

How to Dump Failure and Regret as a Parent

Every father has had that moment when he is overwhelmed with the excitement of being a father. In that moment, you very likely joined the countless numbers of other fathers as we squelched our fears and said: *"I'm going to be the best dad. Ever."*

And then reality set in. We may have started off on the right foot, but we quickly failed. And the failures piled up.

- We broke promises.
- We were absent from their lives way too much.
- We got angry.
- We were too lenient when it came to _____.
- We were too strict when it came to _____.

The growing list of parenting mistakes raises a cloud of doubt. *I have not been a good father. I will never be a good father.*

Let me assure you: your story is not complete. You've made mistakes—you've had failures—as a father, but you are not a failure. To dismiss yourself as a failure is to dismiss the ability of God to work in your life. And to dismiss yourself as a failure is to dismiss the power of God to work in your child's life in spite of your mistakes.

So where does the doubt come from? It comes from focusing on the wrong benchmark in your life. It's good to have a standard for yourself, but make sure it's the right benchmark.

If you want a benchmark for what it means to be the best father ever, don't settle for any of these faulty examples:

- Your own father.
- The antithesis of your own father.
- Some fictional father we see in a Hallmark father.

Place yourself on this diagram:

The Total Failure You The Perfect Father

The father who totally missed the mark is at one end. The perfect father who's never messed up (who we know really doesn't exist except in God the Father) is at the other end of the spectrum. And you're somewhere in the middle.

"You've got that wrong. I'm that father who is on the extreme left. I'm the total foul-up."

OK, so you may not be anywhere near the idealistic perfect father, but by acknowledging your own failures, admitting

you need help, apologizing to your child, and confessing to God, you have moved a great distance from the other end of the spectrum.

This may sound odd, but don't resolve to be the ideal perfect father. That is placing an incredibly unrealistic demand on yourself. You'll only frustrate yourself and get discouraged. Instead make God's standard your *goal*. You won't hit the goal every time, but just keep aiming for the standard of Christlikeness in your parenting. Michael Jordan missed as many shots as he made (his career field goal percentage was 49.7), but he is still considered the greatest player in the game. Keep aiming for the goal.

Look at that diagram again. In particular, look at that gap between you and the ideal perfect father. Let's be honest, you'll never close that gap. As you grow in your walk with Christ and deepen your relationship with your child, you can certainly lessen that gap, but you'll never fully arrive this side of heaven. And you'll still stumble on occasion.

But that gap between you and The Perfect Father does not mean you have failed your child. Or that your child will not grow, develop, and succeed as he should. That gap is not an empty gap.

Jesus stands in the gap.

You may see the gaps in your own life, but God is with you. He steps in with grace. God says to you what He said to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

- When Satan wants to remind you of your past failures, God's grace reminds you that you are free of the past.
- When you fall, God's grace picks you and puts you back on the path—His path.

But God's grace is not just at work in your life; His grace is also at work in your child's life.

- God's grace will help your child forgive any hurts.
- God's grace can overcome any stumbling blocks your failures may have introduced into your child's life.
- God's grace will lead your child to see how God is at work in Your life.

Your story is not finished yet. And neither is your child's.

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect" (1 Cor. 15:10).