

WoH 449

Abuse of power-Repentance

Fran: I visited my friend last week. While we drank our tea, her two children were playing. Rani, her little girl, was telling a story to a toy puppy that she called Tootsie. It was grubby and battered, because it's her favourite thing. She takes it to bed every night.

Her big brother Suresh was playing with the dolls, pretending they were going on a picnic. Suresh decided the doll family needed a pet, so he grabbed Tootsie from his sister and took it to his corner. She couldn't stop him from taking Tootsie, because he was bigger and stronger than her. She just sat there and cried.

Tammy: Hello, and welcome to *Women of Hope*. I'm Tammy.

Carol: And I'm Carol. I'm so pleased we can be together again. I hope you've had a good week. Fran's here too; she was just telling us about how Suresh bullied his sister. What did their mother do, Fran?

Fran: Oh, she made Suresh give the puppy back. But she also talked to Suresh about why taking his sister's toy was wrong. She asked him, 'How did *you* feel when those big boys at school took your lunch?' And she told him he needed to protect his little sister, not hurt her.

Tammy: Bullying can be a big problem at school. Most children have had times when they've been hurt, or embarrassed, or frightened, by other children. It happens to grown-ups too.

Carol: Yes. It's not just hurting someone physically; bullying can be saying nasty words, or making someone do something they don't want to.

Fran: So it's not just big, strong kids who are bullies, it can be pretty little girls with clever, mean words that make fun of another child. Bullying is really about using your power to make yourself feel strong. Bullies often do it

because they don't really feel very good about themselves. Kids who are bullies really need help to change, so they don't grow up to be people with no friends, or who break the law

Tammy: I wonder if you know children who are bullied? Maybe they don't want to go to school because they're frightened. Let's talk about how you could help them. First, tell them the bullying isn't their fault, but they can do some things to help. Bullies pick on people who don't look confident. So teach your children to stand tall, look the bully in the eye, speak loudly and tell them to stop; then turn and walk away to a safe place. Help them to practise acting strong and confident. They could practise words to say – maybe: 'I'm not talking to you while you're being mean.'

Fran: Tell children they need to tell someone they trust, like a teacher or parent. That's not telling tales on someone else - bullying is wrong and needs to be stopped.

Carol: Bullies often choose places where teachers or other kids can't see. So if children are being bullied, they should stay where they feel safe. Maybe go home by a different route, where there are people about. It's good to have a friend with them, someone who could support them, or back them up if they need to report it to the teacher, or even the police.

If the bullying is words, try ignoring it. The bully is looking for a reaction. Or they can ask the bully to repeat the words, or copy them back in a silly voice. Or ask them why they're saying this.

Tammy: If a child is being hit, especially if there's more than one bully, they should try to get away. Don't stay in a fight where they'll get hurt. But definitely go and tell an adult.

Fran: I remember getting teased because all the other girls had short haircuts but my parents made me wear long plaits, so I looked different. Now I don't care if I look different, but back then I just wished I could look 'normal'. Maybe

you can help your kids to fit in better with their group at school. That's so important to children and teenagers.

Tammy: You can teach your own children what is fair - things like taking turns, sharing, not interrupting, not using nasty names. Teach them to protect those who are weak or different, and not to laugh at them or hurt them. You want your kids to respect themselves and other people, so you need to set a good example of that in your home. You have more power than your children, at least while they are small, so make sure you don't bully them!

Tammy: Welcome back to *Women of Hope*. We've just been sharing some ideas about how to help our children who face bullies. Our story today is related to that in some ways - so please stay with us.

Carol: Have you heard any of the old stories Fran's been telling us about a man called David? David was the second king of ancient Israel, and he was famous as a soldier. In those days there were always fights going on between different tribes and countries, and the king's job was to lead his armies in battle to defend his people.

Tammy: But he was also famous as a poet and a musician. I've enjoyed hearing the poems, or psalms, that he wrote. David had many adventures and he really learned to trust in God, the creator of heaven and earth. But he wasn't perfect and he made some foolish choices at times. Today Fran's going to tell us about a really *bad* choice. Here's the story from God's word, the Bible (2 Samuel 11).

Fran: It was spring-time. After the winter was over, the fighting would often start again, and King David would usually lead his soldiers. But this year, he decided to stay home. He sent out his general, Joab, to lead the army, and he stayed in his comfortable palace.

One fine spring evening, after his afternoon rest, David went for a walk on the flat roof of the palace. From the roof he could see into the courtyards of other

houses- and he saw something he shouldn't have; a beautiful woman, washing herself! So David sent someone to find out who she was.

