

Ability to handle failure lessens violence

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How well do you handle failure? Life is full of frustrating experiences, hard work that falls short, someone else winning the prize, good intentions that don't work out. It's easy to be happy and good natured when everything is going right. But one of the best tests of true character is how a person handles failure.

Often we blame another for our own short-comings. Take the Biblical story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-8). Both brothers made an offering to God. Abel's was accepted. Cain's was rejected. How did Cain handle failure? Not well. God told him to try again, improve his offering. Instead of listening to God and improving himself, Cain vented his frustration at failing in a fit of jealousy and killed Abel.

Did this indulgence in envy, frustration and revenge solve the problem? Not hardly. Cain was permanently banished.

How can we help friends and relatives (or ourselves) handle failure, lack of approval, frustration?

First, we can hold in our thought that they are capable. They have the ability to learn, improve and persist. What if Cain had been convinced that he was capable of improving his offering and would be successful if he persevered? Perhaps he would've gotten busy instead of getting angry.

Encouraging an individual that they have the ability to perform what is required if they will work at it, defuses much reactionary anger and frustration.

Second, through Jesus we are assured that all are the beloved sons and daughters of God are already approved by Him. There is a significant difference between feeling that we are not approved and must somehow earn approval and feeling that we are already loved unconditionally by our Father-Mother God. God is the Father and Mother of each one. He loves and approves all of His children. We don't have to earn God's approval.

We have it. We keep God's approval by acting in accordance with His commandments.

Because Cain was loved by God, God demanded more than mediocre effort from him. As God told him, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" The proof of God's love for us is that He has given us the ability to do right, knows we can do it, and insists that we fulfill this higher view of ourselves. We do what is right in order to continue being approved by God.

Third, let us realize that God wants each one of us to be successful. Another's success does not preclude our success. Jesus told a parable to illustrate that God rewards each one equally. (Matthew 20:1-16) It was about a man who hired workers for his vineyard. Early in the morning he contracted with several for a penny a day (considering 2,000 years of inflation, a good wage). Throughout the day, he hires additional laborers. In the evening, he pays each one a penny, regardless of when they were hired or how long they worked.

The original workmen were angry. They had worked longer and harder than the others. Certainly they deserved more. But the message of the parable was that God wants each worker to be successful and receive a good reward. No matter how much or little we think God is asking of us or of another, if we are persistent and faithful we will be successful.

If the first workers had quit in disgust, they would have lost their pay. We want to be alert that we do not forfeit our prize just at the point of success. Can't we have enough mercy in our hearts to be glad to everyone who is successful whether they had to work hard for it or not?

We can contribute to lessening crime and violence by instilling in ourselves and others a desire and ability to handle failure and frustration, rather than letting it control us. Let us recognize that we are loved and approved by God, that we are capable of improving, and that everyone can be successful if they will persist.

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