

## Be An Upstander For Jesus

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-24, 26

### **Bullied People We Have Heard Of**

There was a mild, kind, man of God. There was a group of teens that came to tease, humiliate and demean this man of God. We are told in Prophets and Kings, that these teens had been, “incited by their parents against the prophet” Incited meant, they had overheard or listened to their parents making unkind comments about the prophet, so they felt they could taunt God’s prophet with their parent’s blessing. They said to Elisha, “Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.” (It is common for bullies to pick on *someone’s appearance or someone’s disability*? Bullies plans are to hurt and humiliate someone.)

Evidently, God took this behavior **very seriously**. We are told, “there came forth two female bears out of the woods, and tare forty and two of them” (meaning, she tore up 42 of the young men. 2 Kings 2:23, 24. – {PK 235.2}

God dealt with it in a powerful way. And, what did God’s intervention do? We are told, because of God’s swift action, “For fifty years...none mocked (Elisha) or made light of his qualifications as the prophet of the Most High. – {PK 236.1}

A pretty violent consequence, but God wants intervention when someone is hurt this way.

Jesus was brought before the high priest to be questioned. As He spoke, one of the officials of the high priest hit Jesus across the face in John 18:22,23. Jesus did not get angry. He didn’t act like a martyr, Jesus did not retaliate. But, Jesus did not *ignore* what had happened. In fact, He said forthrightly, “Why did you hit me?”

It says to me, stand up and say something when a person is wronging another or even yourself.

There was an article on the CNN website titled, “One More Reason People Hate the IRS.” (Sept 3, 2013). People weren’t happy to pay taxes in Jesus day either.

Zacchaeus was a tax collector. They disliked paying taxes, but even more so to a tax collector who hiked up his charges, just to take their money for taxes. He had done that so much, that he was wealthy. And, even though he was a Jew, he would take the money

from his fellow Jews on behalf of the Romans and their government, whom the Jews hated. It was natural to hate a Jew who seemed to be a traitor, representing the Roman government. Even though he was this despicable man, Jesus showed him respect and interest.

He climbed up into a tree, not only because of being short, but probably to get away from those who hated him. And he dared to want to see this Jesus that saved people from their sins.

Jesus knew the contempt that the people held for Zacchaeus. But in love, he stopped and talked to Zacchaeus and even told him, in front of those who hated Zacchaeus, that he would visit his home. Luke 19:7 “And when the people saw it, they all **muttered among themselves** and indignantly complained, He has gone in to be the guest of *and* lodge with a man who is devoted to sin *and* preeminently a sinner.

When Jesus did this, the crowd murmured and complained. Jesus was not a people pleaser, changing His actions to make Himself look good. He stood up for Zacchaeus against the crowd, no matter how the crowd saw Him. His focus was the mission of His Father to seek and save the lost at any cost.

That is the character of our Savior, holding His hand out to those who were weak, those disabled, those who were hated for reasons they had brought on themselves. His heart was ever towards the unloved, the despised and the sinners. Jesus was not a bystander, He was an upstander. He stood up for those who were not esteemed by others.

A little girl walked home from school one day with her twin sister. At 9 years old, she was just small for her size. A 13-year-old girl followed behind her. At three years older, she was a threat to her, when some minor item that could not be remembered irritated her. The older girl shouted a threat at her. The twins had been taught, should there be any kind of danger, they should always hurry home to safety. The young girls started running. This angered the older girl even more. She picked up a rock and chased them. Just as little Ellen turned around to see if the older girl were gaining on them, the girl through the rock very hard, striking Ellen in the face. The rock shattered her nose and other bones in her face, knocking her to the ground in an unconscious state. For three weeks she lay in a state of semi-consciousness.

Ellen's father, who had been away on business, in Atlanta, did not recognize his daughter when he returned, because her face was so badly disfigured by the rock.

