

As mothers, we need to show ourselves the grace of God's mercy

When my children were young, as routine as saying my nightly prayers before bedtime, I would recount all the mistakes I had made with them that day. Some failings felt so significant that I would measure them in how many extra years of therapy they would require. While most people worry about saving for retirement, I worried about saving for my children's counseling copays when they were grown and their mama-messed-me-up issues would manifest like a scary clown popping out of a jack-in-the-box.

Motherhood was hard, and it seemed like the harder I tried, the more aware I became of the spaghetti sauce dripping from the kitchen ceiling. (Truthfully, that scarlet drip would have been there regardless of my children, because whenever I am in the kitchen catastrophic events occur.)

Now, a mother of teenage boys, I look back on those years and the litany of suffering I subjected myself to and I realize how little I knew God. I couldn't show myself any mercy because I had yet to know his. God was this perfect being who couldn't possibly understand the trials of being an imperfect parent. He had never wrestled anyone with an arched back into a car seat or saw the need to abandon the baby's stroller in the parking lot after realizing it was more likely that he would collapse from frustration than the too-complicated-to-fold buggy. Of course, Jesus did wrestle demons, and I am sure collapsing was a possibility when he endured 40 days without food or water in the desert. Still, in those early days of motherhood, I relied more on parenting books than I did our perfect Father.

During my 40th year, I made a concerted effort to grow my faith by spending the year doing corporal and spiritual works of mercy. While I went into the year thinking that mercy was something that we do for others, I quickly realized how desperate I was for its redeeming grace. My perception of being a good mother was no longer an account of checked bullet points from so-called parenting experts, but by the measure of mercy that I bestowed on myself as well as my children. It wasn't about letting any of us off the hook or giving a free pass to do whatever we pleased, but a kinder, softer, approach to the inherent struggles of our humanity.

Knowing God through his mercy has been one of the saving graces of my life. It doesn't mean that we don't suffer; rather, it means that we are more aware of the futility of self-imposed suffering. Accepting mercy doesn't mean that we don't acknowledge our mistakes, but that we can forgive ourselves for them. Practicing mercy in parenthood is as much of a compassionate way of viewing ourselves as it is our children. Understanding mercy allows us to accept the unconditional, perfect love of our heavenly Father that on our own we would never be worthy to receive.

Most mamas I know are hard on themselves. We aren't thinking about mercy when we are sleep-deprived, or when a stray Lego pierces our foot. When our children are sick or in trouble or as lost as that one sheep in the Bible that God thought was worth finding, we too easily forget the redemption of God's mercy, which reminds us that with him, nothing is lost. Every moment, mercy gives us a chance to start anew. Remembering that – relying on it – redeems the worst of our mistakes, whether parenting or otherwise. No copay required.

Lara Patangan writes about God's mercy at [MercyMatters.net](https://www.mercymatters.net).