

Finding the Lesson in Losing It



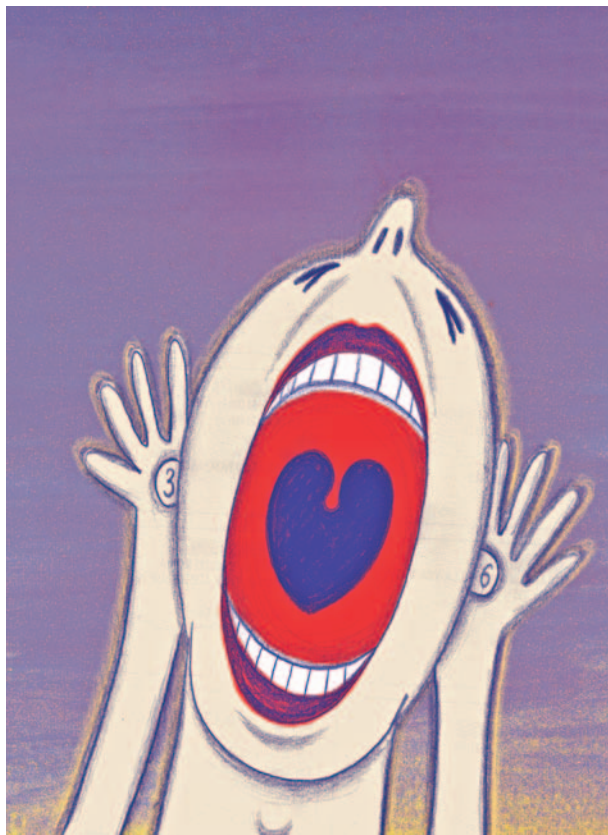
BY AMY STARR REDWINE

Well, it's official. I am not the parent I thought I would be. Since I became the mother of two children four months ago, I have slept for longer than three hours at a time exactly twice, lost my temper completely with two-and-a-half-year-old Sarah more times than I wish to count, felt my muscles atrophy from lack of exercise, and consumed way more coffee than a nursing mother should. (In my defense, I only drink decaf!)

Suffice it to say that my mind and body are far from sound.

Although I feel more deeply exhausted than ever before, I also have a newfound awareness of my humanity. No doubt Sarah does too. I have surprised and disturbed us both by how unexpectedly and ferociously my anger can surface. Whenever this happens, I drown in guilt for the next few hours or days, certain that I have irrevocably damaged my precious daughter's spirit.

Fortunately, I also have a newfound awareness of Sarah's resiliency. "You're all better, Mommy," she says five minutes after I yelled at her. "You're fine now." No, usually I'm not. I'm horrified by the anger I just felt toward the human being whose ability to simply exist inspired a deeper love in me than I had ever known. But she's fine. Whatever damage I just inflicted is well-disguised under her thoroughly in-the-moment experience of life.



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Together on the Path

Despite the increasing volatility between us, I feel as though Sarah and I have deepened our relationship in these past few months. I am no longer perfect, loving, happy Mommy ("I like you when you're smiling," she said to me recently), and she is no longer simply my beautiful, brilliant daughter who could do no wrong ("I like you when you're sleeping," I wanted to reply). But that's a good thing. We now have the genuine relationship of human beings together on the path to becoming who God created us to be. Sarah knows me better than she did a year ago and I know her better—and I know myself better, too, because of our interactions—the good, the bad and the ugly.

Having a sound mind and body is ultimately more than just eating well, exercising and practicing spiritual disciplines. As parents, one of the most important ways to model good health to our children is to let them see the full range of human emotions. After all, as disciples of Jesus, we follow one who expressed intense anger at times, as well as deep grief. I know Sarah has been surprised by the depth of emotion she feels and I hope to help her accept these emotions and learn to express them appropriately—even when this means I will have to talk to her about not doing what Mommy just did.

What a gift we have as parents to shape our children and make positive changes in ourselves! What an opportunity we have for accepting God's love and grace as we learn to forgive ourselves and our children for less than desirable (but quite normal) behaviors! Each day is a new chance to follow Jesus and stick to the path God has placed us on—the path to becoming more physically, emotionally and spiritually sound.

Amy Starr Redwine is the part-time solo pastor of Firestone Park Presbyterian Church in Akron, Ohio. She and her husband strive daily to faithfully parent their three-year-old daughter and infant son.