

Bad Girls of the Bible
“Peninnah: The Bitter Antagonist”
(Part 3)

Intro: Have you ever had an adversarial relationship with someone? Maybe a co-worker / a neighbor / a family member / or even a person in church that was just relentless in their criticism / put downs / accusations / and their consistent negative attitude directed at you? I’ve had a few of these relationships over the years.

- I had one man who was an antagonist towards me while I was a youth pastor (share)
- I had another man taunt me while I led worship and preached years ago (share)

Sometimes we find ourselves faced with dealing with people that are antagonists. Today’s character is one of these individuals. She’s a “bad girl” of the bible because of her relentless attacks on another woman. Her name is Peninnah.

• Summarize Story – I Samuel 1

I Sam. 1:6-8 “So Peninnah would taunt Hannah and make fun of her because the LORD had kept her from having children. Year after year it was the same—Peninnah would taunt Hannah as they went to the Tabernacle. Each time, Hannah would be reduced to tears and would not even eat. Why are you crying, Hannah?” Elkanah would ask. “Why aren’t you eating? Why be downhearted just because you have no children? You have me—isn’t that better than having ten sons?” (NLT)

Antagonist: One who opposes and contends against another; an adversary.

Sometimes we find ourselves confronted with adversarial relationships at work / in families / with neighbors / or even at church. What do we do? First, let’s understand these antagonistic people a bit.

I. Antagonists Are Motivated By Their Insecurities

I Sam. 1:4-5 “Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her...” (NLT)

A. Peninnah was an insecure wounded woman

1. Before we devalue this woman for her heartless attacks, let’s try to understand her pain a bit more. You see, people don’t act this way without a reason. I have said this for years; “Wounded people wound people.” Peninnah was a severely wounded woman.
2. Let’s understand her painful situation she lived in.
 - The second wife to Elkanah – The reason was probably because Hannah wasn’t able to produce an heir. Elkanah did what was normal for that culture in order to produce offspring...wife #2.

- Hannah was Elkanah’s love. He married Hannah for love. He married Peninnah for offspring. Elkanah loved Hannah. The Bible never says he loved Peninnah.
- Elkanah treated Hannah totally different than Peninnah. There was no equality in the household of these two women. (double portions)
- I’m sure with each child, Peninnah thought surely this would cause Elkanah to love her. It never happened. This went on year after year. Can you feel her pain a bit? With every child her insecurity and wounding grew worse.
- Can you see why she began to take her frustration out on the object of Elkanah’s love? I’m not saying it was right...I’m just saying you can see why she did it. Can you see why she resented Hannah?
- Can you see that with every passing year she became more and more insecure?

B. Remembering that antagonists are wounded people helps us have grace

1. Often we tend to demonize mean people. We begin to view them as entirely bad and forget there is a story to their pain. People’s actions are the result of something. Usually, something painful made them this way.
 - Ignoring the fact that these people are wounded, gives us more freedom to think negative thoughts about them. Make them into “BAD” people rather than wounded people.
2. Acknowledging this doesn’t excuse their bad behavior, but it does help us respond with a bit more grace. It enables us to view them through a different set of eyes. It changes our lenses in how we interpret their actions.
3. Sometimes when people are in physical pain, they can come across as impatient / critical / maybe even a bit mean. Even my sweet wife, at the birth of our second daughter, was not real happy with me getting us to the hospital too late for her to have any pain medication whatsoever. (explain)
4. If this is what physical pain can do, what about emotional pain / loss / abandonment / abuse / what about the wounds that have ripped apart people’s hearts that no one ever sees? There are huge holes left of insecurities.
5. Next time you see that bitter antagonist, remember that they are severely wounded insecure people. This may help you respond with a bit more grace.

