



In the Quiet Heart

Gospel Solutions to Bullying

Michael D. Young

INTRODUCTION

I fully realize that my childhood spent as the victim of bullying was not unique. There are many who continue to suffer the same problems and it is likely that there will be no complete solution to this problem.

Many aspects of bullying were out of my control as a child, and so this volume is intended to focus on the factors, which an individual can control. You cannot change your genetics, what family you were born into, etc. But there are many factors you can control.

When facing a challenge, we pray to our Heavenly Father for strength, and often He sees fit not to remove the challenge, but to give us the strength to bear it. Such was the case with the people of Alma. They were in bondage and forced into slave labor and forbidden to pray aloud to God. They, however, continued to pray and the scriptures record that the Lord did not immediately release them from bondage, but lightened their burdens so that they could barely feel them on their backs. This continued for some time before the Lord saw fit to deliver them from bondage.

I am writing this book because I have received many different suggestions about how to deal with bullying

as a child. Many were not effective and many were not grounded in gospel principles. I sincerely believe that the best solutions for any problem of life can be found in the teachings of Jesus Christ and His perfect example and in the words of prophets both ancient and modern. I will attempt to look at the problem of bullying from a gospel perspective in hopes that others who still struggle will become as the people of Alma, who had their burdens made light until the Lord saw fit to deliver them. I hope that you can find solace in this process and realize that you are not alone in this difficult endeavor.

-Michael D. Young

CHAPTER ONE: IN THE QUIET HEART

As a first matter of business, it might be helpful to define what a bully is. When someone says “bully” what comes to mind? You might think of the big muscled kid in school extorting people for the lunch money. Though this certainly fits the bill, it is by far too narrow a definition. Bullying can take place in a variety of contexts, at school, in the workplace, at home, or just about anywhere that humans interact.

For the purposes of this book I would like to define a bully as somebody who abuses their power, which results in harm to others. Let’s look closer at the word abuse. It is actually made up of two parts: the prefix “ab” and the word “use”. The word use is already a familiar verb, and the prefix “ab” is a common prefix that means “away from” such as in the words abscond, abhor, and abnormal. Put together, the word abuse literally means you are using something away from the way it is supposed to be used.

This is the trademark of a bully. A bully has some sort of power. Perhaps it is physical strength, perhaps it is mental ability or talent. Perhaps it is good looks or connections with others. Often, it is only the power of pride, something

that the bully thinks he or she has that is better than everyone else that leads him or her to become a bully.

The interesting thing is that all of these attributes can be applied correctly and used to do much good. The same strong man that can extort people with his strength, could use his strong arms in service, building up and protecting the weak. A leader with a strong military can either use that military to oppress his citizens, or to protect them and preserve their freedoms. In order for there to be a wrong way to use your power, there must logically be a right way. It is those who abuse their power we will call bullies. So, you can see that this applies not only to the thug extorting money, but to a variety of people in various situations.

The First Bully

This logically leads to the conversation of the very first bully. The being known as Lucifer, or “light bringer”, had immense potential for good. His very name denotes someone of great power and influence, one who brings light. Had he chosen differently, he might have become one of the noble and great servants of God.

He, however, chose to abuse his great power in an attempt to satisfy his pride and take God’s glory for himself. He wanted dominion over his fellow beings and wanted to be worshiped by them. Pride and jealousy are common causes of bullying. No being that we know of has possibly influenced and bullied so many people at once. Lucifer’s influence led away a third of all the hosts of Heaven, excluding all the people who have lived, live now, and will live on this earth. There is no way to know the exact number, but it must be astronomically high. He is sometimes referred to in the scriptures as “the Father of Lies”, and I think you could add to that “the Father of Bullies”,

because of his constant attempts to abuse his power and to convince others to do the same.

The scriptures do not record many precise details about the War in Heaven. We can, however, extrapolate many details of Lucifer's tactics from his followers, about whom we know much more.

