

Showing Up

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“I just don’t feel prepared!” my seven-year old explained as I tucked the pink patchwork comforter from my own childhood around her chin. Such adult phrases emerge at the most unexpected moments.

She was bargaining to skip her first basketball game scheduled for the next afternoon. My daughter tried to put on a brave face, but tears threatened to spill down her cheeks.

And the truth was, she wasn’t prepared. She had never even touched a basketball before the two short practices in the preceding week; she wasn’t ready for a three-on-three game. She didn’t know the basic rules of play, let alone have developed skills.

“She’s not wrong,” I said to my husband as I climbed into our bed later that night. “It’s going to be painful to watch. There’s no way this doesn’t end up a disaster,” I fretted as I turned over to go to sleep.

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I waited anxiously in the pickup loop after school. The sun was blindingly bright, reflecting off the banks of snow from the weekend’s storm. I didn’t know what my daughter’s state of mind

would be. But she cheerfully hopped in the car, pulled the buckle across her shoulder. She gobbled down the granola bar I had brought for fortification on the short drive over to the other school’s gym.

“I’m so proud of you,” I said, trying to catch her eye in my rearview mirror. “It’s great you are trying something new, and it’s just supposed to be about having fun today.” She rolled her eyes at me, but I saw the corners of her mouth tugging up toward a smile.

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Nothing prepares you for having “your heart walk around outside your body,” as some describe parenthood. I was tempted to let my daughter skip the game. I, too, like to be prepared for everything. To do my best; to do it right. I want to be successful.

But the truth is, nothing prepares you for the demands of discipleship. There’s no way to be ready to walk into a hospital room and hold someone’s hand as they tell you of the lung cancer diagnosis they just received. There’s no rulebook on how to engage the adult daughter who puts her life on hold for three months to move out of state and provide hands-on

care so her mother can die in her own home.

Nothing prepares you for a friend to drop by the office and share through tears how blindsided she is by her husband’s announcement that he’s done with their decades-long marriage. Or for walking with a colleague just a few years away from retirement who has had his employment terminated without notice.

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Sandwiched between me and her dad that evening, my daughter settled in to watch the shaky video footage of her game captured on my cell phone. There were smiles as she relived the highlights. “It was just so ridiculous,” she giggled to her dad. “I kept trying to make a basket but the ball would bounce off the rim. And when I did a chest pass, Shaelynn wasn’t looking and I hit her in the face! Coach Jess had told us we had to always be ready.”

Turns out the best way for second graders to learn basketball is to actually try playing basketball. There was a lot of traveling and double-dribbling and little to no defensive strategy, but they moved the ball up and down the court, passed to their teammates, shot the ball, and cheered each other on wildly.

And our faith is the same way. The best way to be a disciple of Jesus, to companion people in suffering, to demonstrate the love of Christ, is to show up; to actually be present with someone in their darkest moments. No excuses, because there is no perfect preparation. Just show up. Just be present with the skills and experiences you have, and then attend to the invitation and presence of the Spirit. Somehow, being there, bearing witness to the hard and holy, is enough.

With reading and baking for inspiration, **SHERAH-LEIGH GERBER** lives out her calling as mother and pastor in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley.



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