

Lessons Learned from my Graduate

This whole graduating and leaving home thing is really wearing me slick out! I *don't want* my babies to leave! And yes, even at 6'5", he's still and will always be my baby.

On the night he was born, my #2 son was immediately whisked away due to issues with blood incompatibility. Hours went by that seemed like days. I couldn't stand the separation any longer so in the middle of the night, sporting my new fluffy leopard slippers, I scooted to the nursery to try find him. *I had to get my hands on him!* Looking through the window, I spotted my dark haired, chubby little guy. They were poking him with needles and wires were hooked to his chunky chest. I couldn't watch from the other side of the glass any longer.

As I found my way into the room, the nurse turned her head and piped, "I can't believe you were able to walk all the way down here so soon." Eighteen hours of labor and a few stitches couldn't keep me away from him.

That's just what moms do ... we do hard things for our kids. While physically challenging to walk the length of a hospital to be with my newborn son, it's recess compared to the challenge of watching him drive away and letting him go. I've spent the last 18 yrs. adjusting my grip but letting go makes me a little crazy. OK, a lot crazy!

That same irrational, unimaginable, instinctual, instantaneous depth of love that propelled me to walk through physical pain to get to the other side of the glass, now calls me to leave him.

To let him fly.

I've never liked good-byes ... Well-meaning friends tell me,

“It’s not goodbye, it’s only see you later.”

Not true.

I’m saying goodbye to many things: daily doses of silliness and laughter, a willing helper, a best friend to his siblings, my administrator and daily reminder of things like what we’re having for dinner, an amazing finder of where I put my glasses, nightly “good night, mom,” late night chocolate milk marathons with his brothers, the daily interaction and silly conversations between a 6 yr. old and the 18 yr. old brother he strives to be like, and a positive role model for my younger kids – to name a few...



Yes, I’ll absolutely see him again...much sooner than planned most likely ☐ However, I know that when he zooms out of the driveway in a few days in a loaded down vehicle headed to college, it means “good-bye.”

He’s been an easy one to love ... And although I’m the mom, this guy has taught *me* much over the last 18 years:

- ~ When the quiet one speaks, his message is eagerly received.
- ~ Discipline is a lifestyle that brings great reward.
- ~ Humility is very attractive when lived out through the life

of a youth.

~ A forgiving heart speaks volumes to those watching, especially when all agree forgiveness isn't deserved.

~ Minds can be beautiful.

~ It takes courage to admit you have questions and to wrestle out answers to the tough ones.

~ The positive role model of an older brother is invaluable.

~ Humility is attractive.

~ Thinking before speaking is always a good idea.

~ You can be your fiercest competitor.

My sweet, Noah:

- You are a gift from God.
- I will miss you severely.
- I will love you forever.
- I will love you always.
- As long as I'm living
- My baby you'll be.

And I promise I'll *try* to be ok watching from the other side of the glass ...

XO

[The Beauty of Boys](#)

Before I became a mother of boys, I would've have told you there was nothing beautiful about them. I had one brother

growing up and he was plenty! **I was more than a little surprised when our first 5 kids were boys.** Especially, since I'd made it known before we had any that we were going to have the perfect family with 3 girls ☐ And for very good reasons: boys don't like to take baths, they play with frogs, snakes and other creepy critters, they laugh at gross things, and they're just generally not as pleasant to be around as girls, right?!

I remember the first time I looked at the sweet face of my first-born son...instant love that seemed very old. During a phone conversation shortly after with my best friend, I told her that I was totally in love with my new little appendage and **if I never had any more children, I was more than blessed. And I meant it!** Thankfully, God blessed us with a half-dozen more!



When we're out in public, we often seem to attract a little attention. I think I've heard it all ... and quite surprised that **complete strangers so willingly offer their amazingly scripted commentary about why we have so many kids and tips on how we can prevent it from happening.** I just smile and wave and find the fastest escape route!

However, it's more difficult to escape on an elevator. I was pregnant with our 6th child and my 5 little men and I were on our way up to the 8th floor to see the pediatrician. Directing her gaze at my very large belly, a stranger said with a cynical laugh, **"I bet you're hoping this one's a girl aren't you?"**

Thankfully, the door opened for her to get off along with her laugh leaving me with 10 little eyeballs looking up at me. My heart sank. **I wasn't "hoping" for a girl so I wouldn't have a boy, nor could I produce any words in that moment before the elevator door opened again for us to get off.** I wasn't

surprised by the question ... I'd heard it plenty of times, believe me. But I was amazed that she asked in front of my boys. I never for one second want my boys to think that they were just a stepping stone to get my girl. I've had people ask me a bazillion times if we're trying to get "that girl." Or, "why don't you just adopt a girl...that would be easier?!"

