
E TU TANGATA 3 | WE SUCCEED TOGETHER

We've been spending the last few weeks talking about E tu Tangata - and looking at this cultural phenomenon of 'tall poppy syndrome'.

The term "Tall Poppy Syndrome" refers to a cultural attitude of disliking or distrusting people who are perceived as being too successful or arrogant. This can manifest in a tendency to criticize or cut down those who stand out or achieve great things, particularly in fields such as business, politics, or the arts.

But there's one last aspect of tall poppy we need to deal with - that your success is a threat to mine.

This is not unique to NZers -. Probably the clearest one, comes from the Philippines, although its found in and adapted in different cultures.

The story goes like this: Imagine a bucket full of crabs. As each crab tries to climb out of the bucket and escape, the other crabs grab onto it and pull it back down, preventing it from getting free. Despite the fact that they could all escape if they worked together, the crabs instead engage in a destructive cycle of pulling each other down and preventing anyone from getting ahead.

The metaphor of the crabs in the bucket is often used to describe situations in which people undermine each other out of envy, fear, or a sense of competition. It suggests that the desire to keep others from succeeding can be so strong that it can lead to a situation in which everyone ultimately loses.

The lesson of the crabs in the bucket is that cooperation and mutual support are essential for achieving success and happiness. By working together, we can help each other climb out of the bucket and reach our goals, rather than pulling each other down and perpetuating a cycle of negativity and stagnation.

Germans have a word for it - Schadenfreude is a German term that refers to the feeling of pleasure or satisfaction derived from someone else's misfortune or pain.

I think the story of the lost son might have something to contribute to our discussion: Lets read

Luke 15: 11-32; The Parable of the Lost Son

The story tells us there was a man who had two sons. The younger son came to his father and said, "Dad, give me my share of the inheritance now." So the father divided his property between his two sons.

The elder son's reaction to his brother's return highlights the danger of feeling threatened by the success of others. Despite his faithfulness to his father, the elder son becomes angry and resentful when his brother is welcomed back with open arms. He feels overlooked and unappreciated, and his jealousy blinds him to the joy that should come from his brother's return. This reaction shows how the fear of losing our own success or position can lead us to view the success of others as a threat rather than an opportunity for collaboration and growth.

The elder brother is depicted as a hard-working and faithful son who has always obeyed his father and stayed by his side. However, when his younger brother returns home and is celebrated with a feast, the elder brother becomes angry and refuses to join in the celebration. He tells his father, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!" (Luke 15:29-30)

The elder brother's reaction reveals the danger of pride and self-righteousness, as he sees himself as superior to his younger brother and feels entitled to special treatment from his father. He is so focused on his own sense of justice and fairness that he fails to see the bigger picture of his brother's return and the opportunity for reconciliation and unity within the family. His



attitude also shows how easy it is to miss out on God's grace when we become too focused on our own efforts and achievements.

There are three things this story helps us understand:

Generosity creates abundance

The concept of generosity creating abundance suggests that when we give generously, we create an abundance of goodwill that it benefits not only the recipient but also ourselves and those around us.

The father's generosity is a reminder that when we give freely without expecting anything in return, we create abundance in our lives and the lives of others. The abundance may not always be material wealth, but it can be a sense of fulfilment, gratitude, and peace of mind. In the story, the father's generosity transforms a situation of loss and despair into one of abundance and celebration, and it serves as a powerful lesson for us all.

There are several practical steps we can take to embrace the concept of generosity creating abundance. Here are a few ideas:

1. **Give freely:** One of the most obvious ways to practice generosity is to give freely of our time, resources, and talents.
2. **Practice forgiveness:** Forgiveness is another key element of generosity. By letting go of grudges and resentments, we create space and new possibilities.
3. **Share our successes:** When we achieve success, it's easy to focus on our own accomplishments and forget about the contributions of others. However, by sharing our successes and acknowledging the role that others played in helping us get there, we create a sense of abundance that benefits everyone involved.

We succeed together not apart from one another

The concept of "we succeed together" suggests that true success is not achieved alone, but rather with the help and support of others. In the context of the story of the Prodigal Son, we can see this concept in action in several ways.

Firstly, the younger son's initial quest for success was a solitary one - he asked his father for his share of the inheritance and left home to live a life of excess, without considering the impact it would have on his family or community. He squandered all his money and ended up destitute and alone, until he realized the error of his ways and returned home.

Similarly, the older son in the story also plays a crucial role in the shared journey towards success. He is initially resentful of his brother's return and refuses to join the feast, but the father implores him to come and celebrate with the rest of the family. In doing so, the older son is able to let go of his anger and jealousy and participate in the shared joy of the moment.

The lesson here is that true success is not just about individual achievement, but also about building meaningful relationships and community. When we work together towards a common goal, we can achieve far more than we ever could alone. In the story of the Prodigal Son, the shared journey towards forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation ultimately leads to a greater sense of abundance and joy for all involved.

Here are some practical steps we can take to embrace the concept of success being a shared journey:

1. **Build meaningful relationships:** To achieve success as a shared journey, it's important to build strong relationships with others.
2. **Collaborate:** Collaborating with others is a great way to achieve success as a shared journey. This means being willing to work with others and share ideas and resources. By collaborating, we can achieve more than we could



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on our own and create something that benefits everyone involved.

