

Question: Some people enjoy making fun of others, especially those who may be handicapped or are different. While these remarks may seem funny, they can also be hurtful. What would Jesus do about this?

A good sense of humor is essential to mental and physical health. The wise man of Proverbs once said: “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (Proverbs 17:22 NIV). Even Jesus demonstrated a sense of humor in illustrations he used to teach people. For example, he spoke of a man with a plank in his own eye while trying to get a speck out of his brother’s eye (Matthew 7:3-5). On another occasion, Jesus said that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (Matt. 19:24). Although Jesus was always serious about what he was teaching, I cannot imagine that he did not anticipate chuckles at some of these lines.

On the other hand, Jesus would have been very offended by humor at the expense of others like the poor, the weak, the handicapped or those of a different ethnic or racial origin. According to the Proverbs, “He who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker; whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished” (Proverbs 17:5. Also compare Ecclesiastes 10:12; Proverbs 10:10; 18:2). We need to show sincere respect for our fellow human beings. “Even in laughter the heart may ache,” said the wise man, “and rejoicing may end in grief” (Prov. 14:13). In the Spirit of Jesus, we need to be sincerely interested in the highest good of others and reflect a joyful and encouraging attitude with love for even the weakest person.

Another popular sport among some people is that of verbal jabs at another person, especially an attempt to be first in striking. This game is often thought to be a sign of wit and humor. Apparently, the only way some people can feel good about themselves is to cut others down and trample on them with words. But how do those cuts really make a friend feel when that’s what she hears every time you meet? She may laugh on the outside, but what happens inside? Maybe some people are too sensitive, but maybe some of us are too callused. Every person we meet may be carrying some kind of burden. The sense of humor we reflect should help to make life easier, not more difficult.

Jesus said: “For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things

out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:34-37 NIV).

Dealing with people who misuse humor in hurtful ways is very difficult. The wise man cautions that “Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you” (Proverbs 9:7-8). When false charges and accusations were brought against Jesus just before he was crucified, he chose not to respond. Perhaps those who laugh inappropriately at others are suffering from a low self-esteem. Whether you try to talk with a person who has such an attitude depends on your judgment about his being open to kindly correction. Also, effectively dealing with such a person requires reasoning, not just talking, if progress is to be made.

I believe Jesus would recommend some positive actions. Never join in this kind of banter. Model a kind and respectful spirit before all. Do not laugh along with others at this sort of humor. Show disapproval of such behavior by walking away. Pray that any friends who act this way will come to see how foolishly they are behaving. When the opportunity presents itself, demonstrate a good sense of humor that respects others and is consistent with the spirit of Jesus.

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881. This article is reproduced on the web: www.nchrist.org] 2013/03/08