Dealing with Disappointment

There seemed to be a gigantic collective gasp at the 2016 Rio Olympics when American gymnast Simone Biles bobbled on the balance beam and had to steady herself with her hands. Instantly, the girl expected to win five gold medals lost the gold, even before finishing her otherwise excellent routine. She still won a bronze, but Simone (and the entire media machine) knew she was capable of a gold.

How disappointing!

Simone handled her letdown with grace and realism, limiting her disappointment to the one missed skill rather than globalizing—as we so often do—by saying things like, “I am such an idiot! I can’t *believe* I did that!” Then, quickly moving beyond her setback, she delivered an almost perfect floor exercise the next day, earning her fourth gold medal and propelling her into gymnastics history.

What is the wise, biblical, God-honoring way to handle disappointment?

Fortunately, we have lots of examples of people in the Bible who wrestled with disappointment:

- Women carrying the pain of years and years of infertility (measured month by month)—Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Samson’s mother, the Shunammite woman, Elizabeth.
- Joseph served for years with faithfulness and integrity inside a prison for a crime he did not commit; after correctly interpreting the dreams of fellow prisoners with access to the pharaoh, his hopes of being freed were dashed when the cupbearer forgot him.
- David was anointed as future king, but the years dragged on as he was chased by a mentally ill king consumed by paranoia.
- The Psalmists anguished numerous times: “How long, O Lord?”

Solomon, with his wisdom super-power, wrote in Proverbs that “hope deferred makes the heart sick” (Prov. 13:12). The distance between our hopes/expectations and reality—“hope deferred”—constitutes disappointment.

The way to handle disappointment doesn’t change, because ***the key is re-focusing on God***, and He doesn’t change. He is good, and He is faithful, all the time. No matter what.

I have found two “power tools” for dealing with the pain of

when our hopes and expectations are deferred or, worse, obliterated.

First, take a firm hold on the comforting truth of the sovereignty of God: ***a good and loving God is in control***.
He permits nothing to touch our lives without His express permission, with a perfect purpose. If God allows disappointment to darken our days, it is His good gift of a "something better" later. (Please see my post "Rejection is Protection.") Disappointment may be preparation for something in the future. It may be a just-right tool for producing Christlikeness—spiritual maturity—in us. It may prevent something bad we couldn't possibly foresee.

The other power tool is **God's command to give thanks** *for* all things (Ephesians 5:20), *in* all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18). We don't have to *feel* goose-bumpy, warm-and-fuzzy thankful; giving thanks is a choice of the will. When we give thanks for something God has chosen to allow into our lives, we are acknowledging He is Lord, that He is "large and in charge." We are acknowledging that He has the right to allow disappointment to cast its shadow on our lives, and it keeps us connected rightly to our Creator, as His creature. "Lord, I thank You for allowing this deep disappointment into my life, even though I don't understand how You could possibly redeem it and make it okay." That's what trust looks like, and it pleases the Lord. It also helps us maintain an eternal perspective, that everything—*everything*—is part of a much bigger picture we cannot see.

Olympic athletes aren't the only ones to encounter disappointment. It is inevitable in a fallen world. How will *you* respond?

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