**Bullying in the Bible**

Here’s what happened

Here’s what to do about it

Bullying is a serious problem in today’s society, and the media is covering it more and more. While adolescent bullying seems to have increased with the advent of social media, we know from the Bible that it isn’t just a recent phenomenon.

Do you know the story of Hannah? The entire story is covered in 1 Samuel V. 1-28, however we will focus specifically on verses 6 through 10. Now imagine this as if it were happening today. Hannah’s husband, Elkanah, had a second wife named Peninnah. Hannah was unable to have children at the time, but Peninnah was.

Elkanah appears to have been a really good guy, because as the Bible notes that he felt bad for Hannah since she couldn’t bear children, and he provided her with special treatment. However… Peninnah wasn’t quite as nice. As the New King James version says it “her rival also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the Lord had closed her womb. So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, that she provoked her”.

Again, picture that…the poor woman can’t have children which was just as big of a deal then as it is today if not bigger (remember, women were property in many cultures and could have been killed with no repercussions for being infertile), and this lady is essentially poking fun of her about it. The Bible uses the word “severely” and then goes on to say that Hannah “wept and did not eat”. If you’ve known anyone to be bullied today, does that sound familiar…crying and not eating? Sure it does.

So what did Hannah do? She prayed…and the way I picture it (derived from V.10), she prayed hard and CRIED to the Lord. I’m sure many of you have cried as you prayed for a variety of reasons. If so, you know that is a very powerful and emotional moment. Hannah actually went on to tell Eli that she “poured her soul to the Lord”, a phrase that is certainly meaningful to most of us today.

So what did God do? He granted her wishes and allowed her to conceive a son! Then, in my opinion the best part of the story happens. Hannah prays again in chapter 2, what I consider to be one of the greatest, most heart-felt prayers in the Bible.

I won’t quote the entire prayer here, but I do encourage you to open your Bibles and read it in 1 Samuel 2: 1-10. I will highlight 2 portions that are very powerful in the context of her bullying experience:

In V.2 she says *“I smile at my enemies, Because I rejoice in Your salvation”* . This one is tough for us sometimes. But Hannah was able to stay focused on the fact that she believed in salvation from the Lord and bullies could not take that from her.

I also think V.10 helps with the VERY human side of us that inherently desires fairness and justice. It reads:

*“For by strength no man shall prevail.
The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken in pieces;
From heaven He will thunder against them.
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth.”*

Now, please don’t take this to be a verse that justifies wanting bad things to come upon your enemy. Yes, that is a natural human reaction, but that isn’t what is meant here, nor is it ultimately what the Lord would want. I like to think of this portion of Hannah’s prayer as a means to stay strong and confident even in the face of your enemies…such as a bully. It’s like saying “your stronger than me, but you’re NOT stronger than God”. That attitude is easier said than done for sure, but if Hannah can do it, there’s not reason to believe that we can’t.

As I said earlier, bullying is not new. It happened to Hannah, and it will most likely happen to your or your children. 28% of students grades 6-12 say that they have been bullied in school. That’s A LOT!

With that in mind, it’s important to prepare ourselves and our children in a way that Hannah would have:

* First and foremost, we need to pray about it.
* 2nd, we need to remember that regardless of what someone does to you, you still have salvation, and nobody can “bully” God….he’s still the ultimate judge.

My last point here about bullying involves a situation where someone else is being bullied and you or your child knows about it. What do they do? They need to speak up and do what they can to help. We are called to seek justice and defend those who are being picked on. Psalm 82: 3-4 tells us to “*Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked. “*

We know from Jesus’ example in the New Testament that this doesn’t mean that we need to go around beating bullies up…but it does mean that we should try to help and defend them in a Christian manner. Speak up, tell someone, get help. We are specifically told in Romans 13 that our government authorities were established by God and have the power to punish those who do wrong on Earth. So don’t be afraid to get them involved if necessary, especially in cases where there is physical danger or harm involved.

I hope you find the above examples helpful in dealing with a serious problem that many of us and our children have, are or will face. Bullying is a form of evil…the bully is a victim of the devil, so let’s not hate him or her. Please remember the lesson from Romans 12:21: *“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*

Thank you, and let us know if we can help in any way.

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