

thirty.

ten things I learned
during my twenties

by molly flinkman

introduction

Thirty. A new decade. Ever the over thinker, I have been processing this age since around the time I turned twenty-nine. I have, obviously, never been one to take birthdays or new seasons of life lightly.

But it doesn't feel quite right to move forward without first looking back, so for the past few months (and as a particularly cathartic, personal experience), I have been combing back through my twenties.

And, as I began looking back on each chapter of that decade of my life, I realized that each of those years taught me something unique. That each year changed me or refined me in some way.

Some of the chapters were relatively uneventful while others were particularly painful, but hindsight I can see very clearly how God used each year of my twenties to shape me into who I am today.

Each chapter following is a glimpse into what I learned during that particular year of my life.

It's nothing out of the ordinary, really. There is no real tragedy or nail-biting cliffhanger (unless you're particularly riveted by things like marriage or car trips across the country).

But it is real. It is how I got where I am today, and that felt worth writing about (at least for me).

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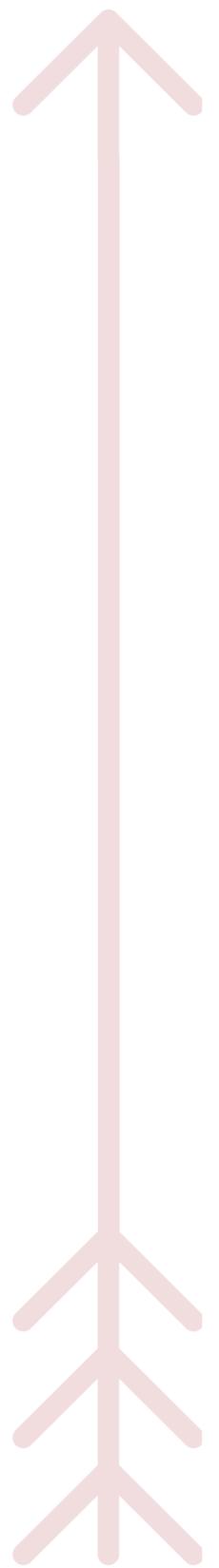
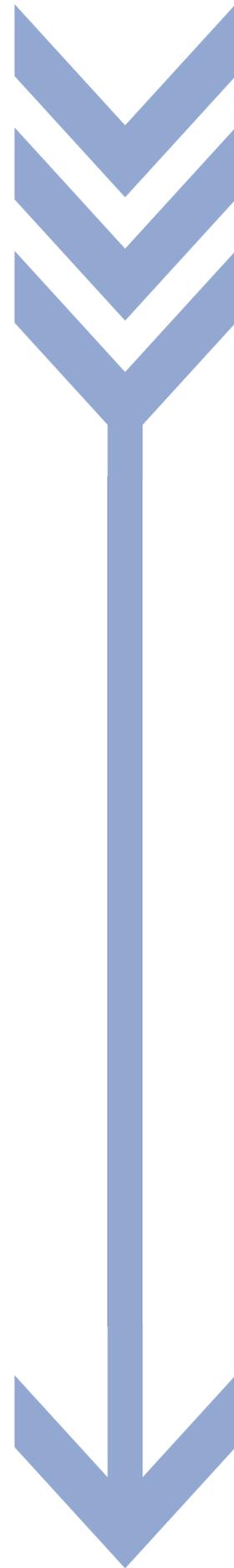
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the most important thing I ever learned about love



I stepped foot into my twentieth year just one month after Jake and I had started dating. We came back to college that fall fresh from a summer spent writing letters to one another and still trying to figure out what our relationship looked like now that we weren't just friends anymore. I remember this birthday with a particular vividness.

Jake picked me up at my dorm and took me to a creek bank we had newly discovered. The water's edge was lined with weeping willows and gave the illusion of leaving the confines of the suburbs (even though we remained well in their grasp). He spread a blanket on the incline of the bank and unpacked a few of my favorite things: a gallon of sweet iced tea and a family-size bag of Cool Ranch Doritos.*

We weren't there long, and I don't remember what we talked about, but I am sure that I sat next to Jake that night with the same anxious anticipation I would feel the remainder of my twentieth year.

