

*If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink* (Proverbs 25:22).

What a simple lesson--in theory. To do good to those who trouble us, and to return good for evil done to us is a very noble principle.

It's at the heart of Christ's own teaching: "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you" (Matt. 5:44).

It appears in the letters of Peter and Paul, both of whom command that we never return "evil for evil".

As principles go, this one is clearly divine. But is it practical? Can we live it in day to day life? Or better put, are we willing to put it into practice when the people we love are being hurt?

I just returned from Church Camp where I am the assistant director. We hosted about 240 kids ranging from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade all the way to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The staff of 70 adults did our best to inspire these campers to learn a bit of our Lord's way of living in this world. But as anyone who has taught kids knows, the teachers frequently become the learners.

When we arrived at camp on Sunday afternoon, everyone was called to an orientation meeting in the auditorium. During that time, a few 10<sup>th</sup> grade girls hung back and decided it would be great fun to trash the 10<sup>th</sup> grade boys' cabin.

When the boys returned, their cabin was a disaster. Clothes were everywhere. Dirt and sand had been brought in by the bucket-load, and covered everything. Toilet paper hung from the bunks, which were now without mattresses. The boys were mad. The staff was mad. I was mad.

The adults set out to find the culprits, and bring appropriate discipline. But as is often the case, the kids found out who the

guilty parties were long before the adults did.

When they told us they knew who the pranksters were, these 10<sup>th</sup> grade boys begged us adults not to do anything, but to trust them to handle it. They guaranteed it would have a positive impact.

It was a leap of faith (not to mention against our better judgment), but we capitulated, provided their counselor would approve their plan.

The next day at dinner, the girls' table was covered with a cloth, and wild-flowers had been placed in vases on the table. The boys escorted the girls past the cafeteria line to their seats, and even pulled out their seats for them. Then these 10<sup>th</sup> grade boys went through the line and served the girls their suppers. Afterward, they brought dessert to the girls, and finally they cleaned their table for them.

It was an amazing transformation. The guilty girls made a public apology, and offered to do some service work around camp to make up for their errors. The innocent girls decided to help them out anyway, since they too received the reward. The boys learned not only a bit of old-fashioned chivalry, but the joy of what happens when we return good for evil. And the whole camp learned a lesson of putting these sometimes difficult Christian principles into practice.

It would have been so easy for these boys to return prank for prank, and escalate the bitterness. Instead, these 10<sup>th</sup> grade boys chose to return a wrong with kindness.

In doing so, they not only followed the teachings of Jesus Christ, they set an example for some 300 souls that day.

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