

My Childhood Mantra

Certain patterns, both spoken and unspoken, are etched deep into our brains. Most of these we don't even know we've learned and have never articulated. Our assumptions about reality may be quite unrealistic. One that has been chief in my life is so pervasive; it's almost a "mantra". Without my even noticing what's going on, from early childhood this "mantra" has shaped action after action, thought after thought, emotion after emotion, choice after choice.

I just recently articulated it. It goes like this: I **CAN'T BUT I MUST**. The mantra developed as a response to my mother's demands:

- You must fill my emptiness ... But I couldn't do it.
- You must bring order out of my chaos... But I repeatedly failed.
- You must light up the dark places in my life... But I couldn't do that either.

My inability to fulfill her demands was quite clear but also quite costly. I was assigned the role of keeping her alive and sane. I accepted my assignment but failed on both counts. What could I do? What choices did I have? I could only strive, fear, try, fail, and live with the reality that there was no escape.

It took until late adulthood for me to learn that I was not responsible for meeting her demands. She was asking me to do what only God can do. Would that she asked Him instead of me. She never learned to do that, and it caused us both great sorrow.

Oh Lord, You and only You, are capable of filling inner emptiness, changing internal chaos into order, and lighting up the dark places in our hearts. It took until late adulthood for me to start learning to hand to You responsibilities that never belonged to me.

And now? Now I thank You from the depths of my heart that You never ask me (or any human being) to do what only You can do. Thank You that You are teaching this silver-haired adult to rest from responsibilities she was never intended to bear. Thank You as I feel a heavy burden lifting from my shoulders. Thank You as You shine light into my dark places, change my chaos into order, and fill my emptiness with abundance.

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