup> graders, know God has placed you there. Be content, enjoy every part of it knowing God has placed you there for a reason. It works the other way, too. God will put people in your path, sometimes ones that you least expect, to help you. I have heard these people referred to as "angels in skin." They show up at just the right time and know exactly what to do. There are no coincidences. Be amazed and always be grateful.

You will experience hard times, sad times, frustrating times. I read a book after our son had the onset of juvenile diabetes entitled "Life's Not Fair but God is Good." Enough said.

You do not have siblings so you will have to appoint some. You need some “sisters” to hold you accountable, to pray for you and with you, to help you raise your kids, to help you in all parts of your life. You need sisters to have fun with, to tell you “NO, that really does not look good on you,” to tell you the truth when you need to hear it. You will need and enjoy sisters of all ages. You need the young ones for their energy and enthusiasm and to help you with your iPhone and other technology issues; and you need the more mature ones for their wisdom. You see, they have experienced everything you are going through now. They have been there, done that, and gotten the T-shirt. Your friends will need you, too. Be there for them. Nothing is too small nor too messy for you and your friends to tackle. Hold hands and take care of each other, every day. Never pass up an opportunity to offer an encouraging word or tell them you appreciate them being in your life.

At the end of the day, it is all about your relationships, your relationship with God, with your family, with your neighbors and co-workers, and your friends. No disagreement or argument or opinion is more important than the relationship. Spend time in these relationships. Be patient, be available, be kind. There is a Jewish teaching that reminds us to do the right thing and our heart will follow. I have found this to be true time and time again.

Speaking of relationships, there will come a day when your sons will choose their brides and start a family separate from you. This is when you shut right on up and crawl into the very back. If and when they want your input, they will ask. You have had your turn; you got to do it your way and now your turn is over. You remember what it feels like to be the new one in the family; it is up to you to love and make welcome the young women your sons have chosen.

Pray! Have an ongoing conversation with God, just talk to Him. Acknowledge Him, praise Him, thank Him, and let Him have your confusion and worries. Seek His will and His direction.

When you ask Him for something, you need only ask once. He will hear you. Then, continue to thank Him for answering your prayer. He will answer in His time and in His way. Be still, be quiet and listen.

Read! Always have a book going and several in the wings. Learn something every day. Challenge yourself. Sing like your life depends on it (preferably in the car with the windows up). There is nothing better to lift your spirits than to sing. Share. Charles taught us at Hyacinth that there is always enough for everyone.

Every minute of every day provides an opportunity to do good, to love well, to start over. Do not waste one minute; seize the day. Make it a point to choose joy every day.

In closing, thankfulness and gratefulness for the blessings in one’s life, even the blessings of trouble and trial, are ways of honoring God, who made all things. “Be filled with the Spirit...giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Ephesians 5:18, 20

Dear Younger Rachel,

When I look back at the first 10 years of my marriage, I do have some things I would like to say to myself. God has a plan for you, Rachel. He knows who you are going to marry and that man is the perfect man for you. Someone you never expected—really from your wildest dreams. God will surprise you, restore your faith in trusting someone, renew your understanding of what it means to truly be loved. He will bring the best out of you and your husband, because of your past experiences. He will build the woman, wife, and mother that you will become because of the heartache and struggles of your younger years.

I wish I could go back and tell you to cherish these first years of marriage when it is just the 2 of you as your little family - just husband and wife. Do not rush these years. They are sacred. They are the base for your future.

Rachel, God will give you exactly what you need when you need it. I wish I could go back and tell you that God will give you children - do not worry or lose sleep over this. He will know the perfect time - the perfect children, and the perfect story for you. Be still and wait. Give it to God, for his timing is whole and perfect.

Rachel, I wish I could have told you that Holt will stop crying - this is just a phase. I wish I could have truly believed that I would sleep again - and through the night. For babies don't stay babies for long. Oh young Rachel, I wish I could have told you this child will touch your heart in more ways than you will ever understand in these long, dark moments. I wish I would have known that this tiny baby will develop a deep love for Jesus at such a young age that it will knock you to your knees. God will show you his love and teach you the only type of love that comes close to HIS love for us, through your journey into motherhood.

So, having a baby changes everything. It especially changes your marriage, young Rachel. I wish, above all else, I could go back and prepare you for that. There is no need to pout or act so upset when he walks in from work b/c you have been busting your hiney with these children. He has been

busting his hiney so that you have the blessing of spending your days with these children. How cool is that?! So many people don't have that opportunity. You see - that baby is here b/c of us. Put the Lord first, your relationship with your husband second, and your children after that and they will be showered in love.

Young Rachel, you do want a child that is strong-willed - I promise. This is a gift from Him. Just wait and see the things He will do and the things these little people will teach you. You didn't know what you were doing Rachel and we both know that - but God was working through you and will continue to work through you in the years to come.

Oh young Rachel, - why do you torture yourself with these silly comparisons. The typical mom concerns start early on comparing - is he rolling over yet, crawling, walking, getting teeth, eating big foods, potty trained yet. As they grew more, I continue to compare them - do they know their letters, numbers, are they reading yet? Younger me, seek only His approval on your children. Do not compare, but encourage them in all that they do and pray for their future.

I want to end my letter with some words of advice to my older self. Continue to pray every day with your boys, Rachel. Teach them the importance of prayer and how it builds their understanding of God and their relationship with God. Prayer is a conversation - you don't have to recite the same prayer nightly. Teach them to really pray their happiness, their disappointment, their sadness, their worries. Teach them that you can't always be there - because you can't. But God is, was, and will always be.

Thank you Lord that you gave me 2 boys that are strong-willed and that YOU trusted with me to mold - with your guidance. Thank you that Holt and Wesley fought me and brought me to tears (As they continue to do so now). Thank you for teaching me how hard it is to raise a child. How in the world else would I know even an inkling of how hard YOUR job is to raise me, Lord? Psalm 90:12 ÷ So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

*Sincerely,*

*Your older, not so wise quite yet, self...Rachel*

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**Megan Howard**

**Rachel Howard**

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