

Let's face it, we live in a world where everything doesn't go the way we want it to! Yeah, we like to plan and orchestrate how things should unfold to our advantage and to our pleasure...and you know what, it just so happens that we lose some of the battles that we fight! So, here's the question, *how do you handle losing?* More specifically, what is your mindset about losing battles or events or circumstances in your life? And here I don't mean a mindset naively based on positive thinking...I mean a mindset based on the realities of personal experience...adversarial developments...and an active God responding to your faith!

So, we're starting here with that basic, recurring phenomenon of life, that unhappy reality that happens sometime, somewhere to everyone—losing! But when it occurs in the lives of people who are poised with a mindset and a response to harvest well from unhappy events, the fruit that results can be awesome! Yep, it's all about this: *winning by losing*. That's right: winning by losing!

Actually, that “winning by losing” phrase is sometimes used in talking about politics or business—by people who analytically look back at key events that unfolded in bad ways. Yeah, we're looking for the “losing” that turns into “winning by losing.” Let's take a look at the real stories of several politicians, actually each one a very prominent leader of a powerful nation.

Ronald Reagan was a successful Governor of California in the 1970s and ran for the Republican nomination against a sitting President, Gerald Ford—but Reagan lost. Democrat nominee Jimmy Carter went on to defeat Gerald Ford for the Presidency—but Carter's weak responses to expensive Middle Eastern oil embargos, double-digit inflation, and Iran's holding American hostages for months...well, those ensuring events torpedoed Carter's aspirations to win a second term as the U.S. President.

But then who defeated Carter? *Ronald Reagan*. Yeah, Reagan had lost the Republican nomination four years earlier in 1976, but by 1980, Carter's bumbling of the Presidency was combined with Reagan's personal lessons learned and perseverance to create a strong victory. You see, by then, Reagan had been on the national stage for four years speaking and broadcasting his ideas to the American people. Yeah, Carter's stumbling, coupled with Reagan's loss and his astute use of the four years that followed—well, all that made Reagan a winner. But what if Reagan had won earlier...in 1976? No one knows, but the cratering of Carter fostered voters' desire to change leaders. And Reagan is now counted among the most beloved of U.S. Presidents. Reagan's initial loss in the national spotlight positioned him for his later win!

How about President Donald Trump? Americans disliked Trump after his first term as President enough to elect Joe Biden instead. But after four years of Biden, many decided they liked Trump again! Biden helped that along because of his own stumblings, like high inflation, open borders, and woke social policies. Now it's certainly not clear that Trump would have had a highly-regarded Presidency during the four years he was sidelined. But having experienced Biden's Democrat policies, many voters fostered a much different appreciation for Trump. So, Trump enjoyed a version of winning by losing: Americans lived out the miserable alternative to Trump and then voted for the Trump they had rejected four years earlier.

And how about a two-timer in this world, again in politics. Winston Churchill was considered all washed up in the early 1930s, losing the support he needed to become Britain's Prime Minister. Some said he was too aggressive...too impetuous...a war-monger. But after years of British leaders mishandling and even ignoring the threat of Hitler, Churchill was called to be England's wartime Prime Minister. And the rest is history: Churchill's actions of partnering with Roosevelt and the United States won World War 2.

But just when that victory was assured, British voters had tired of Churchill and voted in the socialist Clement Attlee as Prime Minister. But six years later, England's voters realized what they had lost in Churchill, considered the sad results of Attlee, and voted Churchill in a second time as Prime Minister!

You see, Reagan, Trump, and Churchill all knew that battles lost, no matter how important they may seem at the time, can help foster new victories, each in their own peculiar way. And *this is key*—they not only knew this, *they actually acted and they persevered*—with each leader waiting years to taste victory again.

In fact, *the losing at a particular point in time and under a particular set of circumstances may be a very vital factor in the later win*. That losing can result in fresh resolve, new character-building, hard lessons learned, an unfolding revelation of competitors' weaknesses, a changed landscape. But listen! For many, that kind of losing results in loss of resolve...character erosion...and the wrong lessons learned.

Now how about the business world? For *successful* business founders, winning by losing is absolutely routine, it often happens many times! Not one founder who is successful plans to fail...but winners respond to multiple failures by—you got it—a fresh resolve, the building of deeper character, the learning of more lessons, the gaining of revelation of competitors' strengths and weaknesses. But for *unsuccessful* founders of a business, losing is the end of it—they departed as a loser! *Unless, of course, they start another business and it isn't the end of it at all! Again, that's winning by losing!*

Winning by losing has a couple of profound examples in the Old Testament—and they're both very helpful. That's because they show that people aren't always the true author of their losing status. Take Joseph. He was sold into slavery by his brothers. He was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and jailed. He was forgotten for quite a time by the person who could foster his release from prison. But Joseph didn't lose his resolve...or character...or faith! With his response, he migrated from jailbird to the second most powerful person in mighty Egypt! And when called to help his family Israel—some the very folks who sold him into slavery—he responded as a winner...not as an embittered victim! But the way he won as a powerful leader was through his key losses and circumstances getting him there! *Winning by losing!*

And then there's Daniel living in the Southern Kingdom. Daniel was a very young man who really had nothing to do with his countrymen's rebelling against God again and again, rebellion that led to their destruction. So, Daniel was taken to work under a foreign king. But then he faithfully served God by serving at the top for several successive Middle Eastern empires, living as a decades-long example of winning by losing. That left his people then and us today pondering Daniel's life well-lived and his amazing prophecies.

Look, in most of our roles—in our families, in our workplaces—*we should never plan to lose*. But we should expect to embrace what the inevitable losses of life can offer us in fostering fresh resolve, building our character, and turning losses into key factors that bring the wins about that God intends for us all along.

But, wait, there is one surpassing circumstance *where we are supposed to lose*—in fact, Jesus Himself instructs us to lose for His sake! Matthew 16:25 (ESV) says this: “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” *Wow, that's the ultimate winning by losing!*

For sure, that puts quite a different light on winning by losing, doesn't it? That's right, there is this one very elegant, overriding case where we should actually focus on losing what we have and who we are to become a new creature in Christ, a born-again life of vitality—and with that, we end up winning by losing! That's right, we are taught by Jesus to specifically *choose to lose* in order to win!

You see, with Reagan and Trump and Churchill and many famous business founders—and even with Joseph and Daniel—the correct goal is to avoid losing. And think of it: those individuals became prominent in their spheres, very successful in the eyes of many. No problem there, that can be effective witness for Christ—there have been true God-followers throughout the centuries who follow hard after Christ and rightly become prominent and effective in the social structures of their time and place.

But, for two millennia, the vast majority of believers have been quite unknown during their lives—and were certainly forgotten 100 years after that! Now *that doesn't mean they didn't win*, because many were known by Christ and were very fruitful for His Kingdom! But often their choices of vocation or social status or wealth or fame were not respected or honored by others, including other Christians! Nevertheless, these believers didn't swerve from Jesus's instructions we just spoke of. Again, listen carefully to Christ: “...whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” So. Winning by losing. That's a very important tool in a believer's toolbox for a life truly lived for Christ. *Crazy good!*

