



Have you ever had a person in your life who was just (for some reason) out to get you? That person who, for some reason, didn't like you?

[Author Note: If you have one, share a personal story about someone who didn't like you or picked on you when you were little.]

These are some of the things that I dealt with during elementary school when it came to a kid who didn't like me:

- He was always a punk to me.
- While playing football, he kept trying to get me in fights.
- He would make fun of me.
- He was kind of a bully.
- He would always talk trash whenever we played sports against each other.
- He would try to instigate any conflict he could.
- He was always a jerk and rude.
- He went out of his way sometimes to be a jerk to me.

And when I was in junior high (and even parts of high school), I never knew how to deal with him.

I wish that back then, my church did a series on dealing with mean people—like the series we are starting today, because definitely I could have used it.

Maybe you have someone like this in your life. Or maybe someone has just hurt you. Maybe you are dealing with people who are just being mean to you (gossip, disagreements, hurtful words).

Then I want to encourage you to lean in and listen for a few minutes because I think this series can help you. Maybe no one has hurt you (or been rude to you) lately. But listen anyway, because it's coming. It will happen.

I've heard this said before: "The only way to avoid conflict and mean people is to *do* nothing, say nothing, and *be* nothing." Which is impossible!

Jesus understood mean people (because He created people). But more importantly, I think that He understood how to deal with them.

Over the next four weeks, we are going to look at what Jesus said and did when it came to people who are just plain rude. And dealing with rude people is more than just "shaking it off" like Taylor Swift says.

Let's face it: hurt is tough to shake off. But Jesus gives some insight into how we can deal with mean people in life.

God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way. (Matthew 5:10-12)

There are so many ways we could go with this passage, but I want to focus on two foundational truths that Jesus shares with His disciples through these three verses about understanding hurt.

Truth #1: People are mean. (Even Christians are mean sometimes—we'll talk about that in a bit.)

Jesus makes this plainly clear. He doesn't say ***if*** people mock you, persecute you, and lie about you. He says ***when*** they do it.

*... **when** people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you ...*

This is a given, because we live in a mean, rude, hurtful world. If you don't believe this, drive up to [busy intersection in your area] and sit for three seconds when the light turns green. You'll find out really quick that people can be rude.

[Author Note: This is a personal illustration, but you can probably come up with a story about when a Christian was rude to you.]

This reminds me of a time when I saw a car with the bumper sticker, "Honk if you love Jesus." So I honked. Guess what happened next? A little birdy flew out that car's window ... and it wasn't the dove of peace, if you know what I mean!

Why are people mean? Why are even Christians mean? It's really simple:

People are mean, because people are broken.

Paul tells us that everyone is susceptible to being mean, because everyone deals with sin:

*As it is written: "**None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.** (MEAN AND RUDE) Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."* (Romans 3:10-18)

Paul later goes on to say something that has become one of the most popular verses in the Bible:

*For **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:23)

People are mean and rude because they are broken. I can be mean and rude because I'm broken with a sin problem.

- There are times when I do my own thing.
- Times when I use my tongue to deceive.
- Times when I spit venom with my words.
- Times when my mouth is full of curses and bitterness.

It's because I'm a sinner, and even though I'm a Christian, I still revert back to my flesh from time to time. It's crazy! But I do this even though I know Jesus gives me power over it. We all do sometimes.

When I'm rude and mean (or when others are rude and mean), it's all just a cover up for the brokenness we have. Meanness covers up hurt somewhere (in the past or present). People who are mean are covering up hurt they really feel inside because of the brokenness sin causes.

An American philosopher, Eric Hoffer—I don't even know if he is a Christian or not, but he says something very profound about rudeness:

"Rudeness is the weak person's imitation of strength."

People are typically mean because they have been hurt, either by you or someone else.

That person who is always mean to everyone, even you—when you never did anything to them—was hurt somewhere, sometime.

I don't really know why _____ was mean. Maybe his home life wasn't all that great. Maybe he didn't follow Jesus. Maybe he struggled with a lot of issues. There are all kinds of things that could have worked their way into this person's story that contributed to why they acted the way they did.

You see, in this same passage where Jesus tells us a profound truth that people are going to be mean, He also gives us another truth on how to deal with it. And it sounds a little bit crazy when you first read it.

Truth #1: People are mean.

Truth #2: You don't have to be.

Look at Jesus' words right after He tells His disciples that people are going to mock them, persecute them, and lie about them. He says be happy about it! Wait ... what?

Be happy about it! Be very glad!

Seriously? Why in the world would Jesus say to be happy when people mock you?

Why would He say be happy when people persecute you? Why would He say be happy when people lie about you?

