

Helping Your Child with Failure

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How can you help your child with failure? One of the best ways is to let them see how you are growing in this area. You've probably already noticed that this problem does not disappear as you get older. It takes hold even more. But what if resumes, achievements, reputation, the approval of others, and the quest to be remembered were less important to you?

Imagine having nothing to hide in your closest relationships and being free to admit weakness and ask for help. Imagine a world where you are no longer ruled by the opinions of others. You would be affected by their opinions, either hurt or encouraged by them—there is no way around that. But you wouldn't be controlled by them. Instead, you would remember that everyone is better at some things than others that failure is essential to learning and growing. This is not an imaginary world, it's God's world, and he invites each of us to live there with him. The alternative is a life prone to judging and being judged (they go together), anger, depression, and always trying to cover up and hide from others.

You can grow in trusting God when you fail and as you do so, you can point your child to Jesus, who is ever-present to help, in all kinds of trouble. Here are some things to talk over with your child that will point both of you to Jesus in the midst of failure.

1. Failure is hard, but Jesus will help.

It's hard to try your best and still not achieve your goal. It's hard to fail in front of others. But failure is also an opportunity to grow. We might fail, but God's love never fails (Lamentations 3:22). We can go to Jesus for help in all of the hard moments of life (Hebrews 4:14-16).

2. Having the wrong goal will trip us up.

Buster said that "practice makes perfect." But buster wanted to be more than perfect; he wanted to be the best. He found out that having this goal did trip him up. It is not the answer to his, yours, or your child's struggle with identity and self-esteem because it is based on what we can do and what others think about what we can do.

3. Being "the best" versus "trying your best."

Ivy reminded Buster that Papa didn't tell them to be the best, but to try their best. The Bible says that we work, even for others "with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (Ephesians 6:5-6 ESV). Work as if you were working for the Lord because you are. It's great to want to do your best, but motivation is key. We should want to work hard and have a good reputation *for the Lord's sake*.

4. The problem is pride.

We want other people to look up to us for our sake, and we want to have our failures well-hidden so others don't look down on us. We want to be above others. And since that is not

where God wants us to be, the proud will always teeter and fall, perhaps landing among the wise who are more familiar with weakness than strength. Here is how the Bible puts it, “If you are proud, you will be destroyed. If you are proud, you will fall” (Proverbs 16:18 NIV).

5. A simple prayer of confession to Jesus is a good way to come down from our perch.

The goal is to come down before we fall down. Once down, rejection can still hurt deeply, but when we don’t live for the praise of other people, we can turn to Jesus and begin to see how God’s world (the real world) is constructed differently (1 John 1:9-10).

6. As we follow Jesus, we learn that life is not about living for our own glory.

The better we get to know Jesus, the less we think of our achievements. We realize that they are not enough to earn us the forgiveness and life forever that Jesus freely offers those who ask. When we realize that we have nothing of worth to bring to Jesus, this pleases and honors him. Then we can say to Jesus, “only you have what I truly need.” To which we might add, “and it sure would be nice if you could help me think less often about myself.” This is the path of true honor.

7. God’s kingdom is where we experience the best life.

Jesus came into this world and was determined to set it right. He ate with people who hurt his reputation, washed people’s feet as their servant, and was penniless when he died. He was the King of the universe yet was looked down upon by the entire world, both Jews and Gentiles. But this was also the path to true glory. Jesus lived to glorify his heavenly Father and now he reigns forever as our risen Savior. As we lose things (like our reputation, others’ good opinion of us, being “the best”), we find out that they were really getting in the way of the best things in life—knowing God’s love, loving God, and loving people.

8. Here are some Bible verses to share with your children when they experience failure.

I waited patiently for the Lord,
and he turned to me and heard my cry for help.
He brought me up from a desolate pit,
out of the muddy clay,
and set my feet on a rock,
making my steps secure. -- Psalms 40:1-2 (CSB)

God resists the proud
but gives grace to the humble. -- James 4:6 (CSB)

But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. -- Romans 5:8 (CSB)

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens — Jesus the Son of God — let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us

approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need. -- Hebrews 4:14-16 (CSB)