

Finding God in a geography lesson

Our fourth grader has to be able to label all the states in the U.S. on a map in five minutes.

It almost seems impossible. There are so many states. To be fast enough, he has to know all the abbreviations. Many of those aren't intuitive. So many start with M. Some look like the same shape. That East Coast has so many states.

And he has to be ready by Friday.

Every day our social studies student is a little faster and a little closer to perfect. But completing all 50 perfectly and quickly isn't easy.

As I watch him working so hard to fill the map, I try to offer him hints to help him remember. I would love just to tell him the answers. I know that in the end, however, he has to do it on his own. I won't be next to him in his classroom on the day of the test. I won't be there to whisper, "I don't have N-E idea why Nebraska is abbreviated NE."

So, as hard as it is for me, I sit there and try to pretend I'm not struggling quietly along with him. But I feel his agony as he searches his mind for a state. I want to jump in and fix it, but I know that the best solution is letting him focus and memorize and win this battle.

Maybe that's how God feels when He watches me trying to balance everything in my life.

Even though I can't always understand it, He sees value in my struggle to handle everything—just as I understand the value in knowing all the U.S. states.

God knows that as I grapple with the challenge of being a good wife and mother and daughter and friend and employee, I will learn and grow.

He appreciates that suffering and overcoming adversity can make me a better person, serve some greater good, and bring me closer to Him.

Sure, He sees the reality of the struggle. Maybe He wants to reach in and fix it. And sometimes He does. But with His complete understanding, His ability to see the whole picture, His realization that this moment is just a blink in time, He knows that this is my battle to win. He knows how it will strengthen me. And, of course, even though there are moments I might feel alone on this journey, God is with me every step of the way.

Friday will come and go. Our son will take his test. If he misses a state or two or three or 10, he'll get to take the test again. The world will still turn. One day—either Friday or another day in the future—he'll know all his states. When that day comes, he'll be in what his teacher calls the Nifty Fifty club. He'll be relieved. He'll be proud.

But I'll be even prouder.