

Y-WoW Nation

Bullying

Scriptures:

Hagar vs. Sarah – The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. (Gen. 21:8-12 NIV)

Peninnah vs. Hannah - There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none. Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the LORD Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD. Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb. And because the LORD had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. Elkanah her husband would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?" Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD's temple. In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. And she made a vow, saying, "O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

... So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him." (1 Sam. 1:1-11, 20 NIV).

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Kids vs. Elisha - From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some youths came out of the town and jeered at him. "Go on up, you baldhead!" they said. "Go on up, you baldhead!" He turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the LORD. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths. (2 Kings 2:23-24 NIV)

Hardly a day goes by without our being made aware of a story involving an incident of bullying. According to the US Department of Health & Human Services, bullying is defined as follows:

"Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose. " (Source: <http://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/index.html>)

Bullying may occur in the form of emotional, verbal or physical abuse. It can be directed at a victim on the grounds of age, race, religion, physical size or ability, gender or sexuality. And campaigns of bullying may be waged in schools, homes, neighborhoods and other social settings or gathering places. The birth of social media has even made it possible to harass victims online (24/7/365). As a result, some victims of bullying have resorted to drastic measures including taking their own lives. Consequently, many anti-bullying campaigns have sprung up at the governmental and grassroots levels to combat and ultimately eradicate the social epidemic of bullying.

Unfortunately, bullying is not a new phenomenon. In fact, it's existed for thousands of years as the theme scriptures prove. In each instance, the abuse is verbal and emotional in nature. However, it's hurtful nonetheless. Rather than focus on the bullying aspect of each story, for our purposes, we'll examine each target's response to the harassment to learn some effective strategies for handling bullies.

Hagar vs. Sarah. Perhaps the quickest way to get on a good mother's bad side is to harm her child. That's a cardinal sin as far as most loving mothers are concerned. And Abraham's leading lady, Sarah, was no different. Though she'd been the architect of the plan which resulted in Ishmael's birth, she was none too happy when he started mocking her child, Isaac. From the passage, it's hard to tell whether this was a one-time thing or if Ishmael routinely mocked his younger half-brother. Nevertheless, Sarah

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was having none of it. Like a true lioness, she pounced to protect her cub. At once, she instructed Abraham to get rid of his first-born son, Ishmael, and his maidservant mother, Hagar. Surely, this had to hurt Abraham as he more than likely loved both of his sons. Nevertheless, he obeyed God's and Sarah's command to cast out Hagar and Ishmael.

In this case, Sarah dealt with her son's bully by having him put out of their home and community. God confirmed Sarah's command to Abraham because Isaac rather than Ishmael was the son of promise. Through Isaac, the son born after the Spirit, God planned to keep His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 21:12). And to ensure that there were no challenges or obstacles to establishing Isaac as Abraham's true successor with all of the rights and privileges due him, it was necessary to remove Ishmael from the camp.

Sarah's actions were swift and decisive. She knew what needed to be done to protect her son and she went straight to the authority figure in the situation to resolve the issue. In essence, Sarah worked through the proper channel (or authority) to achieve the outcome she desired. In similar fashion, Hannah sought help from an outside source to resolve the issue with her bully. However, rather than work through man, she worked through God to rectify her situation.

Peninnah vs. Hannah. God designed the institution of marriage to include one husband and one wife. The story of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar proves that varying from that script for any reason can have disastrous consequences. And hot on their heels, Elkanah, Hannah and Peninnah provide yet another example of how things can go awry when we stray from God's plan for marriage.

In biblical times, being a wife and mother was a woman's primary reason for living. If a woman didn't get married or couldn't have children, she had little value or worth by societal standards. Though Hannah was married to a devout man who loved her dearly, she was barren. It was a physical limitation beyond her control. And her chief rival, her husband's *other wife* never let her forget it. Peninnah, who was quite fertile, took every opportunity to torment Hannah over her barrenness.