II. Antagonists Can Be Relentless In Their Attacks

Year after year it was the same—Peninnah would taunt Hannah

- A. As long as the wound remains, antagonists have an endless supply of attacks
 1. Sometimes I have wondered; “When will these people ever quit?” Answer: Never! Why? Because they antagonize out of their wounding. Until the wounding is addressed, their behavior can never change.
 2. Their energy to antagonize is fueled by their wounds that have never healed. This is

how Peninnah could taunt Hannah year after year. She was relentless in her attacks. She never ran out of energy to wound Hannah because her own pain fueled it every day. Penninah's pain created this negative energy.

3. Sometimes we run into people like this. You may be faced with a relentless co-worker / relentless family member / maybe even a relentless church member. You keep waiting for them to run out of energy for their mean spirit / harsh critical words / their demeaning comments...yet it never goes away.
4. The most relentless antagonists I have ever encountered have been in churches. Christians who have never dealt with the reality of their wounding and now find their way to church and create havoc.
- I have faced a few bitter antagonists over the years. Man entering my Adult Sunday School class of about 35-40 people and verbally condemning the whole group.
5. Just because you give your life to Jesus doesn't mean the wound of your divorce automatically goes away / the pain of betrayal / the damage of abuse / or the emptiness of loss. We must be intentional at dealing with these things. Left by themselves, they fester and get worse. Emotional gangrene sets in.

B. Dealing with our own wounding protects us from being antagonistic

1. The reality is that life wounds everyone. Nobody gets a pain free ride through life. Therefore every one of us has the potential of becoming a Peninnah. Each of us can wound the people around us out of our own pain and wounding.
2. What wounds are you ignoring? What pain are you refusing to deal with? What emotional pain are you just hoping that if you ignore it, it will go away?
3. This is why when we give our lives to Jesus, we must embrace His plan of transformation. Jesus enters our lives to transform every area of our lives...This includes our pain!

Is. 53:4-5 "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows... But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." (NIV)

4. The whole point of Jesus being wounded on the cross was so our wounds could be healed in this life! Jesus doesn't only just give us eternal life later. Eternal life begins the moment we give our lives to Him. The transformation of our lives begins the instant we say YES to Jesus. This includes our wounds!

*Matt 11:28-30 "Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. **Let me teach you**, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light." (NLT)*

5. Are we willing to take our lives and wounds to Jesus and "let Him teach us"? There is not only healing that He wants to bring to our lives, but also perspective. There are lessons from our pain / maturity that results from our wounds / insights that only He can bring.

6. Are you weary today from carrying the heavy burden of your pain? Jesus says, “Come to Me.” “Bring it to Me” “Learn from Me” “Let Me change your life.” This is how we avoid becoming a Peninnah.

III. Antagonists Are Unconcerned Over The Pain They Cause Others

Each time, Hannah would be reduced to tears and would not even eat.

A. Antagonist can progress to the point of having no remorse

1. We see this with Peninnah. She didn't care about the pain she inflicted on Hannah. Hannah's tears had no emotional effect whatsoever on Peninnah or her behavior. Her conscience was seared.
2. Whenever we don't turn away from wrong behavior, over time, our consciences become damaged or dead. We no longer hear it telling us that the behavior is wrong anymore.

- The Bible warns us about people like this.

1 Tim. 4:2 “These people are hypocrites and liars, and their consciences are dead.” (NLT)

3. If we violate our conscience long enough, we will no longer hear it. It literally becomes dead in us. This is how people can severely wound each other without remorse / without guilt / without concern over the damage they create.
4. I compare people like this to terrorists. How can a terrorist look at the images of broken and bloodied bodies of innocent men, women and children and not be moved emotionally? Their conscience is completely dead.
5. Yet, there are plenty of emotional terrorists in this life. They daily wound people with their harsh, mean spirited comments without any regard to the damage they create in people's lives.
 - Are there people in your life where you feel you have to walk on egg shells around them? WHY? They can just “go off”! Are you one of those people?
6. Even when confronted, they have no remorse for hurting people. This is where a dead conscience will go.
7. I have confronted people with wrong behavior in church and they have participated in it for so long, they don't even see it as wrong anymore. It has become so ingrained in their DNA that they are in complete denial of the damage they do.
 - At this point, it doesn't usually end well. The pain has taken over.