Quite honestly, after mothering boys over the years, I realized there aren't as many layers with boys and raising them seemed to be much more straightforward for my brain. **God knew what He was doing.**

And it's definitely



something



beautiful!

[Your Child's Character – What's it Worth?](#)

Several years ago, I ran across a book, *Little Threads*. It's a beautiful story that parallels the lives of 2 mothers raising

their only children. One daughter is the “perfect” child and the daughter of the other mother is ... well, not so perfect.

Recently, I’ve been having some behavioral issues with one of my children that’s been very challenging. At times, the not-so-perfect daughter in this book would come to mind as a similar behavior was being displayed in my own child. I felt like I had to address it over and over again.

Every.

Single.

Day.

I tried to think of new ways to explain from different angles why this behavior was wrong, how it could be avoided, why it should be avoided, etc... But still getting nowhere.

I thought maybe it could be a good time to whip out this precious book ... Surely this story would teach without having to be confrontational. The back-door approach ☐ So, I began reading. Much detail is given in the first few chapters about little Tangle Thread – the daughter whose behavior is extremely difficult from the moment she’s born. As I’m reading, I’m thinking, “surely my child will see how horrible this little girl’s behavior is, will draw the parallel and make the necessary changes.”

I know ... I’m funny like that ☐

As I’m reading along, trying to “fix” my sweet child, I come to this passage in the book, speaking about the dear mother of the willful child.

She was so troubled with her child’s conduct that when she tried to read, she often did not know what book she held in her hand. When she tried to draw or paint, her hand would tremble so that she had no pleasure in what she was doing. By degrees, the piano was opened less and less frequently, the

portfolio of drawing began to be neglected and new books and magazines lie with uncut leaves upon the table. What she studied now was the character of her child, and how best to mold and fashion it into the likeness of Christ.

Wherever she went or whatever she did, there was always a secret care gnawing at her heart.

“... there was always a secret care gnawing at her heart.” As moms, we carry the burden of our children because nobody knows them like we do. We know when their character is in crisis and in need of intervention and the longer it goes unresolved, the longer we have the “gnawing at our hearts.” We carry it with us everywhere ... secretly.

Am I willing to sacrifice?

The mother in this story found little time for her own pleasures – piano playing, reading, drawing. She willingly laid these things aside so that she could intervene in the life of her daughter. It wasn't easy. It seemed a hopeless challenge and she felt totally helpless as her daughter's behavior was relentlessly bad.

Day after day. For years.

As I was trying to “fix” my daughter, I realized that maybe I needed a fix as well. This mother models what I'm not always willing to do – give up my own pleasures. When WW III is in full-swing in the game room again just as I'm about to finally have some “me” time, I have a choice. Deal with character issues of my kids at that moment or let it slide and fulfill my own pleasure.

There are seasons of my life as a mom where I've not been as available to my friends. Maintaining my own social life has been put on the back burner at times in order to deal with issues at home. With a large family, sometimes this has been longer than I'd prefer, but necessary.

Becoming a student of my kids

This mom sacrificed her own pleasures in order to invest the time into learning how best to train her daughter's character. She became a student of her daughter. I can't call myself a foreign language student if I only hop on DuoLingo occasionally while waiting for a Dr. appointment or ball practice. If I truly want to learn it, I must schedule the time and make it a priority or I'll never get beyond "Hola! Como estas?"

I must ask myself how important is my child's character? What's it worth to me? Am I willing to sacrifice my own pleasures for a time – maybe longer than I'd like – in order to determine the best way to deal with character issues of my children?

Character training goes deeper than dealing with the crisis of the moment. It's about being consistent and intentional ... anticipating the wrong behavior or attitudes in our kids and intervening before it becomes their new normal.

The time that we spend training our children is not "spent." It's invested. We're actually making an investment in their lives that will pay off ... and just like a monetary investment, it takes time ... but it's worth it.

What I Learned During My Son's First Semester at College

My oldest son finished his first semester away at college. He's been challenged in ways that make my mom heart sad. Ways

that were initially our reasons – reasons for ever starting this crazy journey we call homeschool. He's learned many things this semester, but much of his education took place outside the classroom.

I'm pretty sure I learned even more...

1. I can trust God with him.

I know this now more than ever before. When our kids live under our roof, it's a little easier to help God out with this. ☐ News flash! God really doesn't need me to help Him figure things out. If He knows the stars by name, I know that He hasn't forgotten my boy and will take care of him.

Nothing will catch Him by surprise. He will even help him find his keys again. And again. And trust me ... that is something that only God can do! Above all else, my mom heart just wants to know that he's ok.

I can trust God with that.

2. "Letting go" allows our relationship to grow.

