

Dear Mama,

I am a huge planner. I love to plan ahead and organize; total control freak over every element of life. Planning just has always been my thing. I had my whole life planned by middle school. Go to college, make my mom proud, have great health, wealth, travel, and success. My only catch: No kids allowed! I had things to do and places I wanted to see. Growing up, I was always so focused on my academics and career goals I couldn't imagine having children. I always reminded my good girlfriends that I would be their babysitter, the "Rich Auntie" in our adult years because I just had so many goals to accomplish I didn't have time for children. Me... have a kid? Me... change diapers? I couldn't even take care of myself (spoiled brat, only child blues). No, thank you! I wanted to go to school, I wanted to use my passion to fuel my career, and I wanted to live life on my own terms. You could easily still find me in someone's class or workshop. A forever student, as my mom always affectionately calls me, I love to learn... So I did. I went to college twice and did all I was expected to do, and in my last year of graduate school, I got pregnant.

I couldn't believe it. Growing up in a Black, baptist single-parent home, I just knew I was dead wrong. Sex before marriage? Baby out of wedlock? Now, of course, my mom didn't make me feel like a Jezebel, but I'm not going to act like a grown-up around "church folk." It didn't cross my own mind. What will my parents say? What will my peers think? How will my church family react? I was always an outstanding student in every ministry at church, debutante, avid volunteer, and little miss goody two shoes. I really felt like I fell short. It wasn't an ideal situation at all. I can honestly say I was embarrassed and mad at myself. Like why right now? I was 24, leading Male Abuser Intervention Group Therapy at my internship, and on the brink of graduating with my Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. I just knew this had to be a joke. Waddling around Trinity Washington University, waiting for Ashton Kutcher to pop out because I just knew I was being punked.

Women are conditioned to believe once they have a baby, their life, dreams, and goals are put on hold. Especially black women! We are the most durable beings. One thing we are going to do is hold it down and make sure things get done. Take care of the family and the home. We will pour until we can't pour no more to make sure our families are taken care of. That's the priority even over ourselves. I didn't want that for me. Please get somebody else to do it! My mom wanted to be a nurse but never finished school because she had to take care of her family. She put her life on hold to be a caregiver.



I've seen her make the impossible happen but never was able to fulfill her own passions. When I had my son, she encouraged me to keep going. I am living proof that you can do it all. Every day isn't easy but every day's another chance. I am making my dreams come true and being the best mom I can be simultaneously.

My life didn't stop when I became a mom, and it got more meaningful and interesting. I found my purpose to fuel my passions. My son is the perfect plan I never thought of. I was able to graduate on time. I had my son on a Tuesday and went right back to class that next Tuesday. My family and peers were so impressed by my drive, and all I could say is it was all because of my son. So many fulfilling things have happened since I was blessed with my son. I've participated in Maternal and Infant Health Summits with the mayor's office, participated in Black Maternal Mortality Boards, and even have my own 501c3 nonprofit supporting local moms and their families in Washington, DC. I have connected with so many women, moms, and their supporters, who are just like me, trying to figure this out every day, and it feels good to be seen, heard, and understood in those spaces. Because some days, you just need space to be yourself, be more than a mom, and those communities and support groups help make sure I am still in touch with me. You can still be you and be a great mom, and I want every woman and mom to be encouraged to do the same. Life doesn't stop when you become a mom, and it just gets better! I said all that to say God makes no mistakes, and it is important to show yourself grace because God always has a plan, even if it wasn't a part of your plan. They always say, "If you want to make God laugh, tell him about your plans." Well, I am forever grateful for God's plan and this journey called motherhood.

Motherhood isn't linear. There will always be trials and triumphs. Be encouraged and show yourself grace because you were chosen for this! And on the days when you're feeling like Bernie Mac, just breathe, ask for help if you need it, and find peace in the process. You got this, mama, and if you need me, I got you!

Happy Mother's Day!

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