The message came back 'Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?'

Then David sent messengers to bring her to the palace. And he slept with her, then sent her home.

Fran: Let's stop and think about this for a moment. What's David's first mistake?

Carol: He should have been out defending his country, instead of having afternoon naps and spying on women from the palace roof!

Tammy: Yes, and a respectable married woman too, from a good family!

Carol: I wonder if Bathsheba wanted to come to him. The story doesn't say.

Tammy: Maybe she was flattered by the king's attention. Women are often very attracted to a man because he is powerful and wealthy. But they're not very good reasons to like a man are they!

Carol: Or maybe she really didn't have much choice...when the king said 'come', you had to come. Powerful men often seem to think they are above the normal rules, and they often seem to get any women they want. I think David was using his power in a wrong way, don't you? It's always wrong for a man to use his power to get sex from a woman, whether it's his physical strength or his position in society.

Tammy: And whether she agreed or not, whether he was king or not, he knew it was wrong for him to have sex with a woman who was not his wife. God's word is very clear about that.

Fran: But David was taking a big risk, wasn't he? You can't keep your mistakes secret. Have you found that? Someone always knows...and God

certainly does. Some of his servants knew what had happened, and they would gossip.

Carol: Are you wondering what happened next? Did he get away with it?

Fran: Let's go back to the story from God's word.

(Brief music)

The next thing was a message from Bathsheba: 'I'm going to have a baby.'

Oh, what would David do? Her husband, Uriah, was an officer, away with the army, so people would know he wasn't the father. So David made another choice; he sent a message to his trusted general Joab. 'Send Uriah home to report to me how the war is going.' David expected Uriah would spend the night with his beautiful wife and then everyone would think the child was Uriah's.

Uriah arrived, and made his report. But he didn't go home. He slept in the barracks. He said he was still on active duty and it wasn't right to have the comforts of home while his comrades were at war. David even invited him to dinner and got him drunk, but he still didn't go home to his wife.

David was desperate now. He wrote a sealed letter and sent it with Uriah to give to Joab. The letter said: 'Put Uriah where the fighting is fiercest. Then pull back so that he'll be struck down by the enemy and die in battle.' The general obeyed, and...yes, Uriah was killed. Joab sent David a message: 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.'

When Bathsheba heard the news, she mourned for her husband. But after the days of official mourning were over, David sent for her. She became his wife and bore his son.

But do you know what the Bible says? 'The thing David had done displeased God.'

Carol: Here on *Women of Hope* we've been listening to a true story from God's word, about how King David made some wrong choices. First he abused his position of power and had wrong sex with another man's wife, while her husband was away.

Tammy: Then he tried to cover up what he'd done by sending for her husband and trying to trick him into sleeping with his wife.

Carol: That's often what happens, isn't it? We do something wrong, and instead of confessing it we try to cover it up. Sometimes we think we get away with it...but remember, God always knows. Often, the cover-up leads to more and more lies...worse and worse mistakes. Has that ever happened in your family?

And another thing - David made his servants and Joab part of the cover-up. When people use their power wrongly, they often pull other people into the situation and make them do wrong too. That's terrible!

Fran: Well, what did David do next?...

Tammy: Yes, he plotted to put Uriah into danger so he would be killed in battle. But it wasn't an accident was it? It was the same as murder. And now the general, Joab, and some of the army knew. How could they respect a king who did that?

Fran: Well, we know what God thought about it. He was angry. The Bible tells us what God did about it. God sent his prophet, Nathan, to David, to tell him a story.

Tammy: A story? Is that all?

Fran: Ah, but wait till you *hear* the story (2 Samuel 12)!

Fran: Nathan said, 'Your majesty, there were two men who were neighbours. One was rich, with many animals, but the other was poor. He had only one

little lamb, and he loved it like his own child. Now a traveler arrived to visit the rich man; but he didn't want to use one of his own sheep for dinner. So he took the poor man's lamb, killed it and made a feast for the visitor.'

David was furious. 'He deserves to die! He must pay four times the value of the lamb, because he had no pity!'

Then Nathan the prophet said, '*You* are that man! Listen to what God says: 'I gave you the kingdom, and everything you have. Yet *you* killed Uriah, using the sword of the enemy. You stole his wife to be your own. In doing this, you despised me, your God, and you have made my enemies despise my name. You and your family will suffer because of this.'

Then David suddenly realized what a terrible thing he'd done. He broke down and confessed: 'I have sinned against the Lord.'

