

Winner or Loser?

Winning Over Basic Youth Conflicts

By

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New Teen Author

Publisher's Preface

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When I first received the manuscript from this insightful young man, Mark Metzger, who was only 18 at the time, I was skeptical as to what life lessons he had the time to experience and the inspiration to write about. However, I soon learned and was quite amazed at the resolve he had to help others achieve a more purposeful life by sharing stories of his youth and giving other youth (and many adults as well) insightful and positive actions they could take to accomplish their goals.

As a self-publishing expert, my goal was to help Mark publish his book and to attract the right audience so that he would have the greatest impact on the largest number of people. I quickly realized that Mark had written a "Guidebook for Dealing with and Resolving Basic Youth Conflicts" to help young people become "Winners" at the game of life and not "Losers," a popular label used by youth to demean their peers.

As Life Group Leaders at our church in Argyle, Texas, my wife Donna and I have often searched the scriptures looking for inspirational stories to share with our small group or challenging subjects for future group Bible studies. After Donna had read a few sample chapters of Mark's manuscript, she remarked, "Mark should read Isaiah 53 and see how well this chapter's subject "the suffering servant's life" parallels the life of Jesus with the lives of so many young people from the past and present day." As she read Isaiah 53 to me, I understood exactly what she meant. In this Old Testament scripture, the prophet Isaiah describes a "servant" yet to come, Jesus Christ. It describes how he had no special features or grandness, was not attractive, was despised by his peers, misunderstood, made fun of and was not considered to be anyone's hero, except

for twelve disciples he had chosen to be his friends. Most of them were challenged in some way and in need of a teacher who could instruct and inspire them to reach their full potential, as disciples and purveyors of the words spoken by Jesus and inspired by God. Most weren't considered "special" in Jewish society. In fact, the tax collector Matthew was hated by the Jews. Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John were uneducated fishermen. Yet their leader Jesus taught them how to become effective servants through suffering and sacrifice. And the religious leaders, their opposition, the other "gang," soon became so angry at the success and popularity of this group that they sought not only to disband them but to have them all killed! Does this sound like a story that could have been written today?

Let's review this chapter together before you begin reading what Mark has to say to his target audience, the youth of today. I have chosen "The Message" version of this scripture because it uses some of the same vernacular as Mark has used in this book and to which youth of today can relate.

Isaiah 53 (The Message)

Who believes what we've heard and seen? Who would have thought God's saving power would look like this?

*The servant grew up before God - a scrawny seedling,
a scrubby plant in a parched field.*

*There was nothing attractive about him,
nothing to cause us to take a second look.*

*He was looked down on and passed over,
a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand.*

One look at him and people turned away.

We looked down on him, thought he was scum.

*But the fact is, it was our pains he carried -
our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us.*

*We thought he brought it on himself,
that God was punishing him for his own failures.*

But it was our sins that did that to him,
that ripped and tore and crushed him - our sins!
He took the punishment, and that made us whole.
Through his bruises we get healed.
We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost.
We've all done our own thing, gone our own way.
And God has piled all our sins, everything we've done wrong,
on him.

He was beaten, he was tortured,
but he didn't say a word.
Like a lamb taken to be slaughtered
and like a sheep being sheared, he took it all in silence.
Justice miscarried, and he was led off -
and did anyone really know what was happening?
He died without a thought for his own welfare,
beaten bloody for the sins of my people.
They buried him with the wicked,
threw him in a grave with a rich man,
Even though he'd never hurt a soul
or said one word that wasn't true.
Still, it's what God had in mind all along,
to crush him with pain.

The plan was that he give himself as an offering for sin
so that he'd see life come from it - life, life, and more life.
And God's plan will deeply prosper through him.
Out of that terrible travail of soul,
he'll see that it's worth it and be glad he did it.
Through what he experienced, my righteous one, my servant,
will make many "righteous ones,"
as he himself carries the burden of their sins.
Therefore I'll reward him extravagantly -
the best of everything, the highest honors -
Because he looked death in the face and didn't flinch,
because he embraced the company of the lowest.
He took on his own shoulders the sin of the many,
he took up the cause of all the black sheep.

Think about this verse as you read this sample chapter and learn from Mark's book.

Be A True Friend.

"The wise prevail through great power, and those who have knowledge muster their strength." Proverbs 24:5 NIV

"A friend is one who believes in you when you have ceased to believe in yourself." Unknown

More often than not, people will only socialize and be friends with people that are just like them. We are naturally attracted to people who are a lot like ourselves; have the same passions, personality types and common interests. The reason for that is because it is so simple and comfortable to fit in and associate with similar people.

What about the people that are the opposite of us that we call "different", the groups and people that don't have the same passions and interests as us? You've probably heard someone say, "I am not going to get along and be friends with that guy, just look at him!" or "That guy looks mean and he's been in trouble with the law." That doesn't give you the right to treat them like they are inferior. What I have learned is that you should get to know that person before passing any judgment. Some of the most generous people are the ones with noticeable problems and hang-ups. To be honest, you might be able to trust that person that you call "different" a lot more than you can trust your "group of friends." Many people don't know the reasons why people have the hang-ups they have. You should always try to be more understanding towards others.

When I was in high school, there would always be the stereotypical groups of the "athletes", the "smart ones", the "preps" and the "different" ones. I always asked myself, "Well, what is different?"

What makes you different?" People need to get over the "doesn't measure up to my standards" attitude. I remember times when some people would say right out loud, "As long as you act like me, have the same passions and interests as me, then I will like you, get along with you and be friends with you." It's almost like you had to pass a test to become someone's friend.

