

Guest Editorial: Letters to my past and future selves

March 27, 2024

I'm a married young adult mom of a toddler and infant. I'm also a Baylor graduate, NICU nurse and church member.

I'm in a stage of life duly acknowledged as my "mom era." You may have heard of it or even witnessed it yourself.

The stage of life characterized by little sleep, not eating in peace, constant noise, the expending of emotional and mental energy children seem to suck up.

The stage of life characterized by laughing at silly and surprisingly articulate anecdotes from a toddler and repeating them every chance you get.

The stage of life of somebody needing something from you from the moment you wake to the moment sleep comes over you.

The stage of life of choosing to put your kids first.

The stage of life when showing up to church means older ladies looking at you and glancing at their watch and older gentlemen jokingly saying, "Nice of you to join us."

And you think, "They must've forgotten this stage somewhere along the way," when a seamless morning is the culmination of effort and two hours of getting ready.

So, I present some thoughts—letters to Past Me and questions to Future Me—so I won't forget.

Please come on this journey with me, so you can remember similar stages in your life. Let this serve as an admonishment for our Baptist family to acknowledge, relate to, encourage and pray for those around us. For, we all are in some stage of life, and we need each other.

To Past Me

You'll never believe where we are now. You've heard it said, "You are currently living at least one of the prayers you used to pray," and it's true for more than one thing in our life now.

People have said to you: "Oh, you think you're tired and busy now? Just wait," and that's also proved, oh, so true for our life now.

I will say it's very different from what you are working through. Our college experience held formative years for our faith, relationships, education and career.

From having biblical conversations in class to having a mantra as a prayer when words wouldn't form.

From being dependent on our parents to being independent.

From praying for whom we will marry to marrying them.

From all-nighters writing papers, pouring over textbooks, counting down the hours or days until the next test or deadline to nightshift nurse life.

And all the growing pains that come with those transitions.

The adjustment from college student to new nurse also was substantial. The weight of holding someone's family member's life in your hands. The knowing this is a unique opportunity to be Christ in someone's life. To work on being compassionate when they are vulnerable, patient when they are

afraid or angry, joyful when they go home.

You'll never believe where we are now. This job never fails to get you out of your "Baptist bubble." As a NICU nurse, you see cases of unplanned teen pregnancies and drug or alcohol abuse. You can be Christ to them.

You see cases of high-risk pregnancies and preterm babies. You can be Christ to them.

You see cases of refugee parents, who even though you are bilingual, you need a translator to communicate with them. You can be Christ to them.

You see cases of failed home abortions. You can be Christ to them.

I won't pretend to be wise now, but maybe a little wizened. I vividly remember navigating those things. Some of those I take for granted now.

I want to say you are not alone. It is a difficult stage with many weighted decisions that will affect your life for a long time.

I also want to remind you to breathe, take a moment, look around, enjoy. You've heard it said, "You'll never get those years back," and it's true.

I know you've found some good church homes with good community. That is one of the most important things you have done.

College friends and young coworkers are good to have. Better to have are godly men, women and families who will be there for you when you need to talk, process or effortlessly be. There is experience and wisdom and renewed hope to be had.

To Future Me

Was it worth it? Is your home quiet? Do you get to go to the bathroom alone now? Do our kids have their own faith and church? I hope they're happy.

Do you encourage women currently in their college or young professional or mom eras? Are you there for them to be around and to talk to? You can encourage them more than you know. Will your son and daughter have someone like that?

To Present Us

There's a phrase Hispanics use: "*Somos familia*," or "We're in this together."

As Baptists, we have an opportunity to support and encourage each other. I hope in our church communities we find biblical people in a judgement-free environment.

I challenge us to be unafraid and honest in the stage we are in, ask for insight when we cannot see, and be generous with our time and prayers for each other.

HIPPA disclaimer: All medical cases mentioned above are hypothetical and occur throughout many hospitals. No identification to a single case or patient should be inferred.

Rachel Garcia is a hospital nurse, a member of Calvary Baptist Church in McAllen, and a member of the Baptist Standard board of directors. The views expressed are those of the author.