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MAKING OUR KIDS CHAMPIONS

george andrews

*All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful;
yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields
the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*

—Heb. 12:11, NASB

If there is one character trait that I believe is important for my children to learn, it is persevering through trials and disappointments. We all face trials sooner or later in life, and when they hit, if we're not prepared, they can cause us to question our faith and our relationship with God.

Personally, it took me a long time to understand how God can love me but still allow hardship to come my way. Though there were many reasons for my lack of understanding, this was primarily because I did not see those difficulties from God's point of view—until a winter day in 1999.

My oldest son, then in sixth grade, was a member of a local basketball team. It was the first round of the playoffs, and our whole family got up early and drove to a neighboring town to cheer on the team. My son wasn't a starter, but he

always played at least half of the game. As I sized up the other team from the stands, I thought to myself, *This should be a team we can beat*, and I presumed my son would get a lot of playing time that day.

The game started, and as the first quarter ended, we were in the lead as I expected. My son wasn't in the game, but that's the way it had been all year. We got to halftime, and my son still wasn't playing. By then I could feel my attitude changing. *Hey, what's the deal? Everyone else has played, so why not my son?* By the end of the third quarter, he still wasn't in the game. By this time I was boiling inside. Remember this is sixth-grade basketball.

I hate to say it, but with two minutes to play in the fourth quarter, I was rooting for the other team. We won the game, but my son didn't play at all. I thought to myself, *How can the coach be so callous? What am I going to say to my son to encourage him?* There were only eight players on the team and he sat next to the coach the entire game. There's no way the coach forgot about him.

As I sat in the stands after the game, God tapped me on the shoulder, and I started to pray. *God, what are you trying to teach my son? What are you trying to teach me?* There were plenty of tears shed on the way home, but eventually I learned something about the very heart of God.

There was my son sitting on the bench the whole game. He couldn't perform for me at all. The coach wouldn't put

him in, but as the game went on, my love for him grew more and more. He became so vulnerable sitting there next to the coach. In those moments, God taught me that His love for me isn't based on my performance. He loves me because I am His son. My son learned that life doesn't always go the way you want; it's what you do with those moments that matters. How you respond to disappointments is what determines your character. He showed growth in his character that day as he shot baskets at home to get ready for the next game. He was on his way to understanding that God allows trials, not because He doesn't love us but because He wants us to grow in our relationship with Him and trust Him no matter what.

In our performance-driven society, it is easy to forget that God first loved us. Give your children big hugs and tell them how much you love them.

Prayer: *Dear Father, thank you for giving us a love we do not have to earn.*

Thought for the Day: Since we cannot see what God can see, we must learn to trust His wisdom and love. Then we can teach our children by our example.