I learned that, nowadays, too many people don't choose their friends for the sake of friendship. My parents taught me from an early age not to choose my friends because they were the star athlete of the school or because they were popular, the class clown or the pretty girl that everybody likes. They told me to choose my friends because they are kind, caring, and you just enjoy being around them. Today, I understand more than ever what my parents were teaching me. They weren't saying to be friends with every single person you come in contact with but at least be sincere and generous to everybody that crosses your path. My mom would always tell me when I was in school, "If you see anybody sitting at a lunch table alone, go sit with them and make new friends, better yet, invite them to sit with you and your group. You never know the impact you will have on someone else."

For example, my senior year of high school, something happened that totally changed my heart. I was taking a class required for graduation. The teacher never took sides, and she always seemed to understand where people were coming from with their thoughts and ideas. It was the first day of class, and she had us play a game called the line game. The whole class stood on the line, and she would ask questions such as do you live in a house, do you have a car, do you have siblings, questions like that. A question that stood out was this particular one. She asked, "Does anybody feel lonely or ever feel like they have no friends and feel like they are just aren't good enough?" One kid was bold and had enough faith to step over that line. My heart instantly went to my

stomach. I felt so badly for him and was upset emotionally.

Later I noticed that he had the same lunch time as me. One day, I saw him sitting all by himself at the corner lunch table where nobody could see him, so I went over and sat by him. He was very quiet and shy. I introduced myself and just asked him to tell me about himself.

He told me his name was Ricky and that he just moved to our city because his workplace is right by the school and his apartment. He went on to tell me that he had experienced a very rough life. He moved out of his house because his father was an alcoholic and drug addict, subject to angry rages and violence. He went on to say that his mother passed away when he was in first grade.

His life was very difficult. His dad would come home at night drugged up and would physically and mentally abuse him. You could tell that he was struggling and on his own, because he only had three shirts and wore the same pajama pants almost every day. He told me that he worked every single day, and this was his daily schedule: he would come to school at 7:45 am until school was over at 2:30 pm, then he would go home, do homework, sleep for a little bit, then work at his job from 11 pm until 7:00 am in the morning, then he would head off back to school. His story made me feel very sad for him.

After sharing all this with me, he opened a red notebook and began to draw. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw his amazing drawings. I even asked him if he traced them, and he replied, "No, I drew them myself." I saw incredible drawings of a portrait of a person, of animals, of a window and the sky beyond. I asked him if I could see the rest of his drawings, because they were so good, and I was impressed. He gave me his notebook, and as I was flipping through it, I came across a poem. The title of his poem was "Nobody Will Miss Me." The poem's main point was that people would always judge him, laugh at him, and, in fact, even beat him

up for no reason at all except for being "different." I was so heart-broken; I gave him my cell phone number and said, "You have a friend in me, in fact, a true friend... I promise." Suddenly, Ricky smiled the biggest smile, and in an appreciative voice, said "Thank you!"

The next day in the classroom, he handed me his notebook and said, "Read this, I have written a poem for you." It was a poem and a picture that he had drawn. The poem read:

"My New Friend"

"I finally found and have a friend, someone that actually cares about me and took the time to reach out to me. I know he has my back, and he is a true friend. He even said you got a friend in me, I promise. I totally believe in him that he is my friend. What Mark doesn't know is the day he talked to me and got to know me for the person I am, I had a loaded gun in my apartment that was ready to go. I was going to pull the trigger when I got home from school. I had the gun in my hand ready to fire, but I kept hearing this kid's voice, heart and seeing him saying, "You are such a talented drawer, and you got a friend in me. I promise." I thought to myself I would hurt my friend way too much if I did this. I set that gun down faster than you can imagine. I am so excited that I will see my friend, in fact, my best friend tomorrow at school. He saved my life because he showed interest in me.

Your friend, Ricky."

I thought all I had done was to be friendly and include him, make him know that I cared about him. I wasn't treating him differently than any of my other friends. The little life lesson that I learned is that it makes such a difference in somebody's life when you take the time and get to know someone and hear his or her story. It is so easy to laugh and say, "You don't measure up to my expectations or my friends' criteria." Try to include most everyone you know on

your "friends" list. You might not talk to them all the time, but make friends with as many people as you can. Let them know that you care about them. Take the time to find out what makes that person who they are. Some of you would have many more friends, or who knows - maybe even a friend for life! Who are you to judge? Never put someone in the "not my friend" category.

Remember, Proverbs 18:24 says, **"There are friends who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother."**

Let me ask you, whom are you sticking close to like a brother or sister? I know there are other people like Ricky, someone who needs you to be their friend, someone who could use your acceptance and friendship. Sometimes a desperate person goes to another person as a last resort before they give up hope. You may be the one person that makes an attempt at friendship with someone who is dying of loneliness on the inside. The person you befriend may give life a second chance just like Ricky did. They could be doing the absolute best they can with who they are and what they have. This was certainly true in Ricky's case. Show acceptance to everyone! Never ignore someone that you don't think meets up to your friends' checklist. Expand your friends list. Don't just have a few friends; have a lot of them! It makes life more diverse and interesting.

ACTION PLAN:

This week when you go out whether it's at school, college, work or just anywhere in the real world, notice if you are only associating with people that are "just like you" or measure up to your standards. If that is true, be bold enough and include and get to know somebody with whom you normally wouldn't associate. Make new friends, in fact, maybe that next "somebody" will end up being one of your closest friends. Being friendly might help you and your new friend reach your individual dreams and goals.