What an unlikely combination we were. I'm sure you could not find two more drastically different personalities to pair together. I balanced Jake's sense of adventure and tendency to lean toward rebellion with a strict adherence to rules and a supremely guilty conscience. His independence was challenged by my sensitivity and the differences in our communication styles led to many conversations in which Silence spoke the most words.

Being with Jake has never been the "easy option." I lived in a constant state of anxiousness that year because I couldn't believe Jake would ever choose someone like me and because I was so crazy about him that I couldn't imagine not having him. The two feelings didn't marry well.

We did have one thing in common though; something that I am convinced I learned this year because it would carry me through the years to follow.

It was a simple, yet weighty understanding that love is a choice.

It is not something either of us has ever taken lightly—even then.

I knew I loved Jake by early-October. I had driven him to downtown Chicago, and while he underwent wrist surgery, I spent eight hours in the hospital waiting room reading *The Plague*, by Albert Camus, and intermittently watching the trashy soap operas that aired all afternoon (both equally depressing in their own right).

I went back to see Jake once he was awake, and as I watched him try to get a straw into his mouth with the anesthesia working hard against him, I knew. It had been the worst day—I was bored out of my mind and tired of sitting on a waiting room chair—and, yet, there was nowhere else I wanted to be.

Being with Jake was a choice I knew I wanted to continue making. Even from the beginning, I knew it would not always be easy but equally believed it would always be worth it.

And it has always been worth it.

Here's something else that will always be worth it: Bringing a drink with a straw if you ever get to see Jake post-anesthesia.

*I could write a sub-chapter for this year of my life called "How I lost 20 pounds." The first key to my success? Eliminating the consumption of sweet iced tea and Cool Ranch Doritos.

twenty one the life-giving power of community



I had more fun in college than 95% of college students, a fact that can be proven if ever a study analyzes the numbers of costumes worn, road trips taken, and dance routines performed by a single dormitory floor. Somehow I managed to convince all my friends to perform in floor-hosted talent shows and find bags of pennies I had buried behind the football field (dressed as pirates, mind you). When *High School Musical* first came out, my friend Rachel and I watched the VHS tape her mom had recorded for us at least three times a day until we had learned every song and dance.

My coolness cannot be understated.

By the time I turned 21, I had moved off campus and lived with five of my girlfriends. I packed up my dance costumes that year, but did make them dress up like fifties housewives once to make a music video with me. I think I found a healthy balance.

I had lived with three of my roommates since freshman year. Our closeness can be best explained by the two bunk beds we pushed together during our sophomore year, and, when you live in such close proximity to other people for extended periods of time, you can't help but to know them well.

This year of my life brought the beginning of the end of college. My friends and I were all looking ahead to what came next, and, while we weren't going to be terribly far from one another in proximity, three hours or a drive across town is still a vast change when you're used to a quick trip to the basement.

My last year of college brought with it the beginning of a commitment to find community wherever I went. I graduated from college a different person than when I stepped foot onto our campus four years prior. A better person. More generous and more open to adventures and more aware of the needs of the people around me.

And all that because I surrounded myself with good people.

I don't think you can taste this kind of community, and then go on to live without it, and I know this because my three roommates are still surrounded by life-giving support systems of people even though we now represent three time zones and two different continents.

Some people try to believe that they don't need people to get by in this life, but I don't buy it.

Jake and I wouldn't be where we are today without the people God placed in our paths along the way. Whether it was people who mentored us, or supported us, or just walked through life with us, we are better because we have chosen to let people into our lives.

I think God knew I needed to know this, so, from very early on in my life, He has put good people in my path. Allowed me to taste how much better seasoned this life is when sprinkled with community, so I would know to never try to do it without.

And, luckily, while in college, at least, He went one step further and gave me people who felt as passionate about singing show tunes into spoon microphones as I was. I'll be forever grateful for that.



twenty two the one where nothing happened



My first year of marriage was particularly uneventful.* Jake and I had boring jobs, which we hardly ever even talked about in the evenings because we did almost exactly the same thing every day. We spent most of these evenings eating chicken (that's all I knew how to cook back then) and watching Prison Break together. Most of the trips we took revolved around who was getting married next, and, when people ventured our way, we sat at our kitchen table and played Balderdash for hours.

Marriage suited us.