While her family treated her with care for many months, Ellen finally was able to return to school. But she wrote later, "I was forced to learn the bitter lesson that our personal appearance often makes a difference in the treatment we receive from our companions."<sup>1</sup>

In this story, it would have been nice if an older child that had stopped the girl from chasing Ellen and her sister. It would have been nice if a neighbor had cared enough to come out and reprimand the girl for teasing, chasing and throwing rocks. And it would

have been nice for an adult to help Ellen get home safely when she had been hurt. There were people who saw Ellen and did not intervene. Much like today, I am afraid.

Every day, there are news stories where people have been harassed, teased, embarrassed in our schools, in our newspapers, on our television programs. I think of the pictures that were widely circulated of George Bush made into a monkey face, or Andrew Weiner (because of his indiscretion and certainly bringing on problems to his marriage), having many jokes made because of his nose and his name. I think of Bill Cosby saying he is sad for the fatherless black families across the nation and how people were allowed to call him names and try to ruin his career. When Vice President Dan Quayle, 1992, delivered a family-values speech, chiding the sitcom, Murphy Brown, for making it popular to have a child, outside of marriage, a debacle followed where they not only attacked his opinions, and his character, they also started to attack the way he spelled and find dirt to hurt his campaign. Do you remember how they made fun of the looks of Chelsea Clinton, Linda Tripp, who testified against Clinton because of her conversations with Monica Lewinsky. She was so teased about her appearance and weight, that a private donor paid for her to have plastic surgery and change her appearance to give her a chance at a normal life.

When it comes to figuring out why bullying has become such a pattern in our country, psychologists tell us that parents are the guilty parties acting in such a way that children take it out on others that are weaker than them. Researches also say children caught bullying others say their parents were more authoritarian (harsh), teach their children that it is appropriate to fight kids who anger them or threaten them.

Even Christian parents are not exempt from some of the dysfunctional parenting styles that create children who bully. After all, we are encountering a wave of bullying behaviors even in our Christian schools. Parents may use intimidation, threatening, yelling, shaming, humiliation, belittling and sarcasm are the most successful in raising an angry child. They spank in anger rather than using spankings as a last resort and when their emotions are in check. Add to that, how disconnected parents and their children are because they are so involved in the use of technology like cell phones, Ipads, computers or iPods, using them for hours and neglecting to talk and work together around the home.

So many Christian adults, that come in counseling, hesitate when I ask them about if they felt loved as a child. Many of them say, "I'm not sure" or "I don't know" or "I think so". Many came from broken homes where a stepparent was allowed to treat them harshly so their natural parent could keep the peace with their new spouse. Because of our divorce rates going on in our nation, this impacted Christian homes as well.

Parents, Sabbath School teachers and members who are around our children, need to help children change any characteristics that go along with bullying behaviors: These characteristics are:

- They are defiant and even aggressive toward adults (we would want our children to form friendships with older people at our churches, do volunteer work and be taught to be respectful)

- If they are boys, they are physically stronger or taller than others (we would want to teach them what? How to be gentle, kind, thoughtful, not use their size to hurt others).
- If they play rough, loudly, are rude or aggressive (teach them the Golden rule to be kind to others, share, or give them a time out. Teach them Bible stories, kindness to animals.)
- If a child enjoys the game of having secrets, shunning others, humiliating others, e gossiping or has a strong need to control others (teach them Bible stories, how to include others, how to befriend those who are weaker, Sabbath Schools and youth groups **need to be taught** inclusion of all children/youth and teach: how to welcome, how to befriend everyone, despite attractiveness or popularity etc.) I Thess 5:14 And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, *encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*
- If our child lacks empathy, nurture or compassion for others (what could we do? Pathfinders, mission trips, volunteer work, member visitation, all of these help our children to grow in empathy and compassion)
- They are competitive and can be selfish, wanting their own way (watch out how they behave in sports, teach them or don't allow them to play if they continue that way. Pray for others) **I Thess 5:17** Pray continually (By the way, if you aren't doing what it says in verse 17, don't try any of this because on your own power, you will fail. I know, I have done it on my own power. I found out that when I do it on my own power, I have a little hook at the end of each of my sentences...I want people to be guilty not helped. Only your family really knows for sure....right?)
- They are impatient, impulsive or easily angered when they don't get their way. (notice when they are patient and comment on it, work with them on it. Teach them from the Bible about anger, temper, read books about kindness, gratitude, etc.)