If I were standing there with the disciples, my first response would have probably been, "Uh, Jesus, have you ever had anyone mock or lie about *you*? Because it royally stinks!"

And His response to me would be, "Yes, I have. As a matter of fact, they (the Pharisees) are lying about me right now, they are going to persecute me for your sake, they are going to mock me when I'm on a cross for you, so I think I know a thing or two about how to respond when someone mocks or lies about you."

And He says be happy about it! Why? I think there a couple of reasons Jesus says this.

The first one is this: Jesus is telling you that ...

1. You can make a difference.

You have a choice! *You* choose how you react to rudeness and hurtful people.

Think about it this way: if you are happy about something someone has done to you, how do you respond to that person? More than likely, it's a response that comes out of love.

I believe choosing to be *happy* about persecution means choosing love over retaliation.

Jesus says **you don't have to retaliate; you can choose love.**

Look what Jesus says in Matthew 5:44.

*But I say, **love** your enemies! **Pray** for those who persecute you!*

What is the best response to someone who has been hurt and may be hurting others because of pain in their past? *Love and prayer.*

Can you hold hatred and bitterness toward someone you chose to love?

Can you want revenge on someone you are praying over?

My guess is no.

Words are strong. Often when we are hurt by mean people, we retaliate with even more hurtful words. We do this in order to *make our point* that we have been hurt. Or to *point out* the wrong that someone else has done to us. Often, it's both!

Here's a question I want you to think about the next time you are hurt and want to get revenge:

Do you want to make a point or do you want to make a difference?

Too often I focus on making my point that I was hurt rather than trying to make a difference in the relationship.

Making a point comes from wanting retaliation or restitution. *Making a difference* comes from loving the other person (even if they have hurt you).

It's your choice to choose to be happy about persecution ... to choose love over hate.

The second reason I believe Jesus says "be happy" about mean people in your life is ...

2. You can show Jesus.

On another occasion, Jesus is talking to His disciples about the future and telling them about all the things mean people will do to them because they are His followers.

But before all this occurs, there will be a time of great persecution. You will be dragged into synagogues and prisons, and you will stand trial before kings and governors because you are my followers. (Luke 21:12)

He gives them a great reason why others will be mean to them: so that they can show these people the Way, Truth, and Life! Persecution gives them an opportunity to share Jesus!

But this will be your opportunity to tell them about me. (Luke 21:12-13)

Meeting rudeness and meanness with love is the essence of being Jesus to others. When Jesus was on the cross, dying and being mocked, what did He say?

Forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Even in the most excruciating hurtful, moment of His life, Jesus still loved.

The third reason I believe Jesus says be happy about mean people in your life is ...

3. You'll get rewarded.

God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs ... For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way. (Matthew 5:10-12)

Paul even talks about this reward after the hurt:

For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet **they produce for us a glory** that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! (2 Corinthians 4:17)

Did you see that? This "short-lived" hurt/trouble we have *produces* glory for you in eternity!

People are mean ... but you don't have to be.

You can choose love, and you can show Jesus.

And when you do, a reward is coming. It may not feel like it now, but know that you have a future ... and that future includes glorious blessing from God.

Quickly, before we close, I want to address an issue that comes with mean people and the church.

What if the church has been mean? What if people you trusted in your church were mean to you?

First, remember that all people are broken, so even those in the church are going to hurt you sometime. Even *I* am probably going to hurt you if you hang out with me long enough.

It's a constant battle that we have to choose to love. If we don't, we will hurt others.

But if you are sitting there and you are almost done with the church because people have hurt you that aren't supposed to hurt you, then I want to share with you a few things you need to know:

- 1. Christians are going to hurt your feelings.** We're all broken because of sin. It's going to happen. Expect it. No perfect people are allowed in this place. We all need grace.
- 2. If the church hurts you, your spiritual maturity will be revealed.** You will discover how real your relationship with Christ is when your feelings get hurt.
- 3. God intends to use any hurt you have for your good** (even church hurt).
 - a. Paraphrase Romans 8:28: Anything that comes into our lives (good or bad), first passed through the hands of a sovereign, loving Father before it got to us. And He uses it for our good.
- 4. You'll never heal until you forgive.** Forgiveness is not for the other person; it's for you. You can live free from this.

This doesn't mean that you'll never get hurt again. Or that people won't be rude to you. (For some of you, it will happen at the restaurant after church. For some of you it will happen in traffic leaving the parking lot of the church!)

But you can choose to love in spite of being hurt.

You can choose to mature.

You can choose to forgive.

You can choose to show Jesus.

People are mean ... but you don't have to be.

Let's pray.