

Are the Good at a Disadvantage?

“When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time, they can seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall. Think of it – always.” – Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhi was one of the two most famous civil-rights titans of the 20th century. He inspired the other civil-rights giant, the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. Both men preached peaceful, non-aggressive protests. Interestingly, both were men of faith. Gandhi was a devout Hindu, while King was a Baptist Minister. Unfortunately, their religious faiths are usually ignored today.

Even today, these men serve as an inspiration for millions of people. Yet, despite their acclaim and prominence, a single person with a gun tragically ended each of their lives.

The apparent ease at which a solitary individual can exterminate an admired leader leads to all sorts of conspiracy theories. Consider JFK and Lee Harvey Oswald.

Perhaps we embrace such conspiracies because the obvious is just too difficult to acknowledge. It takes a tremendous amount of time, work, cooperation, and goodness to build and achieve anything positive or significant. Yet, one simple act of evil can end it all.

One hundred people might live together peacefully in a small, quiet town. Day after day goodness prevails, and there is peace, unity, and harmony. Yet, all it takes is one murderer, arsonist, or rapist to destroy the tranquility, and shatter the lives of the other 99 people. The town will never be the same.

It is discouraging, but evil seems to hold a tremendous advantage over good.

We witness it in politics where a strategy of demonization and smearing opponents is more politically advantageous than finding common ground. Such societal division captures the attention of the “if it bleeds, it leads,” media far more than political cooperation ever would.

We see it at work where coworkers accommodate, humor, and embrace the office troublemaker, in an attempt to pacify him. In comparison, the honest worker who minds his own business is often ignored. Few go out of their way for the person who is not threatening.

Viewers prefer television programs highlighting murder, torture, lying, and sexual assault over shows featuring a traditional, religious family who teaches their children values, favors honesty and cooperation, and attends religious services each weekend. Do such television families even exist today?

The message is unmistakable: goodness is boring, while badness is challenging and interesting.

And which behavior influences the boss more? The person who consistently works hard, is punctual, reliable, and competent may capture the boss's attention. However, let one jealous coworker repeatedly whisper lies about that person, and suddenly the boss becomes suspicious. The boss will believe the lies before trusting their own eyes.

Even relationships do not appear to favor the good. As I explained in "Are We Rewarding Goodness?", the most popular man or woman is often not a very good person.

In the end, most believe that goodness will conquer evil. Gandhi certainly believed that. So do those with deep religious convictions. Historically, when goodness wins, however, it comes at a terrible price.

The Bible recognizes Moses as the leader who freed the Hebrew slaves in Egypt. It was a glorious day when they marched out of the land of their oppressors. Yet, the Bible also states that the enslavement persisted for four centuries. How many generations of people were born, lived, and died as slaves without ever seeing that moment of freedom?

Good triumphed in World War II with the defeat of Germany and Japan. Tyrants fell, as Gandhi observed. Yet, the cost of the war in terms of human suffering was astounding, with the slaughter of tens of millions of people. In addition, many prisoners of war were cruelly tortured, subjected to medical experiments, brutally raped, or worked to death as slave laborers. They would refute any notion that good defeated evil. Evil lost that war, but its impact was profoundly destructive, and damaging to the entire world.

Complicating matters is our own inability to identify true evil. Since the beginning of time, people have supported those tyrants. Millions of admirers supported Hitler, Stalin, Mao, and more recently, Fidel Castro. Castro televised firing squad executions, jailed and tortured political prisoners, created a one-party police state, suppressed all freedom of speech, religion, the press, and the movement of his people. Incredibly, many still admired him.

While the bad wage tireless, relentless campaigns to impose their will on society, the good are generally reluctant to fight. They capitulate on nearly every issue – political, cultural, and even military. They appease the bad, praying their concessions will satisfy them, and that the bad will finally let them alone. However, each retreat only means more demands. This pattern has been repeated since the beginning of time.

Perhaps goodness will ultimately win the war against evil. However, considering our inclination to placate evil, underestimate evil, and our inability even to identify evil, I do not believe good will triumph without some type of supernatural intervention. Meanwhile, most of us will continue to suffer because of the acts of a few. Tragically, that is our human nature.

Previous article: Which Presidents Belong on a Second Mount Rushmore?