

A Challenging Life-Lesson From Champion Runner Wilma Rudolph

I pulled my van up next to the curb, and one little bedraggled second-grader dragged her book bag and long-ago-cast-off jacket into the car.

“Hey sweet girl! How was your day?”

Every afternoon begins the same. I ask the same three questions:

- Did anything exciting happen today?
- Did anything frustrating happen today?
- Did anything funny happen today?

But on this day, I didn’t get past question one. Excited brown eyes found mine in the rearview mirror.

“Mama! Something very exciting happened today. I got nine laps on my pacer! I did it, Mama! I did it!”

If you aren’t the parent of a young one, you may not be familiar with the PACER test in Physical Education. But it is an aerobic activity test where the kids run laps for an allotted amount of time. They are challenged to increase the laps they run each month they take it. Grace, bless her heart, didn’t get the fast-running gene. And most every time she has taken the PACER, she has come home defeated.

“I’m too fat.”

“I’m too slow.”

“Everyone is faster than me.”

“I’ll never get it.”

Those are just a few of the heart-wrenching statements my child has made after the test in the past couple of years since starting elementary school. We've tried running at home to help her endurance.

My husband, who ran track in high school, tried teaching her how to find her cadence while running. But that's hard to explain to an 8-year-old. And instead of helping, it completely messed up last month's test. She came home to tell us she only got five laps because she was trying to make a beat with her breath. After asking her to show me what she did, she created a bee-bop type beat while breathing. And I imagined how frustrated she must have felt while trying to run while she made a "fresh beat" with her breath.

But today, she told me, "I got it, Mama! I figured out that rhythm with my feet like Daddy said, and it worked!"

I grinned at her in the rearview mirror and gushed about how proud I was of her for not giving up.

"I think maybe my morning work helped me, too," Grace said. "We read a paragraph about Wilma Rudolph today. And, Mama, she was a real fast runner. And she said the secret to doing something great in life is to learn how to lose. And if you can learn to pick yourself back up after a crushing defeat, one day you will be a victorious champion."

"I think I learned from all those times I lost, so today I had victory. I didn't give up."

Tears pricked my eyes, and I steadied my breath so I wouldn't start the ugly cry.

"That's right, Grace. We can never give up."

For the many times as a parent when you feel like you've fallen on your face, pick yourself back up again. Don't give up. The secret to doing anything great in life is to learn how

to lose. And as moms and dads, we will have many opportunities to lose and to help our children accept loss. Amid your crushing defeat, don't forget to get up again. One day, you will be a victorious champion:

"My brothers, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations, knowing that the trying of your faith develops patience. But let patience perfect its work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1;2-4). {eo}

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