

A little more broken, a little more grounded in love and grace.

Today, I went to church broken. And I left a little more broken.

My children were exhausting during the service, and I wasn't feeling it anymore than they were. It happens sometimes. We would have survived without much issue.

After church, I needed to talk to someone about a CPR class I am doing, and the kids were antsy. E was pushing buttons as he ran through the crowd "punching" people. (Let me be clear, he was not hitting hard, it was more of a tap besides the fact that he said "punch" each time he did). I grabbed him and we had a quick chat while I got some disapproving stares. I made a mental note to get him out of there. He was overwhelmed by the people and he was anxious to get home.

Plus, I was feeling edgy with the stares I was getting. After our chat, he ran off again and "punched" one more person on his way. Sigh. Kids are exhausting and 4 year olds aren't always the best behaved. But then I got the nastiest, eyebrows raised, *really-did-your-son-just-do-that-can't-you-control-him* look, and it pushed a button.

I was tired from surviving church. I was frustrated at my sons less than stellar behavior. I was feeling pulled in two different directions from the necessary conversation about the CPR class and the obvious needs of my kids. I felt the shame wash over me. *How dare that kid not listen? Why can't he do anything right? Why do I always have to deal with this? Now, all these people are looking at me and giving me nasty looks.* Shame sends me right to blame.

Not familiar with the visceral, physical reaction of shame? Check out [Brene Brown](#).

Next, I did something I am not proud of. It was fight or flight. I couldn't think straight. That woman gave me that final look, and I lunged after my son. I grabbed his arm, not gently at all, growled unkind words into his ears, and pushed him towards the back door telling him to GO HOME. (We live next door, he knows how to get there, and his brother was going with him). I was mean, nasty, and *shaming* to my son because of my own reaction to shame.

Sigh. Right away, I was mad at myself. I knew I took it out on him. I was frustrated with him, my parenting, and my reaction. I walked back across the front church hallway to say goodbye to my husband before leaving when I heard a man walking out the front door say in a disgusted *tsk-tsk* kind of voice, "those kids need a little Catholic school" to his family.

Excuse me? EXCUSE ME? I almost said it. I almost stopped him right at the door to say, "Excuse me!?" I didn't, because I couldn't think straight. I was seeing red. Here I was, an exhausted mom of two small children who had struggled through church, and then had a rough time afterwards. Judgment and shame were exactly what I did *not* need. I stomped out of church, swearing (loudly) through my tears across the back parking lot. I can only imagine what our poor Council President thought as she got out of her car and watched as I stormed away.

After letting this sit for a few hours and restraining myself from responding to comments on my angry Facebook post, I have come away with two things.

First, people come to church broken. We all do on some level or another. I came to church today incredibly broken. If our church is going to talk about renewal and wonder where all the members are or why churches are dying, we need to consider if we're meeting broken people where they are. I left church today more broken than I when I went in. I struggle to get through a

lot of my days, and it's a simple fact of survival to not do something that I know is going to make it harder. So why would I go to church? Well I have lots of reasons – a seminary education, a belief in raising up faith-filled children, and a desire to support my husband, the pastor. But what if it wasn't me, what if it wasn't the pastor's wife, what if it wasn't the girl with a seminary degree? What if it was another broken Child of God without the support network or church connection that I have?

Outreach and community are not just words to throw around. I am thankful for the many supportive members of the community we have. Just moments before the dirty looks and the mean comment, I had been joking with another church member about my kids' antics during worship. We can joke because we know their presence is important for them and us. At the same time, I am also reminded that we need to be really outspoken with our support of each other, especially young families. Church can't be another place where it feels like us vs. the world.

Second, it has to start with love and grace. The fact is that the people at church today looking at my admittedly misbehaving children don't have any idea of what's going on in our life. They have no idea that I've spent the last three days doubled over in pain wondering what in the world I am allergic to and what is actually safe to eat. They have no idea that my kids are hanging by a thread after having their routines destroyed and no school for a week. They have no idea that depression and anxiety threaten to suffocate me constantly - sometimes they loosen their grip and sometimes they squeeze tight, but they never let go. They have no idea that juggling therapies, school, and other commitments while trying to help my sensitive children with special needs succeed brings us to our knees daily.

I am not angry (okay a tiny bit, but I'm working on that, it's only been a few hours) at the people who gave me dirty looks or the man who made his rude comment, but I am frustrated with a world where this is how we operate. I am reminded and inspired to just hold space for people. A kind word to a struggling mom does so much more good than the enjoyment you might get out a snide comment. I know that everyone is doing their best. Life's just hard. We all have different kinds of hard, but it's all hard. I am stretching my limits of compassion and empathy, for myself and others. It takes courage. **Love, grace, and courage.** I might have it tattooed on my forehead... or maybe somewhere slightly more acceptable.

Today, when I felt myself spiraling into anger, shame, and guilt, I did the only thing I knew to do to stop it. I went shopping.

No, no, not for me. I ordered some books that fill me with hope and ground me in grace, and I had them shipped to people I know who could use some hope and grace.

That's all I could do. When I need more love and support, I am pushed to reach out to others with love and support. In the end, love wins. It always wins. I told my little "punching" 4 year old that the other night, and he said, "But I thought God wins?" It's all the same, buddy. It's all the same. God is love.