

TIME PASSAGES

How exactly did this happen? How is it I woke up one morning, as I have a thousand other mornings after I became a mom, only to find my three children in various stages of gone?

Somehow time snuck up on me even when I swore it couldn't do it soon enough. After all, when you are changing a thousand diapers, wiping a snotty nose with the very last tissue in the house which necessitates another trip to the grocery store with three whining kids in tow all of whom are begging for a Popsicle; rushing to the emergency room, the pediatrician, two different schools, the grandparent's, or the soccer and baseball fields, it can all feel a little over-whelming. Strap 'em in, get 'em out. Hold their hand, watch for traffic. Drop them off, make sure you have all their medicine. Have a conference with the teacher. Shake your head in dis-belief or nod your head and smile in gratitude. Bathe them, brush their teeth, read a story, read Dr. Dobson, put them *back* in bed. Then you finally crawl under the covers and your husband says, "Hey baby..." and you pretty much just burst into tears.

Or maybe it's just me. I used to wonder what life would look like when all of the mad-ness was over. No more potty breaks on a road trip that's only an hour long. No more having to console your bawling kid who was called, "Granola boy" because you made his PBJ on home-made, whole-wheat bread. No more soothing the anguish over a bad grade, a missed catch in left field, or a heartache. No more angry conversations over dinner because the kids didn't study enough, do their chores up to par, or feed the dog which they swore you would *never* have to do which is the only reason you agreed to the darn thing in the first place.

I've always maintained that my job as a mother was to work myself out of a job. And that's true. Now that I'm almost retired (though I hope to be called back in as a "consultant" from time to time), I hope I taught them how to balance a check book, stick to a grocery list, shop economically, wash their whites in hot and their colors in cold, be on time, the necessity of responding to an RSVP, and most importantly, to love the Lord and seek His guidance in *everything*. Their future spouse, most of all. I was just doing my job, of course, but part of it might be selfish. As much as I lament them leaving, and I *do*, oh my gosh, I do, I really don't want my 20 year-old child leaving, breeding, then coming back to live with me.

This is a very strange time in my life. Jordan is with the Lord, Jacob just left for his sophomore year in college and Jessie is a senior in high school. You might as well start praying for me now because this time next year I will probably be bawling and pig-snorting my way through yet another transition.

My babies are gone. My children are raised. This stage of my life is almost over. I still can't believe it, but time waits for no man, or so they say. Apparently it doesn't wait for a mother either. If I had it all to do over again there are things I would do differently, to be sure. Like have more children when that's what I was doing. But these are lessons and life experiences I can pass on.

The truth is, I am only sad for myself. Jordan, for the first time ever, is whole and well. Jessie is on track to be valedictorian. Jacob is having the time of his life! He loves

college. My heart sings when he calls and says, “Mom! Guess what? I...” It thrills me to know they are each exactly where the Lord wants them.

Next year it will be Jessie’s turn to leave. I’m sure I will be a blithering mess, both grieving and rejoicing. I find myself wishing I’d had more children. I don’t think God is the author of the empty nest. These days I encourage young parents to pray and ask the Lord how big He wants their family to be and not give in to “practicality” and social pressure. Because the truth is, God provides in every measure. It’s not *really* up to us to provide food, clothing, education and whatever else we think of as our responsibility in America these days. All of that is God’s job. Our task is simply to ask Him what He wants us to do, believe Him for it, walk in faith and allow Him to overwhelm us with His goodness as we “work out our salvation in fear and trembling.”

Interestingly, marriage and children seem to be His favorite venues for achieving that goal.