

You Can

In the course of time Cain presented some of the land's produce as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also presented [an offering]-some of the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions. The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but He did not have regard for Cain and his offering. Cain was furious, and he was downcast. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you furious? And why are you downcast? If you do right, won't you be accepted? But if you do not do right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must master it." Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. – Genesis 4:3-8 HCSB

Hundreds of people live in poverty stricken neighborhoods. All are exposed to the same limitations. The vast majority live lives of “quiet desperation” yet practice honesty, integrity and love. A tiny minority may choose to revolt against their conditions and pursue the drug culture, become abusive of their spouses or turn into rebellious criminals. What makes the difference?

Very likely, when one of the rebels ends up in court, a lawyer will probably find a psychologist who will blame the criminal behavior on living conditions.

“His mother did not provide adequate love to nurture his ego. The desperation of poverty and lack of education drove him,” the psychologist will blather.

Yet humans are not trees. We are more than an accumulation of our circumstances. We have been granted a free will to choose between good and evil. For every person who succumbs to the temptations that are particular to squalor, there are hundreds who choose to live honest, wholesome lives.

Human beings can overcome terrible environments. Abraham, our spiritual ancestor, grew up in an idolatrous family. Moses, whom God determined to be the most humble man ever, was raised in the household of that paragon of arrogance – Pharaoh.

Are circumstances mitigating factors? Certainly, but they are not excuses. We cannot control where we were born. We cannot control how we were raised. We have no way of changing our genetic predispositions. We can, however, control what we choose to do with those circumstances.

A person who was raised in an abusive home can choose to create a shelter for abused spouses. Another who was raised in poverty can choose to work hard, save their money and make sure the next generation gets a better shot. Or, they can whine and spend their money on booze and cigarettes. But make no mistake, they choose.

Cain was presented with such a choice. He could choose to adjust to the realities of God's demands or wallow in self-pity. Sin was crouching at his door, but Elohim told Cain that the possibility of mastering it lay at hand. Cain chose, and sin leapt.