Prior to my son leaving for college, I cried at the thought of having to drop him off ... and leave him there. While it was very difficult to drive away, leaving him behind alone with no friends in a room that his roommate had tastefully decorated with a skull head and a buddha was crazy hard. I knew I had to "let go" but my mom heart hurt so bad that I gripped tighter.

Over the next few days/weeks, I texted. I called. Too much.

He needed space.

He needed room ... to breathe.

Finally, I let days go by without attempts to reach him and it got a little easier. Then days turned to (gasp) a week! I have 6 other kiddos at home which helped the time zoom – God have mercy on my youngest son!

Amazingly, I've found that he's much more free to share his life when I'm not strangling it right out of him ☐ The more I let go, the stronger our relationship grows. So counter-intuitive to my mom heart...

3. I must put my big girl panties on and deal with it.

It's just kind of a saying we have in our home. Dinner isn't your favorite? Deal with it. You're tired of your chores? Deal with it. Your house was hit by a tornado requiring 4 moves? Deal with it. And so on. There's times when we just have to deal with it.

Yes, I've cried many tears. My feelings have been hurt. My expectations went unmet and I've questioned the seemingly rude and unthoughtful human being that just flew out of my nest.

While I'm throwing a pity party and wondering why he hasn't answered my text from 3 days ago, he's trying to figure out how to survive multiple professors, where to find food, how to get to class, where to find food, make friends, figure out how to maneuver a 25,000-person campus, where to find more food as well as hold down a part-time job as well!

Unthoughtful and rude? No. He's trying to figure it out. He's moved on. We all do it. We fly out of the nest. We're all transitioning. It's a normal, natural progression of life.

While I miss his late-night, daily download of life, his frequent hugs, his piles, his funny laugh, his political rants, his hair and his 10-egg omelets and deep philosophical conversations post-midnight ... I must deal with it, even when sometimes I'd rather clip his wings.

I'm.

Trying.

And I'm certain that he is too ...

XOXO

An Open Letter to My College-

Bound Son

First, let me say that I love you more than you know and always will. **Before you were born, I prayed for you...mostly that I wouldn't mess you up!**

That I wouldn't mess up God's plan for you...

When you were born, you made me a mom and I've never been the same person since. Let's just say, that as any new mom can relate, my world totally and completely revolved around you. Your schedule was my schedule. Period....

And I loved EVERY second of our days together...

It's been an amazing journey to be a part of your life – **watching you grow and develop passions that drive you to make our world a better place.** One thing about you that I cherish ... your unwavering commitment to your passions which come from a deep, personal faith.

Even when others around you don't understand...

or laugh at your **ideas...**
or discredit your **dreams...**
or **passions...**

You. Stay. Strong.

Perfect? Not even close.

Without detours? Of course not.

But, you stubbornly hold fast to those matters that mean much to you. That makes me proud.

As you step into a new chapter, **I'd like to share a few bits**

of motherly advice ... because I'm good like that ☐

1. Seek few, deep friendships...the life-long type that will weather storms with you and sharpen you.

It's a great status symbol to be known by many or have thousands of friends or followers on social media but when you're alone in your dorm room, they're nowhere to be found ... Be selective of who you let into your personal space – who you share your dreams and passions – not everyone can handle them.

2. Be teachable.

It's ok to not know everything and you'll learn quickly how little you know ... It's ok.

3. Be a leader.

It's a part of you – that first-born thing – to lead. So, continue to be the kind of leader that's worth following and lead by example.

4. Help others.

You won't have to look far. Use the eyes God gave you to see the needs of others around you, even when you feel needy yourself. Reach out to them...you may be the life preserver they need. And you quite possibly may need them too.

5. Don't let opinions of others derail you.

You won't be liked by everyone. In fact, you won't be truly accepted by many at all. You can't please everyone. Consistently seeking approval of others is a trap. Keep your Bible open and seek advisors, but always know when truth trumps culture, opinion or preference.

6. Eat to nourish your body.

I know you're laughing now...but truly, your body needs more than carbs and caffeine ☐ Eat the rainbow and you'll be good!

7. Come home as little as possible. (Did I really just say that?!)

In those early days of motherhood, **I couldn't wrap my mind around how my older friend moms could let their sons like...leave!** It killed me to leave you in the nursery during church. I don't think I was or ever will truly be ready for that baby/nurturing part of my life to end. But, babies grow up – some of them cowboys (sorry, I couldn't resist...go Pokes!)

I couldn't imagine then what I'm saying to you now ... **You're always welcome to come home as often as you can but as little as possible to allow you to forge ahead in your new season of life.** Letting go is the hardest part of being a parent but I'm looking forward to the next chapter of our story.



I've prayed for you since before you were born. My prayer for you now....**Go rally the troops and be the leader God made you to be!**

College needs you...

Love,
Mom