From his servants Kohrihor, Nehor, and Sherem who are mentioned in the Book of Mormon, we can learn that he likely used his gifts of speaking and flattering words. He was likely a charismatic and passionate speaker and understood how to say the sort of things that people wanted to hear. The same gift, which could have been used to motivate people to righteousness, was abused into pulling people away from Heavenly Father's plan in favor of another plan that would give Lucifer the glory.

We know from his servants such as Amalickiah that he likely used threats to win people over. It is not hard to imagine that he might have pointed out that in our Heavenly Father's plan there was the danger that some of us would choose poorly and not obtain the rewards the righteous would receive. He probably tried to frighten us by pointing out how difficult it would be in mortality under Heavenly Father's plan. He likely offered security at the expense of growth. As we look at other bullies found in the scriptures, we will see the same tactics appear again and again. You also see the difference as to how people react to these tactics of Satan.

Above all, what we learn about being a bully from Lucifer is that, at its core, bullying is selfishness. Those who bully others put their own needs above anyone else's. They may claim to be acting in the best interests of others, but ultimately only think about themselves. The scriptures teach that Satan will not uphold his followers at the last

day. "...and thus we see that the devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell" (Alma 30:60).

Although Satan likely used flattering word threats to get people to see how they would be better off under his plan, underneath it all, he was only thinking about himself and his own glory. If we are to avoid becoming bullies ourselves, we must be careful not to give in to this kind of selfishness. Satan's followers enforce their will through fear, force, and coercion. We cannot use these same tools of the adversary to overcome him.

During the Savior's mortal life, Satan came trying to tempt the Savior, trying to use these bullying tactics to force the Savior into sin. Jesus had been fasting for a long time, and first, the devil tried to tempt the Savior to abuse His power to turn stones into bread. Jesus resisted by using the words of the scriptures against Satan. The devil then tried to convince the Savior to abuse his power by showing off—casting himself from the top of the temple and calling on angels to save him. Once again, Jesus used the scriptures to respond to the temptation. Finally, the devil attempted to tempt Jesus by worldly riches and fame if He would only worship the devil. Even more forcibly, Jesus withstood this father of all bullies with the pure word of God, saying that he would only worship His Father.

Lucifer's abuse of this power is a stark contrast with our Savior's correct use of his power. Though he had been given mighty power from his Father so that he could bend the very elements of space to his will to create planets and stars, Jesus Christ allowed himself to come to earth as a mortal man to be born in humble circumstances and give His life in an agonizing manner. Though he could have easily thrown off his persecutors, he humbly bore his afflictions

and completed the plan His Father had put in place in the beginning.

Our Savior's life is an example of how not to be selfish. He put all of our needs before His own, especially when accomplishing His glorious Atonement, in which he took upon Him our weaknesses, sicknesses, temptations, and sins. Perhaps most telling of all is that even though Christ did great things, He still gave His Father the glory. Like Him, we must choose not to abuse the powers that we have been given, but instead use them as Christ would in serving others and bringing glory to our Father in Heaven.

In the Quiet Heart Is Hidden

The second verse of the beloved hymn says "Lord, I Would Follow Thee" begins with the lines: "Who am I to judge another when I walk imperfectly? In the quiet heart is hidden sorrow that the eye can't see." (Hymns, #220)

These powerful words always struck me. I would sing them in church or seminary and would look around at the other people attending that meeting. I knew that the song was talking about them. Though most of them seemed happy, they each carried sorrows they did not share with everyone else. I know this is true because it was true for me. Some of my struggles were only known to my close friends and family members. Others of my struggles were known only to me and my Father in Heaven.

As I endured bullying in my childhood, I realized that this song even applied to the bullies. My mother would often counsel me that many people become bullies as a way of dealing with their own pain. There were situations they could not control in their own lives and so they sought to control others. Sometimes, I found this hard to believe. The people that made fun of me seemed confident and many

were popular.