As Christians, we have so many opportunities and ways to help them with these behaviors, from reading the Bible Stories to them, to teaching them to appreciate nature, volunteer work, mission trips, door to door, blessing seniors by visiting and helping them, teaching children love for animals, musical ministries, etc.

Letting these unhealthy behaviors go can lead to socially unfit behavior as kids grow into adults, they find, they are more likely to:

- Be verbally or physically abusive to adults in the workplace or in a marriage.
- Being physically or emotionally abusive to the vulnerable like children or the elderly (including their parents in old age)
- Engage in sexual harassment

- Engage in domestic violence
- Commit crimes (many convicts say they were bullies in school)

If your child says they are being mistreated, do not look the other way and hope it goes away. Help your child, work with adults who can help, hold bullies accountable, educate people on the Golden Rule, help people to be upstanders. When we see anything going on in our family or our church, we are to stand up for what is right, whether we like conflict or not. As a bystander, we are just as guilty if it is allowed to occur under our noses. We must also teach those around us to defend victims. Those who do this are highly successful in stopping bullying behaviors. However, only 25% of those who see these behaviors do anything to stop them.

Bullied children that do not get help, as adults, have been found to have more mental health problems, suicidal ideation, self-esteem problems that damage family relationships and difficulties at work.

Emotional wounds caused by strangers can be painful, but even more painful is when church members inflict injuries on another member. Because our churches are to be a loving hospital for hurting people, when the hurting occurs at church or in our church school, a person may find the hurt more traumatizing. Bullying behaviors can be directed towards pastors, members, church officers or our children. It can occur in our meetings, our board meetings, committees, Sabbath schools, or in our hallways.

When churches start chewing up each other, people do not want to bring friends to their church, offerings go down, people leave and those left are so overwhelmed with discord, the joyful fellowship is no more, the spiritual growth and evangelistic outreach are stalled.

**I Thessalonians 5:15 says** "Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but *always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.* "

When someone hurts a sheep, make sure you address it ASAP! Matthew 18 tells us to do this. The longer it festers, the bigger the problem gets!! And people who don't forgive get bitter. (What changes would happen if we saw our people resolving issues on a regular basis!) We need to use the Matthew 18 principle to settle our issues rapidly (before they fester) with people. And, we need to pray, pray, pray.

We want to act like Jesus, standing up for others, whether they deserve it or not. We also know that He trained people of all types of personalities with respect, patience and love. We need to train our members, no matter who they are, and our children to be upstanders.

What about you? Is your tongue committed to God each day so you are not hurting others? Are you talking lovingly to your children, the children in your church, the neighbors in your community? Are you kind and patient with your spouse? Are you

teaching others what is appropriate behavior to treat a spouse or a child? Do your adult children know they are loved by you? Do you pray for the pastor, your leaders, especially when you are working together on committees?

If there were scuttlebutt going around about your pastor, or church leaders, would you decide that unless they are doing something morally or ethically wrong, you would support them and assist them to have a healthy ministry at your church.

If someone comes up to you at church to share some dirt about someone, like a member, the pastor, we need to say something like: "I am not sure why you are telling me this" or "do you want me to go with you to talk to this person" "this story could hurt my worship experience, so please don't even share anymore about it."

In the story of Elisha, God sent a swift end to the youth who bullied him. God wanted it stopped. When Jesus was slapped, He acknowledged what happened and called attention to it. Jesus was not a people pleaser. He held the man accountable that hit him. In the story of Zacchaeus, Jesus stood against the hateful, murmuring crowd to show love and acceptance to an undeserving tax collector. And He calls us to be upstanders in our families, our church and in our community.

We need to be kind to one another. God commanded it. It will keep us focused on where God wants us to go in our church. It will keep us on the right path to God. It will encourage those around us to stay with our team so we can accomplish more. Children will be kinder to one another if their parents are setting role models.