

Life Isn't Fair

My ten-year-old is exactly like I was: he's a Worrier. I'm convinced this is 100% our fault as parents, between genetics and the fact that we try not to shield our kids from the realities of life.

I had a charmed childhood. The part of my day I despised most was chores and homework. I was 8 when my grandma succumbed to cancer and my worrying began. Safe to say less than 5% of my worries were actually worth worrying about. But back then, I remember the future looming before me. Standing on the edge of what little I'd experienced and known, looking into a black hole, expecting to fall.

So when my son had his sad face on and asked me to stay and talk to him before he went to bed, I sat.

"What's up? Why the face?" Bullying? Did he get a detention? Did he do poorly on a test?

"The kids in my class. They have everything! It makes me feel like we have nothing!"

"Like what? What do they have?"

"The latest version of iPhone." Last I saw, these were running about \$700.

"Is that something you want?"

"No. I just don't understand. They get everything without having to earn it. They just GET IT because they want it."

"Kiddo, everything we buy comes with a cost."

"I know."

"No, not a money-cost. How are these kids doing in school?"

"Bad. They never turn in their homework and they can't hardly read a paragraph! Andrew and I always have to finish their paragraphs for them." This makes me like Andrew even more. Mental note to call his mother for more playdates. "They can't hardly speak properly, either."

"That's the cost I'm talking about. When you're in front of a screen all day, unless they're reading from it, they're going to suffer in school."

"But they still GET EVERYTHING! And they don't have to earn it! It makes me feel like I'm doing something WRONG." Oh boy.

"Well, kiddo, the world isn't a fair place."

"Well, it should be!" His fervor made me laugh.

"I agree!! It should be fair! But it's not. Bad things still happen to good people."

"Why?" This one took me a moment to find the answer to. I took a deep breath.

"Sometimes it's to teach us something we need to know in order to move on. Other times it's a shot across the bow."

"What does that mean?"

“Meaning, sometimes God is trying to warn us. Like [when Joe’s dog] Maverick [was killed by the mountain lion when they were chukar hunting]. I felt like that was a warning to us to be more careful when we’re hunting. Especially when you and Gaven are out there with the guys. Joe lost his dog, but things could have been so much worse. It could have been Joe.

“So,” I continued, “your dad is going to change how he hunts when you’re with him. We don’t want anything bad to happen to you.”

“Do you think Joe will ever get another dog?” Lighter question than I was anticipating, but ok...

“I hope so. He needs to. He loves having them, but he lets worrying about losing them keep him from getting another one. I hope Daddy is able to talk him into it.”

He brought the conversation back to the matter-at-hand. Must be weighing pretty heavily on his mind.

“I just feel so bad.”

“Because?”

“Because I feel like I’m doing something wrong because I don’t get to go on vacations for a month to Florida or have the best gaming system” (He has no gaming system.) “and I do my homework and I get good grades and still don’t get to do any of those things!”

“Vacations are fun. Maybe your dad and I can make a point to go on more. Where would you want to go?”

“Dan* just got back from Disneyworld and spent a bunch of time at a Yeti museum. It had a bunch of Big Foot stuff in there like casts of footprints and pictures and stuff!”

“Well now that is cool! I wouldn’t mind seeing that kind of stuff. Disneyworld, not so much.”

“Yeah, I don’t want to go to Disneyworld anymore.”

“Even Lego Land?”

“Maybe Lego Land. I’d rather go to this place in Ontario that has awesome salmon fly fishing!”

“Well, talk to your dad about it. He’s putting in for tags this week. And I’m sure you’ll get to go on whatever he draws for that. But, dude, the bottom line is your dad and I don’t make the kind of money we would make if we worked at the prison. A lot of the kids you go to school with have parents who work there and can afford to do and buy much more. But everything you buy comes at a cost, both monetary and not. I could pick up another job, but it wouldn’t have the flexibility of the one I have now. And then I wouldn’t be able to pick you or your sister up from school. Or go on walks with you. I like our walks. Or be at your baseball games. I LOVE being the crazy mom at your baseball games!!” He smiled at this. I cheer too long and too loud to go unnoticed.

“So I could get another job to afford vacations, but the cost is that I couldn’t be there for you. Which would you prefer?”

“I’d rather have you pick me up and be at my games.”

"I thought so. For some people, what they have is never enough. It's always more, More, MORE! They can't ever be content -or grateful- with what they have. It's a vicious cycle. You don't need STUFF. You have everything you need right HERE." I put my hand on his heart. "And HERE." I put my hand on his head. "You're a good kid. Are you proud of who you are?"

He looked confused.

"I'm going to give you the answer that took me 40 years to figure out. Are you ready?"

He waited expectantly.

"If you're proud of every decision you make and would do it again, then it doesn't matter what you have or what other people think of you. YOU ARE ENOUGH. When I was a kid I always wanted to be loved and appreciated for who I was, not who everyone else wanted me to be. I never felt like BEING ME was ENOUGH. Now that doesn't mean you have everything you need forever. You have what you are supposed to have to be who you need to be now, today. But you are still becoming the person you need to be. You need to continue to learn and grow and make the hard decisions and do what you can with what you have. You need to use your gifts and talents to be who God needs you to be. God has big plans for you and your sister. Your dad and I are trying to teach you what we know is good and right and true so you can make the right choices. But if you're proud of every decision, every action, and believe you couldn't have done more or better, then you've done your best and everything else will fall away.

