

## **The Power of our Words**

*Do they Hurt or Heal, Build up or Destroy*

### **2 Kings 2:23-25**

*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!" [24] 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. [25] And he went on to Mount Carmel and from there returned to Samaria.*

This is a really hard piece of scripture. It reminds me of Numbers 16:28-35 and the family of Korah who got swallowed up because they rebelled against the leadership of Moses and Acts 5:1-11 when Ananias and Sapphira lied to Peter and the Holy Spirit about gifts they gave to God. For a time as I read this story of Elisha, I prayed, "why?" In fact, because this happened so soon after Elisha took over Elijah's ministry, my first thought was, "He really thinks a lot of himself." Some kids call him a name, so he calls down curses from God. And I wasn't too impressed by the fact God actually answered his prayer.

But the more I thought about it, the more I considered perhaps God is trying to show us the seriousness of our words. Our Father often used extremes to give us a glimpse of how he felt about certain situations. Korah, for example, helped us see that it's unacceptable to rebel against God's chosen leader. Ananias and Sapphira set the stage for the rest of Christianity so we would understand that God didn't want our gifts if they were given to make us look good or contributed as a lie.

In his work, "Notes from the Tilt-A-Whirl," N.D. Wilson talks a lot about the power of the spoken word. After all, everything we can see and touch was created by the mere mention of it by our Creator. Likewise, our words hold power . . . more power than we can imagine. The things we say have the power to build up and tear down. They can create or destroy. What if God allowed these young men to die so that we might truly understand the power of our words?

I think that God wants as Christians to have fun. There's nothing worse than a boring gospel or dry, pious Christians. However, it's often easy to allow our "fun" to turn into bullying. Even Christians enjoy a bit of teasing and sarcasm, and often it's harmless. But unfortunately, more often our words hurt and tear down. Sometimes we mean well. We're just having a good time. We think that the person we're teasing understands we love them and don't want to hurt them. They laugh, too! Other times, our teasing is really sarcasm. We mean what we say. The tone we use sounds like teasing, and we laugh after we say it. The one who is the focus of our "joke" laughs, too. So, it must be OK. But in these times, we are more like the young men calling out "baldhead" than the image of the living Christ.

Joking can alleviate tension and help get conversation started. Levity can be healthy for relationships. Laughing is good for our health. But does all of our laughing, joking and levity bring glory to God? Could any of our powerful words be construed of "bullying"? Even if the subject of our jokes laughs too. As Christians it's important that even our light hearted speech is holy.

Ephesians 4:29 says: *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen (NIV)* This week consider every word that comes out of your mouth. Evaluate them according to the power they have and their potential to "build others up." After all, you don't want to be mauled by a lion!

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