

I Was Bullied – My Story and Seven Ways to Prevent It

After becoming a Christian in the eighth grade, I shared my newfound faith with everyone. I hoped my relationship with Jesus would be contagious. After a few months of sharing, multiple friends called and asked to come to church with me. I was so excited! Some came and responded to the gospel as I had. But others decided that the Christian faith wasn't for them. These "friends" who'd rejected the message began to reject me as well.

Being bullied became a constant pattern in my life. I was ridiculed and ostracized by my "friends." I was physically or verbally threatened on several occasions because of my beliefs.

One semester, a group of tough guys began intimidating me. They'd sneak up on me and whisper, "Do you want to fight? You'd better watch yourself after school. We're gonna kick your butt!" They were relentless. The bullies stared and laughed at me in class, followed me down the halls every day, and prevented me from getting into my locker. I was scared to death and felt like no one could help me.

I didn't know how to fight back. I was a scrawny, five-foot-two kid who weighed eighty pounds soaking wet. The bullies seemed like they were ten feet tall. Their intimidation became overbearing, so I went to see the school counselor. After hearing my story, he began escorting me to the bike rack after school for the next month. I'd unlock my bike, hop on, and ride like the wind, hoping to get home before the bullies caught me.

One time, I was home alone, and the doorbell rang. Two bullies were at the door. They tried to pull me outside and beat me

up—in a nice, middle-class neighborhood, no less! I forced the door shut. They looked for another way into the house, calling me names as I hid inside. I tried to call my neighbors for help. No one was home. I was so scared that the bullies would find a way into my house that I called the police. The bullies left.

My dad came home, and I told him what had happened. Trying to help me, he called the bullies' parents and had stern conversations with them. Well, you can imagine how the bullies reacted. Their threats, intimidation, and pressure grew worse. During P. E. the next day, the bullies told me I'd pay for my dad's calls.

Somehow, I kept my faith and prayed for God's protection through all that. I trusted God's promise in Isaiah 41:10: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (ESV). I surrounded myself with other believers and found support. I was never physically harmed, but I was emotionally scarred.

Being bullied was humiliating and embarrassing. Admittedly, I've struggled with resentment toward those bullies and wanted to get revenge over the years. It took a long time for me to forgive them and overcome my fear and anger. These traumatic episodes molded me at a very early age and had a lasting impact. On one side, they taught me to trust God and persevere. On the other side, I learned how to hide my faith from others as a form of self-protection.

Eventually, I grew out of the five-foot-two frame into a six-foot-one frame. I matured physically, emotionally, and spiritually. My confidence grew more potent, and bullies no longer intimidated me. I stick up for myself. But when I sense someone is trying to threaten me or someone else, I have a visceral reaction (i.e., hair standing up on the back of my neck) that motivates me to fight back – stand up for myself

and others. This isn't always good. At times, I can become the aggressor. I'm still a work in progress. God continues shaping me – healing the wounds from long ago, building my faith in him, and moderating my reaction to bullies. He's not done with me yet, but I know that he'll finish what he started.

Statistics show that 20% of children ages 12 to 18 years old experience some type of bullying – unwanted aggressive behavior meant to hurt. Bullying comes in several forms (verbal, social, and physical) and typically occurs in a few locations (school or online).

How do you prevent bullying? It can be complex. But based on my experience, I recommend the following seven ways:

1. **Keep the faith** – I ran to God and sought his help in my time of need. He heard my cries and protected me. My faith in him grew more profound because of my experience, and he continues to mend me today.
2. **Speak up** – If you're the one being bullied, tell a trusted adult or authority. Don't be embarrassed. Ask for help. It took me a long time to muster the courage to admit I was being bullied. Ultimately, I told my parents and teachers. My experience may not have lasted as long or been as acute if I'd confided in someone earlier.
3. **Surround yourself** – seek support, safety, and solace with your friends and family. I leaned into my church youth group and will never forget their encouragement.
4. **Stick up for yourself** – Sometimes, you need to dig deep inside and find the courage to overcome your fear. Let the bully know you're not going to take it anymore. I'm not condoning violence. I am condoning a deep resolve that prevents anyone from unwanted aggressive behavior. Tell the bully to stop.
5. **Be someone's hero** – Don't stand on the sidelines if you

see someone being bullied. Intervene, stick up for the bullied person; if you see something, say something. I wished I had more heroes willing to stand up for me. Now, I try to be that hero in someone's life that I didn't have.

6. **Build awareness and a culture of safety** – Teachers, administrators, parents, and students can all play a role in bully prevention. Educate everyone on what bullying is and what it isn't. Teach respect, dignity, and what to do if bullying is occurring. Learn to listen. Be empathetic. Protect others.
7. **Forgive and forget** – It took a long time for me to resolve my feelings of anger and resentment. I learned that it's not good to hang on to grudges. If you do, you'll become bitter. The path to becoming better is through forgiveness and forgetting the circumstances – move on.

To learn more about bullying, its effects, and how to prevent it, visit: <https://www.stopbullying.gov>.

Have you ever been bullied? What was your experience? Please send me a note to preston@prestonpoore.com and continue the conversation.

Cheers,

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