



Teaching Your Child to Lose

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 11as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many. (2 Corinthians 1:8-11 NIV)

Why should we teach our children to lose?

The main reason we need to teach our children about loss and failure is that these are unavoidable realities of life! People lose! It's that simple. To deny this reality is like refusing to let them take off their training wheels while at the same time convincing them that they have mastered the art of cycling!

If you could wave a wand, if you could erase every failure, setback, suffering and pain—are you sure it would be a good idea? Would it cause your child to grow up to be a better, stronger, more generous person? Is it possible that in some way people actually need adversity, setbacks, maybe even something like trauma to reach the fullest level of development and growth? (John Ortberg)

The hope for success and the fear of failure are perhaps the two greatest burdens middle-class Americans carry on their shoulders. We seem to be looking for some formula that will usher us into the winner's circle on a permanent basis. The more successes one achieves, the greater the addiction to success may be. A winning streak can become a diabolical chain that nurtures and contributes to our anxieties, anguish, restlessness and sense of incompleteness. (Carnegie Samuel Calian)

Furthermore, loss is a reality that can lead our children to rely on God. That's why Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians about his hardships, even when his own life was threatened. His loss pushed him to total and absolute reliance on the God of this universe. God is not in the success business. God is in the refining business! (Job 23:10)

How do we teach our children about losing?

Lesson #1: Let them. And then ask: "Did we do any learning?" People who perpetually fail do so because they often carry the loss or pattern ahead into the next venture, or relationship, and thus repeat the same way of losing." (Cloud)

Lesson #2—Reassure them. When you lose, you will not lose my love! It means we teach our children that it is more important for them to do their best than it is for them to be the best.

Lesson #3—Encourage them. God may call my child to a life of loss. This is about letting God have His way with His child, who has temporarily been in your custody. Consider the prophet Ezekiel.

"Son of man," he said, "I am sending you to the nation of Israel, a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me. They and their ancestors have been rebelling against me to this very day. They are a stubborn and hard-hearted people. But I am sending you to say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says!' And whether they listen or refuse to listen—for remember, they are rebels—at least they will know they have had a prophet among them." -Ezekiel 2:3-5

From the beginning, God plainly tells Ezekiel that he's going to have a tough job. The people will not listen. They are stubborn and rebellious. They will try to intimidate him. Ezekiel will not win any popularity contest. His ministry would be considered a failure by human standards. Ezekiel's experience helps me to rethink my ideas of "success" and "failure." There's a reason why I've put "success" and "failure" in quotes. Ezekiel's calling reminds me that God doesn't keep score the same way I tend to. God does not ask me to be "successful"—He simply calls me to be faithful and obedient. His glory is the issue, not the results that I may or may not see. (Kevin Sanders)

To God, what matters most is faithfulness. **To God, success is faithfulness.** Your child may be called to a vocation similar to Ezekiel's. Or Jesus'. The world saw the crucifixion differently than how God saw it. Jesus' death on the cross—a slave's death—was the ultimate failure. Yet from the foolishness and weakness of crucifixion, God transformed this loss into the power that enables us to be with Him when we take Jesus into our lives.

7But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. 12So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. (2 Corinthians 4:7-12 NIV)