Six months into our marriage routine, the construction company Jake was working for started sending him out of town for work. He'd drive a few hours, work Monday through Friday, and then come back home each weekend. Before he left the first time, I sobbed convulsively in our bedroom because I didn't want him to go.

It was adorable.

2014 Molly (the one whose husband left for three straight weeks just 6 days after their second child had been born) hates 2009 Molly. She's all, "Pull yourself together. You're pathetic." Unfortunately, 2009 Molly can't hear her amidst all the weeping and hysterics.

2009 Molly isn't totally worthless, though. When I think about her, I'm reminded that perspective only comes with life experience. That it's unfair to minimize someone else's pain or sadness because you have experienced something worse.

Chew on that, 2014 Molly.



Now, my life certainly isn't marked by any kind of severe tragedy or life-altering moments as some people are dealt, but I have met my own various challenges along the way. And, as the challenges have become more difficult to deal with or overcome, I'm reminded that this shouldn't dismiss the struggles of others.

Instead, adversity provides me with an opportunity to love people who walk where I have been. To empathize with their pain, even if I have gained the perspective to know that it will be a short-lived season in the grand scheme of the story.

I think we bear a great responsibility to live life with people. To use the experiences God gives us to encourage and empower those who can relate. To turn those hard moments into opportunities to relate to people with whom we come in contact. **To do away with condescension and embrace compassion.**

I mean, it probably wasn't easy for Michael to be in prison during season one of Prison Break. But think of how many people he was able to free from bondage during his various stays in various prisons. His hard times really benefitted others just as the entire series has given me meaningful metaphors from which to draw.

*I would be remiss to overlook the fact that this is the year I read all seven Harry Potter books for the first time. So, to say this is the year where nothing happened is obviously a gross understatement because, well, **Harry Potter.**

twenty three my second identity crisis



I had my first identity crisis right around the time I turned 18. I was a freshman in college, away from home for the first time, and I existed in a constant state of loneliness. I went from being involved in everything to involved in very little, and I spent most of my evenings locked behind the closed door of my dorm room because I didn't have anyone to go to the dining hall with and was too anxious to put myself out there and make new friends.

It was the first time in my life that I really had to figure out who I was—something I was keenly aware of during the entire refining process. I had read through the book, *Victory over the Darkness*, by Neil T. Anderson with a small group the year before and the principles I learned in that study would lay the foundation for what I needed to learn during my freshman year of college and then be reminded of during each subsequent identity crisis I would face (this has been a recurring theme in my life).

Here is a quote that I kept coming back to that year:

We don't serve God to gain His acceptance; we are accepted, so we serve God. We don't follow Him to be loved; we are loved, so we follow Him. It is not what we do that determines who we are; it is who we are that determines what we do.

God stripped me of all my titles that year. I didn't play on any sports teams or join any clubs. I wasn't part of a dance studio or the member of any leadership teams. God used this raw time in my life to bring me back to the only defining quality that mattered and continues to matter to this day: **deeply loved by God.**

Five years later, I would turn 23. And five years later I would need to be reminded of this same principle. Jake and I had spent a year of our marriage focused on being married and then were ready to begin our respective careers. Unfortunately, nobody was quite ready to accept us into our chosen fields, so we spent another year in limbo. I spent this year of my life as a substitute teacher, while simultaneously getting rejected for multiple teaching positions.

I was reminded continually during this time that I could not be defined by my career. I was passionate about it, sure, but at the end of the day, there was so much more to my story. I was more than just a job.

I was deeply loved by God, and the way I lived my life in response to that was all that really mattered.

It was a short season; many others experience this waiting game of interviews and rejections for far longer, but I am thankful that I had already gained the perspective I needed to help me through what could have been an even more discouraging time.

It wouldn't be the last identity crisis I would face either. Becoming a teacher. Becoming the wife of a doctor. Becoming a mom. Becoming a stay-at-home mom. Each time I put on a new hat or shed an old one, I'm given a choice: I can live defined by the titles I'm given and the things that I do, or I can live defined by the love God freely gives me.

And, wouldn't you know, everything is always better when I define myself by the latter.

twenty four everything's jake



Here is a two-sentence conversation, which Jake and I have at least once a week:

Molly: That stresses me out.

