

LIVING THE APPLIED LIFE

Applied to Our Children: When You Give You Will Take Away

Before we hastily rush in to rescue our loved ones from life's struggles and difficulties, maybe we should first consider if this current struggle might be exactly what they really need in order to come to know God more fully and to become all that He created them to be.

Many loving parents and grandparents agonize greatly as they watch the children in their lives struggle. It doesn't seem to matter whether these struggles are self-inflicted consequences of their own poor choices or if they are completely separate from anything they have done wrong. The agony in either situation seems just as great—hence the title *Our Struggle with Their Struggle*. Our natural, loving tendency is to intervene and rescue them from whatever is burdening them.

It is one thing to watch your child or grandchild struggle and not be in a position to help. It is an entirely different thing to see your child struggle, knowing you can rescue them and yet choosing *not* to do so. At first blush, the latter may seem extremely insensitive and unloving, but is it really? Let's consider a couple of biblical stories to gain a broader perspective.

The Struggles of Joseph

Imagine you are Joseph's father or mother. You learn that your youngest son has been sold into slavery. You have the financial means to buy his freedom. Would you? Or, you hear that your son has been falsely accused and put in prison. Would you do whatever you could to free him from this struggle? Most likely, every parent would initially say, "Yes." But had you intervened and rescued your son, you would have led to the demise of the nation of Israel even before it became a nation.

Had you extracted Joseph from his struggles, you would have prevented him from ending up where he did – the second most powerful man of his day. Likewise, he probably would have never learned the Divine *why* behind all his trials. He gratefully admitted to his brothers who started his downward spiral, *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today* (Genesis 50:20).

The Struggles of Job

Consider the life of Job. If you had been Job's parent and you saw your son struggling horribly with the loss of family, possessions, and health, it is likely your grief for him would be almost unbearable. If you had the material means to be able to restore his health and keep him from being forced to sit on an ash pile and scrape his boils with pieces of broken pots (Job 2:8), wouldn't you have gladly done so. But, had you chosen to rescue Job from this personal life-crisis, he would have never come to say after the crisis was finally over and he was totally restored two fold, *I have heard of You by the hearing of the*

ear; but now my eye sees You... (Job 42:5) It was the crisis itself that brought Job to a deep, intimate, relationship with his Heavenly Father. Without this crisis he would never have experienced God at this new depth.

God even stood by and watched His own Son struggle and die and did nothing to intervene. Sometimes our deepest level of love will not be expressed in intervening to rescue a loved one from a crisis (self-inflicted or not). It may indeed be more perfectly expressed when we choose not to intervene, even if we could. Almost all successful people have one common thread routinely running through all their lives—they all went through some extraordinarily difficult times in their life journey.

What is so profound is how often these people share that it was in the midst of these most difficult days that they grew the most and learned their most important life lessons. They universally admit that it was these very struggles that have most defined who they are today. Yet, when these same overcomers observe their children and grandchildren struggling to figure out life and how to make good choices, they choose to intervene and extract their struggling loved ones from the very struggles that could actually be the very best thing for them.

What was the greatest gift the prodigal son's father gave him? Was it the premature inheritance? Was it his willingness to take him back after he squandered his inheritance? Or maybe, just maybe, the greatest gift this loving father gave his son was the opportunity to fail—because it was in his total and miserable failure that he finally *came to his senses* (Luke 15:17). He finally learned what he needed to learn, but he had to learn it in a pig pen.

A wife once honestly confessed, "We have never allowed our children to fail." She recognized that in continually snatching their children from failure, they had actually done their children more harm than good. Consequently, their children had never learned how to successfully overcome life's struggles and failures. Our goal as parents should be to do all we can to prepare our children for the road of life and not to do all we can to prepare the road of life for our children. The former will equip and enable them to succeed in overcoming life's obstacles. The latter may, in fact, do just the opposite. As the old English proverb says, "A stumble may prevent a fall."

The Struggles of the Caterpillar

When a caterpillar makes his cocoon and begins the metamorphic process of becoming a butterfly, it is faced with the daunting task of breaking free from the very cocoon that it created around itself. The butterfly must exert tremendous effort to finally break free from its self-created prison. Suppose you were to come upon a butterfly trapped in its own cocoon, frantically struggling to get free. You feel pity for it and lovingly decide to save it from all this "needless" struggle by simply cutting open the cocoon. (After all, you have scissors and can so easily make this struggle go away by cutting him free.)

However, in your attempt to shorten the butterfly's struggle, you will have simultaneously doomed it to never fly. What you may not know is that in the struggle to escape the cocoon, the fluids in its new body are forced into the wings. And with constant beating of the wings against the cocoon they are strengthened allowing it to fly.

It is safe to say that we do not grow when the sun is shining, the wind is at our back, and life is easy. We grow when the storms of life and the consequences of our poor choices pummel us into a broken and humbled sinner who needs a savior and a guide.

James 1:2-4 states, *Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* In Isaiah 48:10, God proclaimed, *Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.* Paul confesses in Romans 5:3-4, *And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope...*

Can you relate to this...?

I asked for strength...and God dumped such heavy burdens on me that I could barely carry them.

I asked for wisdom...and God presented me with numerous difficult choices to make.

I asked for patience...and God provided me with one frustrating situation after another.

I asked for prosperity...and God gave me nothing but a lot of hard work to do.

I asked for courage...and God set before me one frightening life-crisis after another.

I asked for love...and God filled my life with people who are very easy to hate.

(Author unknown)

Before we hastily rush in to rescue our loved ones from life's struggles and difficulties, maybe we should first consider if this current struggle might be exactly what they really need in order to come to know God more fully and to become all that He created them to be. While our loved ones grow in their strength and faith as they endure their struggles, we can also grow in our strength and faith as we stand by them rooting them on and praying for them as they attempt to successfully break free from the cocoon of their struggles so they can someday *soar on wings like eagles* (Isaiah 40:31). Keep in mind, there is something much worse for your loved ones than facing struggles—that they might never learn to fly! Use your scissors carefully.

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. How did the story about the young teenager getting a brand new BMW convertible strike you? What observations can you take away from that story?
2. Share an example of a bad gift you personally gave that ended up taking away more good from the recipient than it bestowed?
3. In what ways do you see our nation's welfare system supporting this idea of "giving that takes away more good than it bestows?"
4. Share what you have done right in this area of giving that gives more than it takes?
5. Have you considered your motives in providing for your children? Is it sometimes motivated by pride?
6. How can you enjoy some of the fruit of your financial success without getting your children accustomed to a lifestyle that exceeds what they can continue when they move out and start living on their own? Where is the balance?
7. How can you invest your time or talents in giving the things to people that adds to the quality of a person's life?
8. James 1:17 says that "every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights." How can we convey this idea of where the gift is coming from when we are giving to help others?
9. Will cash given with no strings, conditions, relationship, love or accountability accompanying it more likely or not produce a positive outcome in a person's life? Why or why not?

10. What is going to change in your life going forward because of this lesson? What are you going to start doing differently?