

Creating Come-Back Kids

What I'm learning about resiliency....

Growing up, my neighbor had an unusual toy. Shaped like an elongated egg and standing about four feet high, it was the blow-up image of a clown. Its purpose was to take punches, bounce back, and resume position. Neighborhood kids would try to knock it down again and again, but it'd never stay down for long. It just kept popping back up, smiling all the while.

The audacity of that thing amazed me. Nothing could keep it down. No matter how hard the punch or how large the opponent, Bozo bounced back and held his ground; giving me my first lesson in resilience.

That childhood memory encourages me when life throws its hard punches my way. I've certainly been knocked down more than once. What I've realized is that the hard knocks don't define me. Rather, it's my response to the tough times that determines who I am.

When the crisis comes I can choose to let it keep me down; losing ground and transferring a spirit of defeat to anyone watching. Or I can take the high road. I can choose to bounce back, learn something from the situation, and pass on a spirit of resiliency to those within my circle of influence.

I was given an opportunity to put this principle into practice when I became pregnant with my third child. Through ultrasound, my husband and I learned that our daughter Sarah would be born with Down syndrome and a dangerous heart defect. That diagnosis knocked the wind right out of me and left me standing at a crossroad.

I had no control over my daughter's diagnosis, but I was in complete control of my reactions and my next course of action. Would I choose to hold on to the blessings God surely had in store somewhere down the road, or should I curse the situation and refuse to get back up again? The choice was mine.

One thing I knew for sure; my older children were standing by my side at that intersection, taking their cues from me. If I chose to walk down the road called Bitterness I'd be bringing along a few traveling companions.

I'd been teaching my children to trust God and His plans for our family since they were born. It was time to put my words into action. It was time to show the next generation what trusting God looks like.

We as a family locked arms and moved forward. We prayed together throughout the rest of that pregnancy. We held tight to God and to one another during Sarah's open heart surgery at six weeks of age and three month stay in intensive care. We remembered God's promises as we dealt with the daily challenges that came with Sarah's special needs. With each new day we determined to love God and each other, and we did it out loud.

We talked to each other. Rather than risk wallowing in confusing thoughts or misconceptions, my husband and I explained things to our children. We were honest with them, and we encouraged them to share their own questions and concerns with us. Deposits of truth were made through each conversation, and lessons in handling adversity were walked out one step at a time.

I'm not sure that my husband and I fully recognized what we were doing while we were doing it. Now that Sarah's healthy and home, we see that God used our response to some pretty shaky circumstances to teach our

whole family how to bounce back. While our older children were watching us handle this life changing experience, God was creating come-back kids.

God has called us as adults to do our part in raising up a generation of overcomers. While we can tell our children to keep on keepin' on despite various setbacks, true equipping happens as we show them how through our own reactions to disappointment.

Each day brings with it new opportunities to impress upon our children the blessings of bouncing back. The way we do that is by:

- Praying together. Together we talk to God. Not just when we need something, but throughout our daily routine at home and while we're out in the world; from the time we get up in the morning until we go to bed at night (see Deuteronomy 6:7). Our kids are seeing that God is a Person they can go to at all hours and in every situation. They're comfortable asking God to help them up when they're down because they have an established relationship with Him.
- Reading the Bible together. Each time we read Scripture, we understand better who God is and what He does. Our children are learning that God hears them (Psalm 55:17), cares about them (1Peter 5:7), and is fully able to help them bounce back even if the situation seems impossible (Matthew 19:26). Stories like that of Paul and Silas – who sang songs of praise to God after being beaten and imprisoned – provide real-life examples of resilience.
- Walking the walk hand in hand. Our kids are watching our every move. What we say lays a foundation; what we do builds character. Our continual prayer is that God would strengthen our faith so that our children have role models worth following. Knowing that our responses to day to day events will bring about spiritual life or death, we choose life so

that our children may live life to the full; loving God, listening to His voice, and holding fast to Him (see Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

The tough times may be able to knock us down for a while, but God is always able to lift us back up. In the process, He's creating a family full of come-back kids.

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