Jake: That's not hard to do.

The other day, someone told me I was laid back, and I had to laugh because, as far as I can tell, I'm one of the least laid back people I know. I worry about all kinds of unnecessary things and am easily overtaken by stress and the number of unchecked boxes on my to-do list.

Jake is my perfect balance in this way. He has this profound ability to talk me off the edge of my cliff of emotions before I lose myself into their depths. In the various times I've had to spend weeks away from Jake, I have to prepare myself to go a little bit crazy at least once without his magical powers of calm and reasoning (he's a secret wizard of the serene, that guy).

My first year of teaching tested the limits of my stress threshold, and this would be clear in looking at my lesson plan book the night before my first day (the first page included a minute-to-minute break down of each 90 minute, blocked class period, for crying out loud).

It was during this year, though, that I learned one of my favorite words.

Jake.

By dictionary definition, it simply means "all right" or "satisfactory."

How are you doing?

Jake.

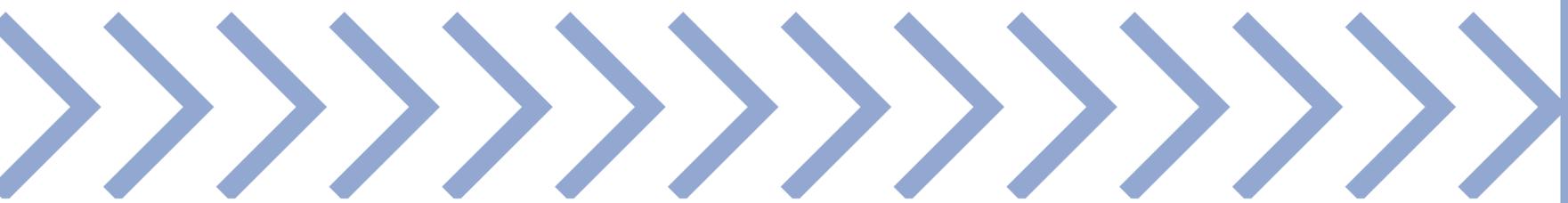
And everything was jake this year because my Jake continually reminded me that it was.

Now, Jake doesn't complete me (an entirely different and important essay altogether), but he certainly does make me better. And I'm so grateful for his logic and ability to help me see reason because, throughout this year of my life, he taught me that there is no sense worrying about things as long as I'm doing my best and working hard in the midst of them.

So, to anyone who thinks I am a laid-back person, I first want you to know that there are currently three color-coded to-do lists sitting on the desk in my office. But, also, I likely am more laid back because being married to Jake has taught me and continues to teach me to be.

Even still today in our most stressful seasons, Jake pulls my feet back to the ground and reminds me that everything will be all right. That we'll get through it together.

That guy. Jake is jake, you know?



twenty five fear: the thorn in my flesh



My roommates in college had big dreams. Like, "I'm going to move to another country, so I can change the world" type dreams. Me? I bought a book at our bookstore called *Justice in the Burbs* because I was so desperate to prove that people in very safe places also needed Jesus.*

I recently found a box of old journals, a few of which well chronicle the progression of my relationship with Jake. Right after we started dating, we had a conversation about our futures. Here is a direct quote from myself, circa 2006:

It is also worth nothing that I bit the bullet (there's an appropriate pun) and asked Jake what he wants for his life. I was scared to death to hear something like "missionary overseas my whole life."

It's almost laughable how desperately I was trying to preserve a very specific plan I had laid out for myself. Especially when you consider that I was dating Jake.

Fast forward to the end of my 25th year: Jake and I were driving to church one Sunday morning when he suggested that we spend a month of our summer overseas somewhere. And because none of my well-crafted (see: particularly "faulty" and "lame") excuses as to why we shouldn't go did anything to deter him, we did some networking and landed ourselves on a trip to a closed Muslim country in Africa a few months later.

I was terrified and pretty convinced that I was going to die, yet there was still no good reason not to go. After all, none of my excuses reflected any sort of Truth I otherwise knew.

I got on the first plane feeling that terror but also hoping the trip would cure me—release me from the prison fear had kept me in for so long. And yet, fear stuck close by me during all three weeks we were in country. It prickled up my neck in the middle of the night and pressed against my chest in the heat of the day.

