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Mentoring Letter 469 - It's So Hard

By Anthony Jennings

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." Martin Luther King, Jr.

Life's storms don't always announce themselves politely as they invade our lives. They are like the uninvited, unwanted guest who invites himself to the dinner table and devours all before him. Such was the experience this week of my friend Gary, a golf teaching professional for almost thirty years. Gary operates his golfing goods store at our local golf club, where he is well known and loved by all. Gary's storm took the shape of residents of the neighbouring township who, in the process of protesting their own frustrations with their living conditions, chose to invade the golf club, trash all before them and loot and destroy Gary's shop. Imagine the scene once police had ensured it was safe to back to the golf club. Imagine Gary's emotions as he stood in the aftermath of this devastating, unexpected storm. He was shattered!

Little did he know as he locked up his shop the night before that his life and that of his family would be shaken quite dramatically within a few hours. His livelihood had been seemingly snatched from him. His ability to put food on the table for his family had been seriously hampered. There was nothing left of the shop. What wasn't stolen was ripped down and destroyed. His business lay in tatters before him.

I phoned Gary the next day, which happened to be his birthday, to offer best wishes as well as whatever support I could give. I will not easily forget the emotion in his voice as he responded to my seemingly limp words of encouragement. With a trembling voice he said, "It's so hard!" What do you say to that? There isn't much that you can say at the time. I could empathize with Gary's sense of helplessness and grief, but I also knew he would get through this. Besides having a good support system in place, a strong, resourceful wife and a personal faith that trusted God with his future, Gary is a man of character. A few days later Gary started posting pictures of his shop, sparsely populated by salvaged products and a few untouched items. Open for business! I know he will make it.

I can't think of too many people who haven't at some stage of their lives uttered those same words. 'It's so hard!' Circumstances may change, but the sentiment remains the same. Sometimes it just feels like we are under constant threat; facing overwhelming pressure; navigating rivers full of crocodiles. How we respond to the situation has more impact on us than the event itself. Wellington, the British general and statesman, used to speak of what he called "three o'clock in the morning" courage. "What a man thinks, does, determines, when things are at their worst, either makes or mars his future. Bitter disappointment, broken trust, the fading of cherished hopes, precipitate a crisis for every soul thus tried; for the soul must choose hate, bitterness, and despair, or have the courage to choose the way of forgiveness and heroic endurance."

Actual storms hit our city again this week. For a few nights we had hours of torrential rain. The evidence was there to be seen as my golf mates and I walked onto the Humewood golf course on Saturday. Huge dams had formed on some of the fairways, the water table being too high to cope with the volume of water. On more than one occasion we had to fish golf balls from the murky pools after driving straight and true down the fairway. But that wasn't the memory I took away from the day. It was the sight of a sliver of sunlight breaking through the dull gray clouds, causing these pools, signs of the storm, to shimmer and gleam with warmth and hope. It was evidence again that storms don't last forever. The sun always appears again. If we rise above the storms, sunshine is never too far away and sunshine speaks of hope. I love the Jackson Browne Jr. quote where he says, "Let perseverance be your engine and hope your fuel."

I spent some time thinking about some of the personal storms I had encountered in years past, and realized that I had actually made it through all of them. Come to think of it, so have you. I realized too that facing storms has been one of the most valuable character shaping factors in my life. Resilience, described in the online dictionary as 'the capacity to cope with stress and

adversity', comes from believing in yourself and, at the same time, in something bigger than yourself. It involves behaviours, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone of us. I found a great article by Lolly Daskal that gave some insightful suggestions on how to develop resilience in us for the days when life is hard. Here are a few of them:

Firstly, master your emotions before they manage you. Resilient people have a positive outlook. They remind themselves that much of what they're facing is temporary, and that they've overcome setbacks before and can do it again. Secondly, stay tough. Resilient people face their fears and have an adaptive attitude that lets them focus on possibilities even in the worst of times.

Thirdly, stay prepared. Resilient people work on solving a problem rather than let themselves become paralyzed by negativity. They keep planning for the future, even when things aren't working out. Fourthly, keep growing. Courageous people know that life is not what happens to us, but what happens within us. Haruki Murakami said, "Once the storm is over, you won't remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. But one thing is certain. When you come out of the storm, you won't be the same person who walked in. That's what this storm's all about."

Fifth, pick yourself up, as many times as it takes. Resilient people have the capacity to adapt successfully and the tenacity to never, ever quit. Sixthly, reward the small wins. Resilient people believe in themselves. They work hard and take joy in the small wins that give them strength.

Finally, create your own meaning. Resilient people search for meaning. They develop a "personal why" that helps them have a clear sense of purpose, which helps them view setbacks from a broader perspective. When Jewish psychiatrist Victor Frankl was arrested by the Nazis in World War II, he was stripped of everything - property, family, possessions. Later, as Frankl reflected on his ordeal, he wrote in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, "There is nothing in the world that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions, as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one's life . . . 'He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.'"

So yes, the truth is that life can be hard, just as Gary found this week, but we can get through those tough days. We can make it! Let me end with the first few lines from the well-known and inspirational poem, *Don't Quit*. It says:

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high,
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit
Rest if you must, but don't you quit.