3. **Be willing to learn from others:** No one has all the answers, and there is always something to be learned from others. By being open to learning from others, we create opportunities for growth and improvement. This means being willing to ask for help when needed and being open to feedback and suggestions.

The need for humility and openness to grace

The parable of the prodigal son teaches us about the need for humility and openness to grace.

In this story, the prodigal son's journey begins with pride and arrogance, thinking he can live life on his own terms and without his father's guidance. However, when he hits rock bottom, he realizes his mistakes and humbly returns home, ready to accept any consequences for his actions.

The father in the story is also an example of humility and openness to grace. Instead of punishing his son or rejecting him for his mistakes, the father shows him grace and forgiveness

This story teaches us that humility and openness to grace are essential qualities for a fulfilling and meaningful life. We need to be willing to admit our mistakes and seek forgiveness when we fall short. We also need to be open to the grace of others and willing to show grace and forgiveness in return. By doing so, we can cultivate a sense of compassion, empathy, and connection with others and live a life that is full of purpose and meaning.

Here are some practical steps we can take to embrace the concept of humility and openness to grace:

1. **Acknowledge our mistakes:** The first step towards humility and openness to grace is to acknowledge our mistakes. It takes courage to admit when we are wrong, but it's

important to take responsibility for our actions and make amends where possible.

2. **Seek forgiveness:** Once we have acknowledged our mistakes, the next step is to seek forgiveness from those we have hurt or wronged. This requires humility and a willingness to accept the consequences of our actions.
3. **Practice empathy:** Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. By practicing empathy, we can put ourselves in someone else's shoes and better understand their perspective. This can help us to be more compassionate, forgiving, and understanding towards others.
4. **Show grace and forgiveness:** Just as we seek forgiveness from others, we also need to be willing to show grace and forgiveness towards those who have wronged us. This can be difficult, but it's important to remember that no one is perfect, and we all make mistakes.

Tall poppy – Your success is a threat to mine

Feeling threatened by the success of others can stem from a variety of factors, including feelings of inadequacy, envy, or a sense of competition. In some cases, people may feel that another person's success somehow diminishes their own accomplishments or sense of self-worth, leading to negative feelings and behaviours towards that person.

One common example of feeling threatened by the success of others is in the workplace. When one person is promoted or recognized for their achievements, others may feel that their own contributions are overlooked or undervalued. This can lead to resentment or even active efforts to undermine the successful person's reputation or work. Similarly, in academic or artistic settings, jealousy or a sense of competition can lead to



negative attitudes towards those who are achieving success or recognition.

Feeling threatened by the success of others can be a natural human response, but it's important to recognize and manage these feelings in a constructive way. Rather than allowing jealousy or resentment to drive negative behaviours, it's important to focus on personal growth and development, and to celebrate the successes of others as well. By recognizing the achievements of others, we can cultivate a supportive and collaborative environment where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and succeed.

If we feel threatened by the success of others, we may be tempted to act in negative ways, such as by belittling the person's accomplishments, gossiping about them, or actively working to undermine them. However, these behaviours are not productive and can ultimately damage our relationships and reputation.

Here are some tips for how to handle feelings of threat towards someone else's success:

Recognize and acknowledge your feelings - It's okay to feel threatened or jealous when someone else is successful. However, it's important to acknowledge these feelings and understand where they are coming from.

1. **Reframe your perspective:** Rather than viewing someone else's success as a threat to your own, try to reframe your perspective to see it as an opportunity for growth and learning. Consider how you can learn from the successful person, or how their success might inspire you to work harder or achieve more.
2. **Practice empathy:** Try to put yourself in the shoes of the successful person and understand their journey and hard work. This can help you appreciate their success and feel less threatened by it.
3. **Celebrate their success:** Rather than feeling resentful towards the successful person, try to celebrate

their achievements and offer your congratulations. This can help to strengthen your relationship and foster a more positive and supportive environment.

4. **Focus on your own goals:** Finally, it's important to stay focused on your own goals and work towards achieving them, rather than becoming overly preoccupied with the success of others. By staying focused on your own journey, you can build your own sense of accomplishment and self-worth.

The elder brother's reaction to his brother's return highlights the danger of pride and resentment. When we become too focused on our own success and feel threatened by the success of others, we can become resentful and miss out on the opportunities for growth and collaboration. The elder brother's reaction shows how easily we can fall into the trap of pride and how it can blind us to the importance of working together.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. How did the father's response to the younger son's return demonstrate the idea that "we succeed together"? Have you been part of a successful team? Have you ever failed at something you tried on your own? What would you do differently with the benefit of hindsight?
2. How did the elder brother's reaction to his brother's return demonstrate the idea that "your success is a threat to mine"? Have you ever felt threatened by someone else's success or achievements? How did you react?
3. What can we learn about the dangers of pride and self-righteousness from the elder brother's reaction to his brother's return? How can we guard against these dangers in our own lives?
4. How can we overcome the fear of other people's success and instead see it as an opportunity for growth? How can we learn to celebrate the successes of others?
5. What do you think God might be saying to you personally about this issue? What might you do differently this week\month\year?



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