And I was so frustrated because I just wanted to be rid of my vice. It was when I came back and was reflecting on the persistence of fear that I was reminded of Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 12:

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Throughout my life (even as a very young child), fear has always been a thorn in my flesh, and I can't tell you how many times I've asked God to take it away. Life would be so much easier if I wasn't afraid of everything. But God's words bring me great encouragement:

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

The lesson didn't stop there, though. It was in understanding that I might fight against fear my entire life that I also realized the importance to do just that: fight it.

I see now that, if Satan can make us afraid of people or situations or change, he can paralyze us. Keep us in one place. Keep us from doing great things.

And, while I still wrestle with fear and worry, I no longer allow those feelings to paralyze me. As much as I might still want to, I no longer allow myself to create safe alternatives or easier back-up plans.

Jake took a chainsaw to the white picket fence of the dreams of a younger me, and I'm better because of it.

I'm better because he reminds me what is really important in the eternal scheme of life, and because he continues to dream of all the big things we still have yet to do for the Kingdom now.

I'm also probably better off now that my copy of *Justice in the Burbs* resides in the Half Price Bookstore in Des Moines (even though I think I missed the point of the book entirely when I read it all those years ago).

*Yes, of course people in the suburbs need Jesus, too. In fact, I'm a firm believer in letting God use you wherever you are. I've just also learned that God never promises this life to be safe. He asks us to serve Him and love people whatever the cost and whatever the sacrifice. I love my neighbors in the suburbs now but also try to remain open to the world that equally exists outside of my own street and my own safety bubble.

twenty six the year my life felt harder than everyone else's



I have always been prone to self-pity, and, of all my character traits and qualities, this is the one I loathe the most. I am easily wounded and my feelings get hurt easily, so, as such, I have to fight very hard against throwing myself raucous pity parties (and by raucous, I really mean passive-aggressive silence in which I retreat into my own head for indefinite amounts of time).

So many good things happened to me the year I turned 26. I was pregnant with Lily and having a great school year. Jake was in year two of medical school, and we had found a rhythm that worked for us. I had community and family and so much good all around me.

And, yet, I did a lot of crying this year because, amidst all the good, were these nagging, small, difficult things, which distracted me from what was going well. Things that constantly made me feel sorry for myself.

For instance, right after Lily was born, Jake spent three weeks cramming for his first round of boards. Between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 11:30 p.m., he spent all his time studying at the library across the street, except for the 30-minute breaks he allowed himself for lunch and dinner.

And, by that, I mean, that's how much time he wanted to be studying each day. Instead, I was constantly interrupting him with text messages and inadvertently extending his meal breaks because of my overall level of hysteria as I tried to adjust to life with a newborn who spent most of her first weeks screaming.

I was a mess.

And I was a mess who saw everyone else's situations as easier than mine which didn't help anything either. So many of my friends seemed to have round-the-clock help, and there I was sleeping alone on the couch, trying to believe that it would get better (which it did, of course).

I really want to end this by saying that the hard and seemingly unfair things I faced this year taught me to be grateful for the all the good things or to stop comparing my situations to others or that many other people face far more difficult things (all of which are true and valuable things to learn and apply to your life).

But really, I think I learned that life is just hard sometimes. And that all I can really do about it is to try to respond well.

At some point during this year, I stumbled into the book of Jonah when Jonah is whining in the desert after God shows mercy on the Ninevites. He was angry and without purpose, and God's response was simple:

Do you do well to be angry?

It was during this season of my life that I started asking myself the same question. Sure, I could make a great case that my life was harder than it "should have been" or that everyone else had it easier. But did it ever do me any actual good to be angry about it? No, of course not.

Instead, the better option was to use it. To try to find ways to use my challenges as a means to improve my character and encourage the people around me (or those I have since met going through similar things).

This change in mindset didn't take away the difficulty, but it did give me purpose in moving forward each day.

