

Christ and the Workplace: Victims of Bullying



The picture says much. Whenever two or more are gathered, there is potential for bullying. Bullying hurts! And, it's not just the two bullies in the picture who hurt people. It's also those who stand back and do nothing.

The bully's primary arena is the workplace. This should not surprise us. It is where we spend most of our waking time and energies. Workplaces include schools; neighborhoods; the home, which is also a workplace; the internet; offices, hospitals, factories, the armed forces, etc.

Bullying must stop!

This is Jesus' world! His values of love, peace and justice are commandments, not options or suggestions.

For bullying's victims

For victims of bullying, there are comforting messages from the Prophet Isaiah, whom Jesus often referred to. Isaiah's insights for victims of bullying are evident in Chapter 43, verses 1-5. The theme is God's presence with us.

God, where are you?

God chooses always to be with us. God's will is to love and honor us, not see us trampled by bullies. God's activity protects (limits), redeems encourages victims of bullying.

God loves us as a parent loves a child. Each of us is precious in God's sight. God encourages us not to be afraid. God chooses to communicate with us. God leads us through every experience that hurts and tries overcome us. Ultimately, God rescues us from evil's grasp.

Reality check

Verse 2 is a reality check about the nasty side of life, and where we can expect to find God in all of that. Paraphrasing the verse, *we may go through hell and high water, but neither will consume us*. The verse acknowledges, (i) we can be victims of evil, (ii) we can feel isolated, consumed or drowning in helplessness. The images of fire and water express vividly how we may feel. But, the verse also talks about limits and control. Evil shall not prevail. God prevails.

Jesus' experience and empathy

Jesus experienced bullying from religious leaders, fickle crowds, and Rome's soldiers (mocking him before and during his crucifixion). He felt abandoned by God and cried from the cross: *My God, why have you forsaken me?* From this experience,

he is able to empathize with us when our spirits feel broken! God redeemed Jesus' spirit, enabling him to say in his next breath, *Into your hands, I commend my spirit.* God will redeem us.

This is God's world

Isaiah's chapter 40 speaks powerfully about whose world this is. Though bullies trample on God's values, commandments and people - and other people just stand, watch and do nothing - none of them will prevail. Verse 28 declares who God is: Creator of all. God's power is absolute.

Chapter 14, verses 11-13 speak of how God uses divine power. Those who attack others shall be shamed, disgraced and will perish. They will be as nothing. God will uphold those who are bullied. *Do not fear, I will help you,* God concludes verse 13.

So?

Bullying is painful for victims, an affront against God, and judgment against those who choose to do nothing in response. When the bully strikes, s/he or they attack God as well as the immediate victim. God stands with the victim.

Yes, God's timing is different from ours. We want immediate relief. Sometimes, it takes time. We want immunity from God. We don't receive it. God, however, is always present, and leads us through painful and frustrating times. Neither hell nor high water will be able to consume us! They can touch - never consume!

As for those who stand by and do nothing, they, too, will be shamed. God never tolerates willful indifference to the suffering of others.

For Good News when we certainly need it, thanks be to God!

D. Browning
January, 2014