

TWISTED LOVE—FAMILY SECRETS, LIES AND HEARTACHES

Bullies and Controllers

2 Samuel 12:1-10

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Brene Brown has said that stories are data with a soul. I could give you statistics about bullying others or I could tell you a story. Nathan could have lectured King David about bullying (taking another man's wife; killing her husband); instead he told him a story about bullying. And he closed that story by saying, "Thou art the man!" (v. 7).

Bullies are people who abuse their privilege and power. David was a wealthy male who lived with a great deal of privilege and power. After he arranged to have Bathsheba's husband killed in battle, David's messenger brought news that many, many of Israel's army died in the same battle. David's reply (11:25) was, "Don't let it bother you. That's what happens during war. A soldier here, a soldier there..." A bully!

But wait. Wasn't this the King David who was a man after God's own heart? Who composed so many psalms? Yes. But we are never just one thing. I have discovered that people who are abusive may be the people who put on a very respectable public face.

Here's the irony. David had seven older brothers (1 Sam. 16). Do you supposed he ever got picked on or bullied when he was little? He should know better! What's more, when Saul was king and David was a private citizen, Saul became jealous and started bullying David. Again, David should know better! But as is often the case, those who are bullied sometimes become bullies. Don't forget. Anger and violence are learned behaviors. I once heard a policeman talk about domestic violence. He said, "Men who are abusers say they have bad tempers and they can't control them. But it's amazing when a 250-pound policeman shows up, suddenly, they *can* control their tempers!"

Early in my pastoral career, I received a phone call about 2:00am. A woman was screaming, "Get over here. He's beating me. I'm going to kill him if someone doesn't stop him." I dressed and arrived to see the husband, motionless on the floor, in a pool of blood. He wasn't dead. He was passed out from drinking. It was her blood.

Many Bible teachers and ethicists have pointed out that abuse is a form of abandonment and abuse is a form of adultery. And both of those are scriptural grounds for divorce (abandonment, 1 Cor. 7:15 and adultery, Matthew 5:32). Let me be clear. No person is bound by scripture or faith to stay in an abusive marriage. You can get mad at me and quote scripture all you want. I've seen too much to believe otherwise!

Remember. There are many kinds of bullying: Playground bullying, employment bullying, economic, political and social bullying. Bullying on dates or in marriage. Emotional abuse, mental abuse, sexual abuse. Also, did you realize there is a socially acceptable form of bullying? It's called controlling others.

Let me bring this down to something to take with you, two practical steps. FIRST OF ALL, you have a right to feel safe. You are beautiful. You are God's creation. Here is a verse that has stuck with me as I have planned this sermon series: "Says the LORD, I will place them in safety for which they long" (Psalm 12:5).

SECOND, discover with me the difference Christ can make in a home. For one thing, think about how Jesus goes down deep to root causes. "Out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery... (Matt. 15:19). We could add, "Out of the heart comes bullying, the compulsion to control others..." Also notice in the gospels the dignity with which he treated women, children and all powerless people.

On this Mother's Day, 2018, I want to admonish every person in this place: let's model for all children a healthy respect for women, for children, for anyone without power or agency. Let's model for children nonviolent behavior and healthy boundaries, so that no one has to live with bullying. In the name of Jesus Christ, who stood up to the bullies of the Roman Empire and of the corrupt church, let's say no to bullying. In the name of Jesus Christ who was crucified by Roman and corrupt church bullies, let's say, "NO MORE BULLYING!" Amen.