

Sticks and Stones and Hurtful Words

Responding to personal injustices, disappointing relationships, and hurtful experiences

Introduction

What makes for a superficial counter-taunt when we were children is certainly not true of our experiences with one another as adults.

*Sticks and stones can break my bones,
but words will never hurt me.*

Sticks hurt; stones hurt; most of all, words hurt. Life is full of situations in which we experiences personal injustice with no resolution. We all have relationships that started well, but never lived up to our expectations. On top of all that, others hurt us, sometimes intentionally, and sometimes completely oblivious to the pain they have caused.

Scripture gives clear commands on how to deal with the sticks, stones, and hurtful words that we as Christians experiences. They seems somewhat idealistic, blunt, and insensitive to our experiences. But the many examples in Scripture say otherwise. These clear commands reflect the insight and wisdom of God our Father, are possible by the strength of the Holy Spirit, and make us better imitators of our Lord Jesus.

As you complete this homework, pray that the Lord will help you as you strive to overcome all evil with God-like good . The following examples will demonstrate the wisdom available to us on how to deal openly and honestly with evil, without ourselves being overcome by evil.

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.—God
(Romans 12:21)*

Shimei—cursing a man when he is down

In 2 Samuel 15, Absalom, King David's son, stages his coup against his father. How would you describe King David's situation according to 2 Samuel 15 (in short, vv12-14, 30)?

Then, as David is travelling, he is met by a man named Shimei. Read what Shimei did in 2 Samuel 16:5-8 and consider the following questions.

How accurately did Shimei portray the transition of the Kingdom from Saul to David?

What was Shimei's evaluation of the transition that Absalom was busy with?

In times like this it is good to have a friend as loyal as Abishai (v9). Why would David be justified in thanking Abishai and allowing him to proceed with his plan?

According to David's own explanation (vv10-12), why did he try and distance himself from Abishai?

After this ordeal, David refreshed himself (v14). Psalm 3 was written during this period of David's life. It indicates the kind of spiritual refreshment that David engaged in during this time of his life. Read Psalm 3 and consider the following.

Who is the source of comfort and blessing for a believer when many seem to be intent on hurting you?

What acts of worship did David engaged in?

How does 2 Samuel 16 and Psalm 3 help you to evaluate similar situations that you were in?

Centurion—not realising how hurtful the actions are

Read the account of the physical circumstances surrounding our Lord's crucifixion in Luke 23:33-47.

What were all the hurtful and evil things done against Jesus in that account?

What was Jesus' response to the one criminal who believed in Jesus?

What are the only recorded words of Jesus towards those who did all the hurtful and evil things?

When this was all over, and Jesus had already died, what happened to the centurion overseeing it all?

What have your responses (active and passive, intentional and unintentional, obvious and more subtle) been to those who did you more hurt than they even know?

According to Hebrews 12:1-3, what was it that kept Jesus in those circumstances till the end? Who are the motivators to keep us steady till the end?

Brothers—insincere reconciliation

Read Genesis 37 and compile a list of injustices done against Joseph by his brothers.

What are some of the other injustices that Joseph experienced from others since his separation from his brothers (Genesis 39:11-20; 40:23)?

What was Joseph's perspective of his brother's actions, and how did his perspective inform his actions in Genesis 45:1-15?

When Jacob died, the brothers feared revenge from Joseph. Instead of repenting, what scheme did they invent to avoid the consequences of their actions (Genesis 50:15-18)?

What was Joseph's response, and why was that his response (Genesis 50:19-21)?

How would you summarise the lessons learned from Joseph about dealing with those who hurt you and care more about protecting themselves than making right with you?

Onesimus—awkward church tension

Read the book of Philemon. It is about a run-away slave and thief named Onesimus who came to salvation under Paul's ministry, and was now sent back to his master Philemon who was most likely an elder in his church. This letter accompanied Onesimus as Paul's attempt to bring reconciliation between them as individuals, but also to strengthen the church that both of them would be attending.

How would you describe the character and reputation of Philemon (vv. 1-7)?

What did Paul appeal to as motivation for Philemon to reconcile with Onesimus (vv. 8-10)?

What was the greater perspective that Paul offered Philemon regarding Onesimus (vv. 11-13)?

How was Philemon to think about Onesimus as an individual (vv. 15-16)?

How was Philemon to think about the past hurt done to him by Onesimus (vv. 17-19)?

What ought to characterise our side in seeking reconciliation with a fellow believer who offended us (vv. 14, 20-22)?

Who enables us to make peace not only with another at church, but even in our own hearts (v. 25)?

Corinthian—ruining your reputation

There was a professing Christian in the church of Corinth who slandered Paul and his ministry among them. It appears that the Church had followed the Biblical approach in dealing with the man, and the man came to repentance. However, some still held the offence against the man, and Paul, the one who was hurt the most in it all, wrote to them with his own thoughts on it all.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11.

Who is Paul most concerned for regarding the man's original hurtful actions (v. 5)?

What was Paul's perspective on the church discipline practised on the offender (v. 6)?

What was Paul's counsel to the church on how to treat the person since his repentance (v. 7a)?

What concern did Paul have for the one who offended him (v. 7b)?

What is to be the two primary motivations for restoring him (v. 8 and v. 9)?

What was the bigger perspective that motivated Paul to forgive the one who had ruined his reputation (vv. 10-11)?

Conclusion

Review the different lessons again and write down some things you would want to share with a Christian friend who is overcome by the evil done against himself / herself and struggling to overcome that evil with good?

Look up the following verses, and draw out the principles in each of them. How will these shape your thinking and behaviour regarding those who at times cause offence to you?

- a) Matthew 5:43-48

- b) Matthew 7:1-5

- c) Matthew 7:12

- d) Matthew 18:21-35

- e) Romans 12:14-21

What other examples in the Scripture can be used to help you and others think more clearly and act more godly to those who hurt us?