
Mom, Are You There?

By *Vickie Mason Randalls*

When I quit my job to spend more time with my teenage children, I hoped it wasn't too late.

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It never occurred to me that I would become one of those women who wait with anticipation for their children to come home at the end of the day. I thought I was much too busy, my time far too valuable for such trivia. I had a career, after all.

I loved my job. I enjoyed the travel; I was seeing places I had never been before. I loved the constant challenge and growth demanded of me; my talents surged and developed as time went on. I loved the sometimes immediate and always regular awards and rewards. I felt appreciated and valued, and the people I worked with were among my best friends.

So why was there a hole in my heart?

When I told my husband I needed to quit and stay home with our teenage children, he thought the feeling would pass. I had quit once before, years ago, but the world had pulled me back in, and we were thoroughly committed, financially and socially, to my working. But when I wouldn't, couldn't, let this idea go, my husband thought I was crazy. I thought he might be right.

It would turn our world upside down. Financially we would be compromised. My children thought it was the dumbest idea I had come up with. After all, what teenager wants more Mom and less money and things?

Following through with my decision took dogged determination and more tears than I care to remember. I felt I was betraying a boss and an organization that had put their trust and faith in me and had sacrificed endless hours of mentoring toward my career. I felt I was forcing my husband to search for a higher-paying career at a time in his life when things should have started becoming easier rather than harder. And my children hated what I was doing.

The period after giving my 30 days' notice, with the endless good-byes and whys and checkout reports, was one of the most difficult times of my life. I second-guessed myself a hundred different times in a hundred different ways, but deep down in a place that is only understood spiritually, in that part of me that has been dubbed "mother," I knew I had to do it. And as scared as I was that it was too late to get it right, to measure up, I knew I *wanted* to do it.

At that time, in 1997, my 18-year-old daughter was into a two-year relationship that was not heading for a temple marriage. My 15-year-old son was having trouble in school and was starting to make a name for himself as he continued to get into more and more mischief. I was watching my 14-year-old son slip into the same pattern. My marriage of 20 years was strong and loyal but stressed and battered.

Nothing magical happened those first weeks and months. I think I was in shock and withdrawal. I substituted work around our minifarm for the work I used to do outside the home. My son continued to get into more and more trouble during the next two years; some patterns just can't be turned around overnight. But I was right there with him.

Sitting with my mother for five weeks, a thousand miles from my husband and children, I watched her slowly die of cancer. But I was right there with her. My daughter and I sat and talked for endless hours about the importance of eternal marriage, and I held her while she cried over a young man she'd given her heart to, a young man who just didn't understand. But again, I was right there with her.

There has been time now to weigh and measure the impact of that decision I made more than six years ago. Some exciting things that can be measured and seen have happened. My daughter was married shortly after her 21st birthday in the Denver Colorado Temple to a wonderful returned missionary who has enriched our family in ways we've only begun to realize. My two sons have graduated from home school and received their Eagle Scout awards. Though we still have the normal ups and downs, those fears I had in my heart for them several years ago have been replaced by thankfulness for their steady progress.

There are things that can't really be measured and seen, though. In even the smallest events, such as when the phone rings in the middle of the day and my daughter wants to know how to cook her first turkey, or when she e-mails me for our family's favorite chocolate cake recipe, I can feel how our relationship has become one that will continue throughout the eternities.

And then there is the feeling that comes over me when my young men, almost a foot taller than I am—the same ones who used to be cold and distant—come bounding through the door at all times of the day and immediately call out, “Mom, are you there?” The thrill that comes to me when I answer “I'm right here” is a thousandfold better and more satisfying than anything I experienced in a career. It is eternal, a lasting, intangible monument to the power and joy of **motherhood**.

I also note how my relationship with my husband has changed. We have always valued our eternal partnership. But what I have learned by having time to truly nurture, explore, and expand that relationship has brought joy that otherwise I wouldn't have known existed.

Has my being at home contributed to all these changes? I think so. I believe **motherhood** simply takes *quantity* time. Quality time by itself will not place a mother where she needs to be at the most important, pivotal moments in her family members' lives. **Motherhood** is an almost overwhelming responsibility, but God has given us what it takes. We just have to make it our priority, our career, our purpose, and the objective of our scheduling.

Is it worth it? Absolutely. Never again will I have to lament over the question “Am I there for my family?” I know that a mother being at home isn't the magic formula for every family; some of our precious youth, like the Cains and Lamans, will be lost no matter what we do. I know too that due to genuine financial constraints, many mothers—particularly single mothers—don't have the option of staying home, despite the earnest desires of their hearts. It is even possible

that the success I have experienced with my own youth could be temporary; all of us have our agency. But even that would be bearable because I know I am doing my best. And that is the most any of us can do.

I know now that it is never too late to be a better mother. The improvement we make will benefit our posterity throughout all the generations to come.

Have I lost myself? There were times I honestly thought I had. Sometimes I wanted to run again. That's when I had to have faith in the prophets' counsel, grit my teeth in determination, and fall on my knees. Satan had a lot to lose, and he fought a dirty fight.

Those times when I felt lost became fewer and farther apart, until they finally disappeared. In their place has come a solid and lasting certainty that I am fulfilling the measure of my creation. Now I have a knowledge, born of that one simple but powerful decision, that tells me I can answer in the affirmative the question that will be asked of me throughout all eternity: "Mom, are you there?"