

Welcome Back?

It's still fresh in my memory: returning to church after giving birth to our first child, Jaicie. My husband Franklin and I were so excited for everyone to finally meet our baby girl. We arrived a little after the service began, so most of our friends would have to wait a while to get a closer look. Throughout the service, other moms periodically glanced our way with bright eyes and enthusiastic smiles, appearing just as ecstatic as we were about our new addition.

Things took a turn, however, when feeding time came and I pulled out the Avent baby bottle. As I sat there feeding my baby, I noticed a few of those warm looks strangely turn to scowls. Somewhat puzzled, I looked around, wondering if I'd missed something that was said, not realizing that those frowns were meant for me. The service couldn't have ended fast enough for some of those moms to make a beeline to where we were sitting. But it wasn't so that they could finally meet Jaicie or greet me. Instead, it was to grill me with questions such as:

"What's with the bottle?!"

"You aren't nursing?!"

"Well, are you at least pumping?!"

"Please tell me that's not formula in that bottle!"

I was so caught off guard by the ambush that my initial response was shocked silence, followed by: "Whoa . . . Wait a minute! What?!" My happy moment quickly deflated and I felt as if I'd shifted from being in the House of the Lord to the courtroom of Judge Judy.

What they didn't know was that I'd had an emergency C-section followed by a tough recovery, and my new baby was a bit colicky – all factors that had led to my decision to discontinue nursing earlier than I'd hoped. And although things hadn't worked out quite the way I had planned, everything was still good: my baby was healthy, I was healing, and we were happy!

Needless to say, I left church far from uplifted that day. Instead, I left feeling discouraged and questioning everything I had done for my baby those past couple of months. Although I'd been able to shut down the interrogation successfully at the time, the uncertainty their words produced and the feeling of having failed lingered for days to come. I desperately wanted nothing but the best for my baby. I began to wonder if I was giving her that.

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I didn't know it then, but this wouldn't be my last encounter with this incriminating analysis over how I cared for my children or the second-guessing it created within me. In fact, it was only the beginning, and would unexpectedly grow into something more troubling than I could imagine. Something, my friend, I would eventually come to know as mommy guilt!