As time progressed, however, I saw what my mother had told me was true. Many of the bullies who picked on me apparently had other problems. I saw them interacting with their parents from time to time, and I could tell many of them did not come from good environments at home and I realized that they did not live in the favorable conditions I enjoyed. I began to see that all of them were suffering in their own way. This is not to say that I condoned their behavior or justified it in any way. The Lord has told us that he does not look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. It is interesting to note that it says the Lord looks upon sin, not upon the sinner. It is not our place to judge another's sinful actions or to punish them. On the other hand, it is our duty and privilege to forgive them.

How much better it is to know that all of us will be judged by a completely righteous judge? He knows all of us down to our very core, our thoughts, our intents, our deeds and our attitudes. He is able to take all of these things into account. We as mortal beings, however, have only a limited sense of what we can tell about our fellow man. The portrait we have is vastly incomplete so we would not have suitable evidence from which to judge someone.

Being forgiving and non-judgmental, however, can be especially hard in the face of an unrepentant bully. It is much easier to forgive someone who apologizes to you and makes an effort to repent. Many times, it will take a bully a long time to realize the error of his ways, if he ever does. We simply have to be willing to forgive him regardless of his actions.

I remember a time during my first year of high school when things were starting to improve in my life. I had overcome much of the social awkwardness I had struggled

with in elementary school and junior high. One day, I was walking through the halls and another student stopped me. I turned to him and I realized that I recognized him from my junior high choir class. He had been one of the students who had often made fun of me during that class.

His face took on a concerned expression and he offered a sincere apology for all the times he had given me a hard time. In that moment, I felt like the Lord gave me a wonderful gift. Instead of harboring anger and feeling like rejecting his apology, I felt only forgiveness and love for him.

I smiled and accepted his apology, and he appeared genuinely grateful. I did not see him much after that but I was profoundly grateful that he had taken the time to apologize, even though he did so years later.

There are many parables that highlight the principle of repentance and forgiveness. I would like to highlight one that shows not only how we should act with our fellow man but also with our Heavenly Father.

The Savior tells the story of a man who owed the King 10,000 talents. In this context, the word talent is used in the same way as it is in the parable of the talents, meaning that it is a measurement of money. It is difficult to estimate exactly how much a talent is worth in modern money.

The point of the parable is that this was a very large sum of money. Imagine if you were in debt to someone for \$10 million, something that most people could never hope to pay back quickly, if ever.

The king's servant did not have the money and faced an extended prison sentence. Seeing his fate, the man pleaded with the King, asking for mercy for his enormous debt. The king took pity on the man and forgave him the debt. This probably came as a surprise to the debtor, who must have

felt that an incredible burden had been lifted.

If the story had ended here, it would be quite the happy one. However, the same man who owed king 10,000 talents went out shortly after being forgiven and found a man who owed him what the Bible calls 100 pence. It is also difficult to determine exactly how much this is, but the important thing is that it is a small amount. It does not even seem to be as much as a single talent. Just as the debtor had before the king, this new debtor also pleaded for mercy. The first man, however, demanded justice and had the man thrown into prison.

News of what the first man had done soon came to the ears of the king. The king was sorely disappointed that this man whom he had forgiven so much had not learned his lesson. He was angry with the man who had owed him 10,000 talents and cast him into prison and released the poor debtor in his stead.

Where our Heavenly Father stands on forgiveness is clear. "I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men" (Doctrine and Covenants 64:10). The Lord is willing to forgive even great sins that we have committed if we show true repentance. When we righteously rely on his mercy, we can be forgiven of great debts as was the first man in the parable. It is a requirement as well that we then do not withhold forgiveness from those who, in comparison, have wronged us very little.

Though it may seem a large debt at the time, any one person's debt is small compared to the many things for which the Lord forgives us. If the first man had forgiven his neighbor for his small debt, the king would have continued to forgive the first man his large debt. We cannot expect continued forgiveness from God if we are not willing to forgive others. In fact, withholding forgiveness is a great

sin by itself. "Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin" (Doctrine and Covenants 64:9).

KEEP READING

Continue the Journey

Courage, compassion, prevention, and healing

The complete book continues with practical guidance on types of bullying, prevention, scriptural examples, responding without retaliation, examining our own behavior, and finding healing through gospel principles.

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