It also effectively shut down those raucous pity parties I had gotten into the habit of throwing, which is probably worth it alone.

twenty seven the importance of paddling



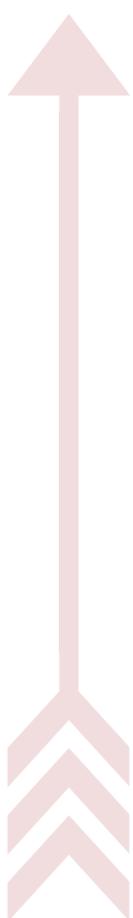
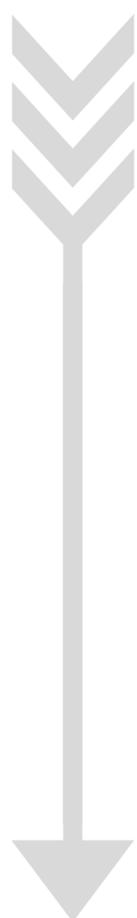
After Lily was born, the real life of medicine started for Jake and me: The rhythms and changes of rotations, a lifestyle we still find ourselves in today.

Each month brought something different: a new specialty, new attending doctors, and new hours. Some months Jake would be around a lot, while during others we hardly saw him at all. Just when we'd get used to one thing, our four weeks would be up, and we'd have to adjust to something entirely different.

As Lily neared one, I found myself restless. I think there's something about that one-year mark that ushers in a whole new kind of emotion for moms (new moms especially). The days of carting around a sleeping newborn wherever we go are over, and we're forced (most days at least) to adapt to the rhythms and schedules of a toddler.

Because Jake worked or studied many nights, I was often left alone on my couch after Lily went to bed, with only my own thoughts to keep me company.

Because of this, I felt particularly isolated toward the end of my 27th year. I felt stuck and wished I could see ahead to the parts of my life that would be easier and more predictable.



Around this same time, I went back to one of my favorite books, *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*, and stumbled across a passage which I have come back to again and again and again (and again) since:

It's like this when you live a story: The first part happens fast. You throw yourself into the narrative, and you're finally out in the water; the shore is pushing off behind you and the trees are getting smaller. The distant shore doesn't seem so far, and you can feel the resolution coming, the feeling of getting out of your boat and walking the distant beach. You think the thing is going to happen fast, that you'll paddle for a bit and arrive on the other side by lunch. But the truth is, it isn't going to be over soon.

The reward you get from a story is always less than you thought it would be, and the work is harder than you imagined. The point of a story is never about the ending, remember. It's about your character getting molded in the hard work of the middle. At some point the shore behind you stops getting smaller, and you paddle and wonder why the same strokes that used to move you now only rock the boat...The shore you left is just as distant, and there is no going back; there is only the decision to paddle in place or stop, slide out of the hatch, and sink into the sea. Maybe there's another story at the bottom of the sea. Maybe you don't have to be in this story anymore.[...]

I think this is when most people give up on their stories. They come out of college wanting to change the world, wanting to get married, wanting to have kids and change the way people buy office supplies. But they get into the middle and discover it was harder than they thought. They can't see the distant shore anymore, and they wonder if their paddling is moving them forward. None of the trees behind them are getting smaller and none of the trees ahead are getting bigger. They take it out on their spouses, and they go looking for an easier story.

It was during this season that God reminded me He never meant for me to remain motionless; He never meant for me to just wait it out for the easy periods of life.

And, when I was reminded of that, I was equally empowered to pick up my oars and start paddling. To work hard to live well, even when it was foggy and I was unsure of exactly what would be coming next.

It's still foggy sometimes. I still have to work hard to adjust well to Jake's constantly changing schedule and my place in the hours of our day.

But, I'm still paddling. I haven't let myself slide out of the hatch and sink into the sea.

The hard work of the middle?

It's worth it. We're all better because of it.



twenty eight thoughts on sacrifice



Year 28 asked a lot of me. Norah was born a few months after my birthday and a few days after that, Jake left us for a month-long audition rotation in Ohio. The holidays came and went, and, then, in February, I went back to work full-time (at a job which I loved, mind you).

A few weeks after I started back at school, was a day we had marked on our calendars since Jake had started medical school four years prior: Match Day. Not unlike online dating, we ranked our top choices and residency programs ranked their top choices and then an algorithm worked to match us to the most appropriate place.

Our assignment? Cleveland, Ohio.

I had four months to gather my bearings and prepare to pack up and leave the city, which had been my home for the majority of my life.