Though Hannah is a sympathetic character in this story, it's possible that the behavior of both women was offensive somewhat to God. Clearly, Peninnah was wrong for teasing Hannah and making light of the fact that she couldn't bear children. (Regardless of their physical attributes or abilities, all of God's children are valuable.) Furthermore, had she been a good godly woman, Peninnah would have done as God expects His children to do in similar situations. She would have helped ease Hannah's burden rather than increase it. She would have helped relieve Hannah's pain rather than pour salt into an open

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wound so to speak. Nevertheless, her cruelty persisted. While Peninnah's behavior certainly was deplorable, Hannah's behavior wasn't a whole lot better. Here's why. Instead of being grateful for the blessings that she did have—a home, reasonably good health and a loving husband—Hannah obsessed over the one blessing that she didn't have (children). If she'd taken time to count her blessings, Hannah might not have been so sensitive to Peninnah's taunts.

To her credit, Hannah did do the right thing in response to Peninnah's antics. She took the matter to the Lord in prayer. Hannah poured out her heart to God with sincere prayer. And for good measure, she offered to give the child back to Him if He blessed her with a baby. That's a great lesson for us even today. Our talents, abilities and blessings are God's gifts to us. How we use them is our gift back to God. And Hannah promised to give her child back to God if she was so blessed.

Ever faithful, God answered Hannah's prayer with a son, Samuel. And as promised, Hannah gave him right back to God. After Samuel was weaned, she delivered him to the temple where he grew up to be a prominent Old Testament prophet.

Like Sarah, Hannah sought help from an outside source to resolve the conflict with her bully. But rather than seek assistance from mankind, Hannah went to the source from whom all blessings flow. She went straight to God. And as always, He delivered. He blessed Hannah with the baby she so desperately wanted. Like Hannah, the prophet Elisha also endured taunts from others. And rather than take matters into his own hands, He too turned them over to God.

Kids vs. Elisha. In the theme scripture from II Kings, the exchange between Elisha and his tormentors is brief but very potent. While traveling to Bethel, Elisha encountered a group of 42 disrespectful young people. It's likely that the idol-worshipping townspeople disliked the prophets because the men of God admonished them. This may have resulted in the adults' disregard for the prophets which, in turn, may have led to the children's attempt to steer Elijah clear of their town.

It's cruel to make disparaging remarks about someone for physical challenges or attributes that are beyond their control. The remarks are both hurtful to the intended target and offensive to God the Father who made him/her as He saw fit (Jer. 1:5). In the case of Elisha, the insult hurled at him concerned his hair or possible lack thereof to be more precise. During biblical times, "bald head" was a contemptuous and insulting remark to hurl at someone particularly a man who held a position of authority. So it was natural for Elisha to feel disrespected by the young men's taunts. However, Elisha's response reflected more than mere offense. He was seething mad. It's possible that Elisha's anger

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burned against the youngsters not because of their offense to him, but because of their offense to God. It's apparent that his motivation for cursing the boys was pure rather than vengeful because God honored his petition. Because the heckling and taunts against the prophets were so pervasive, God swiftly executed justice against Elisha's tormentors (see also II Chron. 36:16). He caused two bears to maul the boys—some 42 of them. It's possible that God chose to strike down the children for a number of reasons—one, to inflict an unimaginable pain on their parents; two, to put the fear of God (reverence for God) in the hearts of all the adults; and, three, to cultivate better behavior in the remaining children in the community. Whatever the reason, the punishment was fair and just because it was executed by God.

While this story proves that *no one* is immune from bullying, it does show that God takes it seriously. What's more, He will protect and defend His children by any means necessary especially when they call on Him for help. So, if you like Elisha find yourself the target of a bully someday, don't take matters into your own hands. Instead, take the matter straight to God and let Him deal with it His way. As with everything else in life, when it comes to handling bullies our Father knows best. Remember, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord' (Rom. 12:19 ESV).

Be blessed.

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