

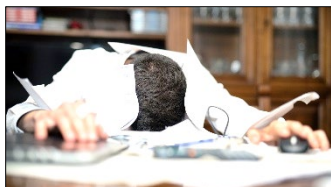


A Parent's Trap

Using Dead Ends to Jumpstart Love

May 24, 2026

Today we're learning how God uses *inescapable difficulty* to create *unshakable intimacy*. Cuz somehow, our *deepest trust*, *strongest bonds*, and *dearest friends* seem to be *forged* in our most *desperate* situations – which means all our *sticky* situations, *hopeless hurdles*, and *overwhelming obstacles* *might* be *God's* biggest *tools* for our greatest *growth*! But, *if so* – **do you feel trapped?**



I know I do! Things like unpaid bills, unfinished projects, unresolved arguments, and all my other unsettled issues feel like they're perpetually threatening as the unknown future closes in. And in the past, those thoughts produced panic attacks so bad I'd have to pull over while driving — and once, I even woke my wife in the middle of the night to have her drive me to the ER, convinced I was having a heart attack.



So when God led me to start preaching in front of you terrifying people, **I almost exploded every Sunday morning for years.** And as much as I liked the idea of pastoring, I was constantly confused why He didn't do both of us a favor and design me different or use a better option. Instead, it seemed like He deliberately put me in daunting situations to provoke my anxiety – which then convicted me for feeling more worry than trust!



C'mon! What kind of monster routinely exploits someone's worst fear by leading them into situations specifically designed to experience it? Well, a loving monster; AKA a good parent. Cuz **good parents want their kids to confront and conquer fear; not accommodate it!** Not because they enjoy watching the struggle, but because they know weakness isn't just uncomfortable – it can be deadly dangerous.



Cuz until kids see what they lack and who they need, they let themselves believe they're good to go on their own; but that's Lord of the Flies – where we all see **the illusion of maturity is a recipe for self-destruction.** So, loving parents protect us by helping us see our deficiencies ASAP!

And that should change how we hear the word *anxious*. Cuz *anxious* can mean *worried* or *eager*. **"I'm anxious about the future"** means filled with *dread* – but **"I'm anxious to see what happens"** means filled with *excitement*. Same word – different *relationship* to the *situation*. So, when we feel *weak* cuz we're at the *end* of our *abilities* – the *sooner* we see it as a *loving lesson*, the *sooner* our anxiety can *transform* from *fear* to *faith*. Which is why God loves leading *His kids* down *dead ends*!

[Remember the Red Sea?] As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were *terrified* and cried out to the LORD ... Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. **[Be excited!]** Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today... The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." – Exodus 14:10-14 NIV



And we all know what happened next – *after Israel admitted they were out of options*, they were finally able to see that **true strength required surrender to a superior Savior**. And the funny part was, they weren't trapped cuz they ignored God – **they were trapped cuz they followed God**. Cuz like we said, to protect us from ourselves, a loving Father needs us to admit our weakness – but once we do, He loves teaming up to crush all adversity and undermine all fear! That's what "Red Sea Moments" are all about – bringing us to the end of ourselves to teach **our only real need is God's true love!** So, don't worry – be happy!

[Cuz] There is *no fear* in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with *punishment*. [But *love has to do with empowerment*. So,] The one who fears is not made perfect in love. – 1 John 4:18 NIV

Until we understand the depths of God's perfect love, we'll naturally see *dead-end-setups* as attacks from an enemy – but the truth is, **traps can be hostile or helpful!** And when God led Israel into their Red Sea dead end – *it was a trap* – but **it was a trap for Israel's two biggest enemies: Egypt and anxiety**. Cuz after being physically free of Egypt, Israel was still emotionally enslaved by the fear of an unknown future without Egypt.

