

Losing Well

HAVE RECENTLY TRADED IN the hours I used to spend feeding, holding, and wiping small humans for my newly assigned hobby: watching my two young males work like mad to place small objects into specific receptacles using an appendage, a stick, or a racket, depending on the season and the mood.

At this time of year in Canada it is usually the stick that lends the aid. I am practicing my new hobby bundled on a cold bench where I watch my children compete. I cheer, often distracted by vehement shouts erupting from many of the parents surrounding me in the stands: “C’mon ref, are you kidding me?” “Get your head on straight!” “Call it both ways!”

And while attempting to raise my two boys to become men who understand their purpose in our world, who revere what it means to redeem our surroundings, and who delight in the handiwork of our creator God, I need to control what I can, even on the sidelines. My reactions to their games are as important as my reactions to their spills, their report cards, or even their coloring.

I suspect that children learn much more about life from their parents’—and grandparents’—reactions to their sporting events than they learn about the physics of a six-ounce rubber disc, for example.

During games, my internal debate rages about how much or how little to make my reactions visible or audible. My wrinkled brow testifies to my worry over how to assuage the feelings of insecurity and sadness my boys will likely feel after a loss, or after a coach has yelled at them, or after their heads barely peek over the edge of the penalty box.

We suffer when we watch our children suffer. But these small doses of disappointment and pain help prepare them for what is to come. We know suffering



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will come to them in more potent forms than numbers on a scoreboard. It will come in a written rejection from a university, from a friend’s verbal scoff, from a broken relationship, or from the results of a medical test. Sometimes it will come in subtle truths: truths finally understood about others and about themselves that will break them to their core. Finally, suffering will come in blatant forms as they glimpse their own depravity and realize their capacity to hurt as well as to love.

So even though I cheer for my children to win, when they lose I know that they may be winning something far more valuable: an opportunity to rethink, relearn, and refocus their efforts on things that matter more than winning.

Losing teaches us to trust by forcing us to experience a death of sorts. A death of a dream, a hope, a vision to which we dared to cling. Losing challenges us to question our prior judgment. Losing asks

us to humbly place our dependence not on ourselves but on our coaches, our teachers, our mentors, and our God.

We will be refined when we lose thoughtfully: without anger, blame, or resentment. When we admit our weaknesses and choose to work on them, we have a chance to lose well.

All our trials, in sports and in life, affect us and the children we’re blessed to parent or mentor. While I’m busy watching my kids be enriched by their trials, I am working on trusting that they will learn—as all of us continue to learn—on whatever bench we find ourselves. ■



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