

God's Grace for the Struggling Single Mom

Sometimes it's easier to apply God's truths to my life than to the lives of my children. I don't know why that is. Maybe I feel like I should be able to fix things for them because I'm their mom.

If I just love them enough, they won't feel the void their Dad's departure left. Nope—not possible. Only God can.

If I just spend enough time with them, they won't miss their father so much. Nope—not possible. Only God can.

If I just do enough for them, they'll know that they are valuable and loved. Nope—not possible. Only God can.

If I make life easier for them, the pain won't be as acute. Nope—not possible. Only God can.

What I've done in my feverish attempt to fill the hole left by their father is become completely exhausted and a bit ineffective as a parent. It might have served a purpose to a degree at the beginning, but now I have children who are selfish about my time, demanding of my resources, thoughtless of the dynamics of our family and a bit entitled in their mentality.

Lest it sound like I have the rottenest kids on the East Coast, let me say they are all wonderful. They all have lovely, sweet moments and kind words often. My teenage daughter still calls me "Mommy" sometimes, which absolutely melts my heart. My tweenage son still enjoys reading with me each night while we snuggle. My 6-year-old loves to draw pictures to encourage me. And at the most surprising and sweetest times, my 5-year-old will flash me the sign for "I love you." They all bless me; they just don't really help me!

I've noticed recently that they don't seem to be getting some pretty obvious house rules. You know, the knock-before-entering thing. The don't-help-yourself-to-mom's-things-without-asking thing. The pick-up-after-yourself thing. The whole obey thing.

I've made myself entirely too available for them, so now they expect me to *always* be available for them. I've allowed them to enter my space freely and, boy, am I paying for that now! There are always people in my room messing with my stuff, making a mess.

I've picked up after them and covered their lack of help without too much fussing. I think I've acted under the assumption that their lives have been too tough already, and I've been trying to make life easier.

I realize now that in doing so, I have taken away normal. What I mean is that my children were not allowed free access to our room, closet and bathroom when their father and I were married. We had boundaries that were normal. When our family was intact, my children were held to a higher standard of work. It was expected that they would help. Now when I need help the most, I don't seem to have created an expectation of it.

So my new moniker is "Meanie." I hear it when I send a child back downstairs because they didn't do something I asked them to do. I hear it when I take away a privilege because homework or chores were not done well. I hear it when I send them back out of my room so they can practice knocking before entering. I hear it when I move all their belongings out of my bathroom and into theirs. I hear it when I say I cannot do something for them, even if it's highly inconvenient and absolutely unnecessary.

My time is valuable. I've got stuff to do! I've got *a lot* of stuff to do.

It's important to have my own space to think and just be without any interruption or kid stuff flung about the room. It's even more important that my children learn to respect me, our family and our home. That they realize that they are a valuable part of our family and that their contributions are necessary and appreciated. That I give them the blessing of understanding that they can accomplish things efficiently and effectively. That they can meet expectations with hard work and resolve. That they are loved regardless of how lousy they are at laundry. That their efforts, when done with a good attitude, are pleasing.

We all have to do a whole paradigm shift. And I say that knowing without God I can't do it. Nope—not possible. Only God can. He can enable me to stand firm in the face of "Meanie." He can enable us to have a vision of a healthy, thriving family. God can fill the void in our lives and hearts because He knows exactly what we need. He can encourage my children, change their hearts and open their eyes to their worth, not because of how easy He makes their lives, but because of how beautifully He made them.

I'm so thankful that in response to my attempts to heal my children's hurts, God answers, "Nope—you can't. But I can!" And He will.

*Written by **Sue Birdseye**, author of When Happily Ever After Shatters, releasing from Tyndale House Publishers in March 2013.*