

Good Enough Mom

A Sermon by Rev. Lynn Kerr

First Unitarian Church of Toledo, Ohio

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I sometimes think that we mothers have set ourselves up for failure. We want to be perfect in every way, for our children, our partners, our employer, our churches, and even for other women to envy! We are seduced by the idea that this elusive, perfect motherhood is within our grasp if just...If we just give up our own selfish desires, if we just took on one more volunteer job, if we just worked a bit harder, if we just lost twenty pounds. In her book, "Perfect Madness," Judith Warner describes how far a mom will go to achieve perfection. She writes, "Mixing promise with politics, feminism with 'family values,'... into a combustible combination that is nothing less than perfect madness." This madness comes on in those moments when you realize your child has gone off to school perfectly dressed on backwards day.

Today, I'm trying to embrace my imperfections, and I hope you will too. But if you are not sure, here are a few helpful hints for recognizing an imperfect mom:

1. Other mother's avoided your gaze at school functions.
2. Your adult son calls you daily from his apartment, in your basement.
3. If there is no blood or bone sticking through the skin, you don't want to hear about it.
4. You do not look at your stretch marks with fondness.
5. Your child can sing the theme songs to every show on the Cartoon Network.
6. You quit writing in the baby book before your children were out of diapers.
7. You reminisce about the good old times when your life completely revolved around you.
8. Half the things in your grocery cart say, "ready in minutes."

When the ancient Roman city of Pompeii was excavated, a statue and very large public building in the forum were found to be dedicated to the ultimate ancient Roman mom. Even in those days, there were certain characteristics a woman must have to get respect. She needed to be a mother and see to the education of her children. If you had more than three children you were given special status along with tax deductions, yes, even then! Roman women were expected to be the household managers and the moral compass for her slaves and children. The Roman mother's aim was to advance her children economically, socially, and professionally. Men commonly turned to their mothers for advice in times of crises. Things haven't changed much!

Eumachia came from a wealthy family of brick makers and married a man of means with vineyards on Mount Vesuvius. Aside from wife and mother, she also held quite a high status as both a priestess and also as a patroness of the fullers' guild, perhaps one of the most respected of industries, that of laundering togas and preparing wool for sewing. In the year 62, an earthquake destroyed many buildings in Pompeii and Eumachia provided her own money for buildings to be rebuilt. Of course, it is suspected that part of the reason she offered to build the buildings may be due to the fact that her son was running for public office at the time. Behind every great man...you know the rest. I mention Eumachia because she was revered as a very great woman. She was a priestess of considerable power, a shrewd businesswoman, a philanthropist, a dotting mother, and from the statues of her that have been unearthed, beautiful as well. Here was the ultimate super mom. Of course, no amount of perfection could save her from the volcanic eruption that destroyed her city and most people in it.

Now, in those days, there weren't articles in women's magazines (now don't pretend you don't read them) telling Eumachia how to be a good mother and wife. She probably didn't rely on a day planner to remind her to pick up her son or pay the bills. Although likely she had a slave helping her.

But I believe Eumachia was the kind of woman some of us try to be today. Someone who has it all. But most of us probably don't "have it all." Most of us fret about how we're doing or whether our adult children were raised right and if you're serious about becoming the perfect mom, you should have no trouble finding numerous articles and books to help you. From 43 things to do to become a better mom to 10 things to do to make your family content. But I hope we all know that we can't nor are we supposed to be perfect moms. But there are a lot of people out there who believe differently and are more than happy to tell you how to achieve perfect motherhood status, to be a modern day Eumachia. So, if you are a devotee of Lane Jordan's [12 Steps to Becoming a More Organized Mom](#), my tips on imperfect motherhood may not be for you.

Seriously though, as you read through most of the articles and books about parenting, one thing clearly stands out, in the end, what makes a good parent is being a good role model. So if we are less than perfect, how do we clean ourselves up?

Dr. Robyn Silverman, a child development specialist, has come up with seven characteristics of good role models. There are many such specialists on mothering and parenting, each with their own list to follow, but a critique of her's will allow me to explain the importance, and inevitability of modeling imperfect motherhood. She says, model positive choice-making, Think out loud, Apologize and admit mistakes, Follow through, Show respect, be well rounded, and Demonstrate confidence in who you are.

I think this is really good advice but I don't always agree with the doctor on how to achieve these characteristics.

First, Model positive choice-making. Children look at what we say, what we wear, and even what we eat. Just the other day as I sat on the couch munching on lime flavored tortilla chips and 7-up, my son hollered at me, "Mom, your diet!" So I had not chosen a healthy snack, but hey, at least my son recognizes what good choices might look like! He also reminds me that I watch too much CNN, play too much Sudoku, and he probably shouldn't be watching the Colbert Report on Comedy Central due to its adult content. He has learned so much by watching me make bad choices.

Second, think out loud. Dr. Silverman writes that it is important that we not only demonstrate good choices, but that we also show our children how we arrived at the decision. In my case, I am quite confident that when my son is an adult, he will argue with his partner about how to raise their children and he will realize that no matter what, his reasoning is always right!