And that's the end of this part of the story from God's word.

Tammy: What a wise story the prophet Nathan told: it made David see for himself that he was just as bad as that rich man in the story, who stole and ate the poor man's darling pet lamb. David knew at once that the rich man had abused his powerless neighbour. Then he suddenly realized he'd done the same thing, only worse...he had stolen a man's *wife*...then *murdered* him.

Carol: Isn't it true that we often don't see our own faults? We make excuses for our own behaviour, and we need someone else to point out the truth. We need to ask God to show us clearly when we have sinned against others and against him.

Tammy: We were talking before about bullying. We can see it in other people, but do we see it in *ourselves*? I don't feel like I'm powerful, but in the eyes of my children I may be. If you're a teacher, or a manager, or an officer, or you have influence, you can be tempted to use your power to suit yourself. Most of

us have some power and we need to ask God to help us to use it wisely, not selfishly.

Carol: (*comment on song*) We're together on *Women of Hope* today, and we've been talking about how David did some very bad things...then God showed him how wrong he was. You might wonder: was David really sorry? Well, he wrote a prayer of confession that we can read in the Bible. Let's listen to it and then see what you think... (Psalm 51, based on GNB)

Marvin: Be merciful to me, O God,
because of your constant love.
Because of your great mercy, wipe away my sins!
Wash away all my evil
And make me clean from my sin!

I recognize my faults:
I am always aware of my sins.
I have sinned against you; in the long run my sin is against God,
Because I've done what you call evil.
So you are right in judging me...

Fran: Does that sound like he was really sorry?... I think it does. He wasn't sorry just because he was caught. He could see that God's judgment was correct, and his own judgment was not good at all. When we do wrong, we hurt God, not just other people. We need to be really sorry. Do you feel like that?
Marvin, can you read some more please?

Marvin: God, you require me to be sincere and truthful in my deepest self;
fill my mind with your wisdom.
Remove my sin and then I will be truly clean;
Wash me and I will be whiter than snow...
Create a pure heart in me, O God,
And put a new and loyal spirit in me. Don't banish me from your presence...

Give me the joy that comes when you save me
And make me willing to obey you.

Fran: It sounds as though he was *more* than sorry; he really wanted to change, and he knew he needed God to change him from the inside...to change his heart. Then he put his confidence in God's love and forgiveness. Listen to what he prayed.

Marvin: You don't want animal sacrifices...
The sacrifice God wants is a humble spirit;
O God, you won't reject a broken and repentant heart.

Carol: So finally David threw himself on God's love and mercy. He stopped making excuses, he knew he needed God to forgive him and he believed God would.

Fran: Oh, yes, God did forgive him. Nathan the prophet told him 'God has taken away your sin. You're not going to die.' But there *were* some *sad* results of his bad choices. However God gave him a new start and he always worshipped God with his whole heart from then on.

Tammy: You know, God is *longing* to forgive us when we truly admit our sins to him, when we want to turn away from our wrong thoughts and actions. He sent his perfect son Jesus to take the punishment for all those wrong things, so now he can wipe away our sins, as David said.

Fran: I can picture that - imagine a board with all the wrong things I've done written on it. Then Jesus comes along and wipes the board clean. They've all gone! That's what happened in my life...God gave me a new start, and a new spirit - the Holy Spirit of God himself. The Holy Spirit helps me to live a much better life with his power in me. No wonder I love him; and I want to tell you that he loves *you* too.

God's word has a wonderful promise for you; listen carefully. It says, 'If we confess our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right; he will forgive our sins and wash us clean from all our wrong-doing.' (1 John 1:9)

Tammy: I think we should learn that promise by heart, Fran. Can you say it again? Let's say it together after Fran.

Fran: 'If we confess our sins to God, (Tammy repeat each phrase)

he will keep his promise and do what is right;

he will forgive our sins

and wash us clean from all our wrong-doing.'

Carol: My friend, you can know that God has forgiven you today if you ask him to. Maybe you'd like to pray a prayer like this, with me.

Holy God, thank you for sending your Son Jesus to wipe away all my sins...

I'm truly sorry for the wrong things I've done...

and I ask you to forgive me and give me a new start, and a new heart...

I believe in Jesus and I want to follow him...

So I pray this in Jesus' name.

Tammy: If you prayed that prayer, you can be sure that God will keep his promise. Why don't you find someone who follows Jesus, if you can, and tell them what you've done? We'd all love to hear about it too. You can contact us...

Carol: Goodbye for now. Can we come again next time?

Fran: Goodbye, and God bless you.