In those remaining four months, I packed up a classroom, a house, and a whole lot of other intangibles that I still carry with me today.

It would have been easy to grow resentful. To feel like I was the only one who was making any real sacrifice throughout this process. To seethe with bitterness, as I listened to Jake take his Hippocratic Oath and officially accept his title as "Doctor." I mean, what was I getting out of the deal anyway? Change and uncertainty, mostly.

But I wasn't resentful, and I wasn't angry with Jake for taking me hundreds of miles away from my family and closest friends—a fact that can only be attributed to God's foresight in teaching me that a life of sacrifice is a worthy life to live.

Months before Match Day, I started wondering if it would ever be "my turn." It's a mentality I think many people take in marriage: I'll make the sacrifices now, so my husband can achieve his dream as long as once he gets there, he does the same for me and my dreams.

But I continued to wonder: What if that's not the way it works out? What if my entire life is spent making sacrifices and putting my goals and plans on the back burner, so that I can better love and support my family?

And I came to the conclusion that it would be worth it. Because sacrificial love is always worth it.

We came to Cleveland at the end of my 28th year, and it was hard. The hardest change I have ever had to make thus far.

And every day since we've been here, I wake up, and I try to choose to find joy in sacrificing of myself for my family rather than to dwell in the difficult. I don't always succeed, but each new day, thankfully, gives me a new opportunity.

I'm happy to be past this year of my life, but I'm also happy for all that it taught me. I'm stronger and wiser and more aware of what really matters in life because of all God brought us through. All He asked me to sacrifice.

Also, Jake doesn't leave us for months at a time any more, which has been one of the best perks of this move so far.

twenty nine
"cleve"ing to today and all I've learned so far

We pulled out of Des Moines three months before I turned 29—Jake with a janky, trailer he had built himself and me with both girls fastened in the back seat. I cried for the first hour of the ride about all that was now in my rearview.

It was in those moments of leaving all that I knew and loved behind that I really understood the meaning of the word "bittersweet."

My life felt bitter because it had been so sweet.

I probably wouldn't have been so torn up about leaving if Jake and I hadn't worked so hard to build community around us or lived life with so many people we loved so deeply.

The fact that this move was as difficult as it was made me feel like we had done something right. Like we had lived our life well in Iowa (though certainly far from perfect).

And, as I neared the Cleveland city limits, I realized that I had a profound, yet very simple choice ahead of me: I could choose to throw myself into our new life here in a similar fashion, or I could choose (to go back to my favorite metaphor) to throw my oars overboard, slide out of the hatch, and sink into the sea.

I don't know how long we'll be in Cleveland, but I do know this: If we leave at the end of these four years, I want to be sad about it.

I want to feel the same bittersweet feelings I felt as I drove away from Des Moines because I think that will mean that we did something right while we were here.

I want to cleave to Cleveland.

I want to live my life well regardless of the circumstances. I want to put myself out there, lay down roots, love people well, and give of myself every day that I'm given.

It's hardly ever easy, but it is always worth it.

Every previous chapter of my life has built up to this. The things I've learned about love and community and fear and sacrifice and dealing with hard things—they're all lessons that have equipped me to face this past year well.

(Better than I should have, at least, given my propensity toward self-pity and my generally high-strung nature.)



I'm always drawn to these verses from Ecclesiastes 3 when something in my life uproots and I have to regain my balance:

What gain has the worker from his toil? I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.

I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him. That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.

Regardless of the situation, there is nothing better for me than to be joyful and to do good. To take pleasure in the toil.

But even better is this: **Whatever God does endures forever.**

And this is what I've seen throughout this past year –that the things God has taught me and the ways that He has refined me in all my years previous will endure forever (as long as I choose to keep paddling forward, I suppose).

I'm certainly still a work in progress. I'm sure 2026 Molly, 2036 Molly, and 2046 Molly—Lord willing—are shaking their heads in amusement at me and all the things I think I know (while drinking coffee in their hovercrafts or something equally futuristic).

But that's the thing about life—you can only know as much as where you're at.

I only know as much as thirty years of experience has taught me, but I'm increasingly thankful for all I have learned as well as all I know I will continue to carry with me.

So, here's to a new decade. To ten more years of being shaped, refined, stretched, and challenged.

2026 Molly will report back.



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