Next, apologize and admit mistakes. Now I *am* perfect at this! I have always apologized to my partner for calling him an inconsiderate, selfish husband and I always say I'm sorry to my son when I make him cry. Just the other day I got him weeping just before he got on the school bus by suggesting that he give away his turtles in favor of a more appropriate pet...like a lizard. I truly didn't even know if my son realized they were still alive! I am always admitting mistakes it seems, so I guess this makes me a good role model. Always say you're sorry when you yell at the top of your lungs to clean your room or forget to feed your child breakfast.

The next characteristic is follow through. The doctor writes, "We all want children to stick with their commitments and follow through with their promises. But as adults it can sometimes be difficult to demonstrate follow through when we're tired, distracted, busy, or overwhelmed. To be a good role model, we must demonstrate stick-to-itiveness. That means; (a) be on time; (b) finish what you started; (c) don't quit; (d) keep your word; and (e) keep going even if things get difficult. When role models follow through with their goals, it teaches children that it can be done and helps them adopt an "if s/he can do it, so can I" attitude. Ok, I again need to take exception here. Be on time? I had never been late for anything in my life until I had a child. Finish what you started? Don't quit? Listen, learning to do Chinese brush painting looked so easy in the book, but when your son says the bird you just painted scares him, perhaps it is time to consider another type of creativity. Keep your word? I do try to do this- I really do, but there are days when I just don't have the energy for the mother/son project of making homemade KEY LIME AND CANDIED KUMQUAT PIE. I'm not joking, this is a real recipe!

The doctor recommends that we keep going even if things get difficult because consistency is important in the mother-child relationship. Well, as far as I am concerned, there are some times when whatever you are doing is just not worth the aggravation. I pick my battles and I'm sure my boy learns something good from that fact.

Next. Show Respect. This is one we try to teach so hard in our church school. We always tell our children to "treat others the way we want to be treated." Dr. Silverman believes that it's often the little things you do that make the biggest difference in the way children perceive how to succeed in business and relationships. I really can't argue with this. Respect is so important to teach our children. But honestly, when your partner never cleans the lint trap of the dryer and then tells you clothes aren't getting dry, a bit of loud sarcasm is a moral imperative!

Number six according to Dr. Silverman is being well-rounded. She suggests that "great role models aren't just "parents" or "teachers." They're great learners and challenge themselves to get out of their comfort zones." But I like my comfort zone! I really don't enjoy doing something badly and have others around to see me doing it badly! Sure, it is nice for your children to know that you know how to cook more than macaroni and cheese, but they don't need to know that your pie crusts are inedible.

Showing another side of yourself to your children is a good idea though. I know that when I showed my son one summer where I had rock climbed when I was in college he looked at his frumpy mom in a slightly different way. And of course, it has been proven that if you want your child to be a reader, you need to be a reader. Few things make a bigger impact on a child than when a parent turns off America's funniest home videos and grabs "An Inconvenient Truth."

Lastly, to be a good role model, the Dr. says you should demonstrate confidence in who you are. Your child should see that you are happy with who you have become and proud of your achievements. Sure, but no matter how much confidence we have in ourselves, the way our children perceive us is another story. Not long ago, my son sat in the back seat of our car with a friend. As they discussed what their parent's did for a living, I heard this from my son, "Well, my mom is just a minister but my dad does something *really* important." True, mom is just a minister who does her very best to be a role model for the children in her congregation. I do recognize the gravity of that responsibility. That's why I get embarrassed when you hear my son say that we simply can not have a woman president. "Men rule," He says. He picked this up at school...I swear.

The thing that struck me in this list of role modeling is that it said nothing about modeling love. Nothing about that incomprehensible, unbridled, completely unconditional love that we have given our children. I guess if my son can learn one

thing from me, I want it to be how to love someone. Erma Bombeck wrote a funny, but painful reminder of what happens to mom's who concentrate too much on perfection and too little on simple love.

“Everyone said Sharon was a terrific mother. Her neighbors said it. Sharon painted the inside of her garbage cans with enamel, grew her own vegetables, cut her own grass every week, made winter coats for the entire family from remnants, donated blood. Her mother said it. Sharon laundered aluminum foil and used it again, planned family reunions, wrote her Congressman, cut everyone's hair and knew her health insurance policy number by heart. Her children's teacher said it. She packed nutritious lunches with little raised faces on the sandwiches, was homeroom mother, belonged to five car pools and once blew up 234 balloons by herself for the seventh grade cotillion. Sharon kept a schedule that would have brought any other women to her knees. Sharon was a SUPER MOM! Her Husband said it. Her minister said it. Her gynecologist said it. Her butcher said it. Her tennis partner said it. Her children... Her children never said it. They spent a lot of time with Rick's mother, who was always home with them and who ate cookies out of a box and played poker with them.”

Today, I say let go of the guilt for all the imperfect things you have done and revel in your imperfection, heck, even strive for it, because in the end, the love you've given to your children is the most important thing, and they will remember it.