[So before God parts the sea, Israel reveals how their heart was the real enemy, saying] It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert! – Exodus 14:12 NIV

And this theme continues throughout the Bible to remind us the **biggest threat to our freedom is internal, not external**. So God wasn't just getting Israel out of Egypt, He was getting Egypt out of Israel! He was using a hopeless situation to show how His limitless love could liberate a fearful heart! Cuz until we trust His love enough to stop worrying about our situations – three fatal flaws will continue to feed our fear enough to keep it in control: **self-sufficiency, insecurity, and immaturity**. So God lovingly uses Red Sea dead ends in all our lives to catch and kill all three threats to our heart.



Cuz loving parents know **dead ends trap self-sufficiency**. Like we keep saying – it's dangerous to believe that we can manage what we're not equipped to handle. But all us kids just can't quit buying the delusion. Cuz after kids watch mom and dad drive for a while, they start thinking, **"I can do that! Wheel. Pedals. Don't hit stuff. How hard can it be?"** And that was pretty much me as a teen – and it took quite a few traps before I admitted how helpless I really was. And my dad set them all the time by letting me constantly run my mouth to continually inflate my ego – and then proving how easily it could pop! Like the time I was riding in this 40 foot mobile clinic he used to drive across the country for work.

I don't remember what I said, but he quietly pulled off the freeway and told me to switch seats. So, being a hot-shot, I jumped in and pulled away. Then the sweat started. I thought I knew driving – but the size, blind spots, braking distance, turn radius, and the wobbling in the wind – I hoped it was still just sweat! And just like that, this hot-shot was happy to admit defeat and humbly switch seats! But later, I realized the lesson wasn't, **"Dad set me up to fail."** The lesson was, **"Dad let me discover my limits – while close enough to keep me safe."** That's a classic dad trap. And now I use them!

Cuz **loving parents let you feel *real weight to create caution before being crushed***. Cuz loving parents *know* that self-sufficiency can *destroy* their kids unless *their kids destroy self-sufficiency!*

[Cuz] *Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.* – Proverbs 16:18 NIV



But, in the same way *overestimating* our ability can lead to a *crushing* reality check, *underestimation* can foster even *more* fear. Cuz while *self-sufficiency* tells our heart, **“I don’t need help”** *insecurity* says, **“Even with help, I can’t”** But loving parents *also* know **dead ends trap insecurity**. And *that’s* vital cuz it doesn’t just deny *dependence* – **insecurity denies design**.

For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. – 2 Timothy 1:7 NIV

Dead ends may put a *healthy fear* into the *self-sufficient* to *humble* their heart – but *that’s* just to get *ourselves* off *God’s throne* so He can take control and grow the *faith in Him* – that *kills* the *fear of everything else*. But, until *we personally* crown *God as King* by following *Jesus as Lord* – *fear* will sit in *His* spot. And **when fear rules our heart, humility becomes insecurity**. So God sets traps to *depose fear* by *exposing lies*; cuz **humility isn’t admitting weakness, it’s making room for strength!**

[In fact,] I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. – Philippians 4:13 NKJ



So, **sometimes a loving Parent puts us in situations where backing out is harder than moving forward**, cuz He wants us to taste our *potential* and He *knows* **we’ll never discover strength we never have to use**. Which is why I’m *glad* God trapped me on an Alaskan fishing boat, where *insecurity wasn’t* an option – cuz I couldn’t *afford* to quit!

Sure, I *wanted* to – but they only *pay* to fly *one way* and you gotta make enough *money* to *fund* your fear before you can *give in to it*. So, I went to *work*. And *every* moment of work was *harder* than *every other job* this hot-shot ever had! But as I kept *grinding*, I discovered something I *never* would’ve learned if *escape* had been an *option*: I was tougher than I thought. Cuz **God built me with a way higher capacity than fear had told me**. In fact, I *now* felt like if I could do *this*, maybe I could do *anything!* But because the work was *hard* enough that I *barely survived* – I learned to be *confident without being cocky*; and that’s how God *traps insecurity* but *preserves humility*.

