

# Forgiving the Bully

by Dana Graham

Have a bully's words lowered your self-esteem? Learn how to forgive and move on.

It was the late 1980s. I was a pudgy teenager, but by all accounts I was also a smiling, jovial girl who made friends easily. However, deep down inside, I was also a young woman riddled with insecurity about my weight, looks and lack of what I decided was social acceptance. As with many girls who are overweight, I became the target for cruel comments about my size and body type. One moment in my high school's weight room crystallized in my mind and nearly immobilized me. As the other girls in my class learned the basics of weight training, a cheerleader began chanting, "Hefty, hefty, hefty" during my turn at the weight bench.

Her words felt like a punch in my stomach, and nothing, I mean nothing, could erase what those words did to me years later.

In fact, I was in my early 20s and working out a small women-only gym when I found myself having to cast those words out of my head repeatedly just to get through a stint on the treadmill. Sometimes I'd drive around the parking lot just to get past my feelings of failure in order to walk into that gym.



## Finding Forgiveness

When I stepped out of situation and analyzed why that girl's words hurt so much, I realized it was because she seemed to have it all. She was a pretty, smart, popular and physically active young woman who seemingly had no problems. Yet she felt it necessary to put others down.

In fact, I was lucky. The taunts this bully directed toward my classmates were cruel and often repetitive. Believe it or not, I was relatively unscathed compared to some other poor souls. In actuality, she must have felt it necessary to bully other girls by putting them down.

Sadly, this story ended tragically a few years ago, I received a call from a good friend who told me of this young woman's passing after a courageous fight with

a condition that left her disfigured. She left behind a young husband, a promising career and a family who was reeling from her loss at such a young age. It was a tragedy for everyone who knew and loved her. Admittedly, I felt a small amount of remorse and mixed feelings about how her words and actions had hurt my self-esteem and limited my potential, at least for a small bit of time in my life.

I will tell you that my spiritual walk with God led me to forgive her, but it took time. I don't want you to waste another minute in a similar bullying episode, so here's where forgiveness comes into play.



**1- Letting a bully's words define you immobilizes your potential to follow God, and it undercuts His plan for you.** Trust me on this one, what God has planned for you is far greater than what someone else can envision for you. And if that vision comes from a bully, chances are that her predications for you are limiting. So, cast them aside and reach higher! You may surprise yourself and end up finding your true calling-one that brings you fulfillment and inspires others.

**2- God has forgiven you, and through this act of love you can forgive others.** Let's face it: Someone who bullies hasn't, in most cases, felt the love that we as Christians receive from our heavenly Father. We're the truly blessed ones. Have you ever asked your bully why she feels compelled to say hurtful words to you? Have you ever prayed for the right time or place to truly talk to your bully? Have you ever prayed for her deliverance? Nothing disarms like a loving presence. I look back and sincerely hope that someone told my bully about Jesus before it was too late.

**3- Hanging on to negativity, hurt and unforgiveness isn't good for your mind, body or soul.** I've wondered about my high school bully and how she might have spent the last days of her life. Did she think about what legacy she'd leave behind? And on the other hand, if I let feelings of hurt and unforgiveness overrun me, I couldn't give myself fully to the wonderful family and friendships God's blessed me with. Praise God! I'm blessed each day to know that my husband and sons are healthy, that my career has afforded me an opportunity to experience extraordinary things, and that I've amassed a wonderful array of friendships. I mean this with every fiber in my being when I say that it's so sad my high school bully couldn't realize her dreams. In short, hanging on to those feelings of

negativity and hurt wouldn't allow me to think with an attitude of gratitude. Don't waste another minute on nonloving, unproductive feelings.

**4- Your ability to be used by God glorifies Him!**

A person who operates with a sense of purpose and sincere love for others is so attractive! Don't allow a bully's words to cripple your God-given dreams. Pour your energies into thoughtful ways you can respond to the world around you: giving to others, donating your time, serving those who need a helping hand.



Remember that as a Christian young woman, you're being watched. If what I've described here rang true for me some 20 years later, you never know God's plan for you. Don't fall into familiar traps of this world, but pray for opportunities to spread your wings and soar in Him. And don't let the hurtful words of a bully stop your from living freely in Christ!

Remember, this forgiveness thing is more about your growth and your success in life-than your bully's.