"Does that make sense?"

"I guess."

"So. What things are you proud of?" I could see his mind spinning. I probably went too deep on this one. "How about your baseball game last night? Did you do your best?"

"Yes."

"OK then. I thought you pitched very well, by the way. And you're the best catcher we have. What else are you proud of? What about the books you're reading? Are you proud you were able to finish *Prince Caspian?*" (Chronicles of Narnia)

"Yeah."

"Have you started *The Old Man and The Sea* yet?" He requested this book after he got into fly fishing this past winter with his dad.

"Yeah."

"Well, I'm proud of you for reading these books. These aren't easy books. What about your grades?"

"My Science grade sucks."

"Well, science being what it is since COVID, I get it." The kids aren't allowed to perform experiments because of having to touch the same instruments to perform the experiments. The kids watch videos on Science and take tests on the videos. He loved Science until this year. "But you're getting 100% in math!"

“But I didn’t turn in that one assignment and that dropped my grade to a B+!”

“I know. Seems like that assignment was weighted heavier than others... But you’re getting 100% on everything else and as long as you don’t forget any more assignments, you’ll have it back to an A by the end of the trimester.

“The bottom line is as long as you are proud of your decisions, then everything else doesn’t matter because you’ve done your best.”

“But what if I make a mistake?”

“Dude, mistakes are normal. It’s how we learn. Think about it; how do you learn the best: from me telling you or from making a mistake?”

“Making mistakes.”

“Unfortunately, yes. And that’s normal. You just have to listen to your heart. God will help you make the right decisions. You just need to make sure your mistakes aren’t so big that they can’t be overcome. AND you need to live long enough to do what God needs you to do!! So when I tell you to WEAR YOUR HELMET, WEAR YOUR HELMET when you’re on your motorcycle!” He smiled.

“Does this mean I can ride my motorcycle tomorrow?” Well played...

“No. You have baseball practice. And if you break anything this baseball season, your dad isn’t going to appreciate coaching a baseball team without his SON on it!”

“Those kids just seem so *happy*...” We looped back around again.

“Bud, just because they SEEM happy doesn’t mean they are. Can I explain a theory I’ve been working with for years? I was very frustrated when I saw people with so much more than me. But I changed my perspective when I started to pay attention a little better. All the money in the world can’t keep you from getting cancer. Or keep everyone you love healthy. Or even keep people from dying. We all suffer, just different things at different times. My theory is this: each person has the same number and intensity of bad things happen to them, regardless of how much they have. It’s what we do with what we have and how we handle the bad. Do we learn and grow from it?

“Having THINGS doesn’t keep bad things from happening to you. And the things that matter the most AREN’T **THINGS**. So while other people who have more STUFF than we do seem happier, we have no idea what’s going on at their house. Or what they’ve lost. Or what they wish they had.” This one seemed harder for him to grasp.

“But they LOOK so HAPPY!”

“You’re right. But just because that’s how they look doesn’t mean that’s how they FEEL. When I was younger, the kids who had the most stuff came from broken families.”

“What does that mean?”

“Homes where the parents are divorced. The parents would feel guilty and spoil their kids to make up for not being there for them as much to teach them the important things. And it became apparent in

the kids' attitudes. They thought they didn't have to do anything to get anything. But for all the STUFF they had, they were jealous of ME."

"Why?"

"Because of my family. My parents stayed married and together in the same house. And I had cousins and aunts and uncles right down the road."

"The kids at school think you bought me my Oakleys." This was a cause of contention in our household. My son wanted Oakleys for fishing because Joe had them. They were polarized and he could see in the water with them. I didn't want to let him get them because up to this point, he hasn't shown that much responsibility in taking care of his things. Daddy caved and purchased them, and my son paid him the money out of his paracord bracelet money-making venture he undertook a few months ago. (I had a lemonade stand at his age. He taught himself the complex braids and sold paracord to everyone we know.)

"Ok...?" I wasn't sure where he was going with all of this.

"When I told them you didn't buy them for me, that I bought them with my own money, they didn't believe me!"

"So, what did you want to have happen here instead?"

"I want them to know I bought them with my own money! That I didn't just get them because I wanted them! That I earned them!"

"Well, bud, you can't control what other people believe. All you can do is be a good example. They're watching you."

"No, they're not! They don't care what I do!"

"Trust me, they are. I bet if you just paid a little more attention, you'd see it. The best thing you can do is be a good example. Maybe they'll pick up a thing or two from you. You're a good kid. I was watching a movie this past weekend, 'Iron Lady'. It's about the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher." I had to Google the quote, but roughly paraphrased it for him:

"Guard your thoughts, for they become your words. Guard your words, for they become your actions. Guard your actions, for they become your habits. Guard your habits, for they forge your character. Guard your character, for it determines your future."

"You're a good kid. You have everything you need HERE," Head. "and HERE." Heart. "Make good decisions, be proud of yourself, do your best and then it won't matter what the world thinks. Also, get to sleep. Sleep is important and it's late." He turned on his side and I hugged him. I walked toward the door and stopped at the door frame.

"Hey, Kiddo?" He lifted his head toward me. "I love you."

"Love you too, Mom."

*Name has been changed.