Just like Israel at the Red Sea; their first instinct is fear: **“Why did you bring us here to die? It would have been better to serve Egypt!”** That’s *insecurity* talking – but while *fear* was making them wish they could’ve *quit* – God was making them discover their potential power! Saying point-blank:

"Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. – Exodus 14:15 NKJ

Just imagine the response! **“Move on?! Into what? The sea? Nice plan! That’s impossible – unless You’re gonna move the sea!”** To which I imagine God would say, **“Exactly”** Cuz God *doesn’t* need *them* to know His plan, He wants them to *follow Him into it*. And *that’s* what want you to hear today: **Go forward**. Wherever you feel *trapped now* – it’s *your* Red Sea moment to follow God *into the sea!* Not cuz you’ve *conquered* your *anxiety* – but because you’re *anxious* to see *what God does next*.

[And if *that* feels *hard*, Jesus says] Look at the birds of the air ... your heavenly Father feeds them ... See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor – Matthew 6:26, 28 NIV

So, **don't think the end of your ability is the end of your story!** Look around, *everything has less control* than you – yet *somehow*, everything is *less worried* than you. Cuz *Christ* is just echoing the *same message as God's creation: you aren't holding the world together – your Father is.* And *that truth* is where *anxiousness* changes from *fear* to *faith*. Cuz if we *were responsible* for everything *alone*, we should worry about the *unknown!* But when we see that our *Father's* got the whole world in *His* hands; and everything's going *according to plan* – well, the *unknown* should produce *eagerness*.



Which leads to the *third* trap: **loving parents trap immaturity.** Cuz the goal isn't just *killing self-sufficiency* and *insecurity*; it's *growing maturity*. Cuz *immaturity* can't see how *dependence* and *responsibility* coexist. It swings between, **"I don't need anyone,"** and, **"I can't do anything."** But mature children learn both: **"I'm responsible,"** but **"I'm not alone."**

[And Paul says *that's* the *key* to our true identity] The Spirit you received does *not* make you *slaves*, so that you live in *fear* again; *rather*, the Spirit you received brought about your *adoption* ... [the *key difference* being] if we are *children*, then we are *heirs* – Romans 8:15-17 NIV



Get it, we're *neither* 100% in control *nor* 100% incapable; we're *royal heirs*. And as *kids*, we're supposed to *depend* on Dad for *direction* – but as *heirs*, we're supposed to take *responsibility* for Dad's *creation*. That's the balance – and **Christian maturity means being like God without trying to be God.** And it's harder than it sounds – but *easy to see!*



Cuz as each *dead end* traps and kills our *self-sufficiency* and *insecurity* – we organically grow an intimacy with the Lord *we follow* into the *sea*. And as He leads us *through* each *Red Sea* moment in our life, *Christ's character* becomes more *clear* so *our* character becomes more *like Christ!* Cuz every *dead end* isn't just a trap – **dead ends are furnaces where relationships are forged.** And the more we let *Christ's love* drive out *fear*, the more we mature into *His image* which modeled the perfect balance of *empowered responsibility* and *trusting dependency*. Cuz when the Father led Jesus to the cross's *dead end* and told Him to **"Go forward"**



[Jesus said] Not My will, but Yours be done." – Luke 22:41-42

That's perfect maturity: the *responsible dependence* of a *royal heir*.

Not self-sufficient. But *not* helpless. *That's* what allowed Jesus to confidently walk to the *cross*, so every kid *trapped by sin* could be *rescued by love*. Cuz **when God rules your heart, even the grave isn't a dead end**, it's just where *Christ's love* trapped *death* itself. So, **do you feel trapped?** You *should*. Cuz you are surrounded – by the *trustworthy* hands of a *loving Father*. The same way a *child* is held in a *hug* to keep them from walking into a *fire*. And *like a child*, until you let *Dad's love* drown out *your fear* – life will *always* feel more *hostile* than *helpful*. So, next time you *think* the walls *closing in*, remember **God isn't trying to destroy you – He's trying to destroy the enemies threatening you.** And to deliver you from *their* attack – **all you have to do is go forward – He'll part the sea!**