B. Maintaining a clear conscience keeps our concern for others

1 Tim. 1:19 “Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked.” (NLT)

1. Not keeping our conscience clear will destroy our faith and then destroy our relationships. Keeping it clear is what protects us from shipwrecking our lives. What does this mean? How does one keep a clear conscience?
2. Pay attention to it: This simply means learn to listen to it. Don't ignore it. Don't

change the channel! God gave us a conscience for a reason. God put within each person a moral compass of right and wrong. It is there at birth. Each person on the planet instinctively knows certain behaviors are simply wrong.

3. Hear God through it: Our conscience is God's vehicle to communicate to us. When we give our lives to Christ, the Holy Spirit lives inside us and communicates with and through our conscience that God created. This is the vehicle where God brings correction and redirection. Ignoring your conscience is ignoring God!
 4. Live humbly by it: When we violate our conscience and we are listening to it, the Holy Spirit will bring conviction. We feel guilty / bad / we feel uncomfortable with what we said or did. This is where confession comes in. Confessing our sin to God is how we wash our conscience, embrace His forgiveness, remove the guilt, and keep our conscience clear.
 - Keeping our conscience clear by constantly and immediately confessing when we violate it is how we live humbly before God and each other. Pride refuses to admit wrong. Humility admits wrong quickly.
- The way to minimize the pain we cause to others is to be keeping our conscience clear. Whenever we ignore it and harden ourselves too it, we will wound those around us and care less and less about it.
 - The last thing I want to leave you with is how to deal with an antagonist. Understanding them is one thing. BUT...how do I live with them? How should I respond?

IV. How To Deal With A Bitter Antagonist

Taken from Hannah's response in the rest of the story

1. **Pray** – Take your wounding to God. Tell God all about your pain they have caused you. He cares about it! Take the antagonist to God. Pray that God heals them of their pain / gives you the grace to endure / or remove them from your situation.
2. **Commit your way to God** – Don't stray off the path following God – Don't decide God's way isn't working because the antagonist hasn't gone away. Don't conclude that just because life is painful, it's not worth following God. Tell God you pledge your loyalties to Him and His way regardless!
3. **Trust God to defend you** – Claim God's protection. Ask God to vindicate you. Daily put your trust in God to defend you in ways that are beyond your control. This doesn't mean the antagonist will stop tomorrow. It will cause you to stop viewing yourself as a victim. (Whoever messes with me messes with God!)
4. **Refuse to engage at their level** - Don't antagonize back – don't act like the world – refuse to allow your flesh to be in charge. Choose to be different. Choose to respond like a child of the King and the Kingdom you represent. One note: This doesn't mean you don't set boundaries. This doesn't mean you become a doormat either.
5. **Endure long enough** – Keep doing what is right long enough to see the Lord bless your life beyond your imagination. Your life will become more than any bitter antagonist. You must Endure! Your life will become an example of the blessing of God if you don't

quit!

The rest of the story: Hannah had three more sons and two daughters. God blessed her more than she could have ever imagined. Because of her obedience, God gave her the desires for her heart. This can be your story too! Don't allow a bitter antagonist to steal the blessings God has in store for you. Don't allow yourself to become another one of their victims. Choose today to become an example of God's blessing for those who trust Him.

Ps. 37:1-6 Don't worry about the wicked or envy those who do wrong. For like grass, they soon fade away. Like spring flowers, they soon wither. Trust in the LORD and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart's desires. Commit everything you do to the LORD. Trust him, and he will help you. He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn, and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun. (NLT) This is how people in God's Kingdom live. This is what our lives will resemble if we will trust him...even with the antagonists in our lives.

As we close, is there an antagonist in your life that you need to stop being a victim to? Are you allowing these people to steal your joy / your energy / even your future? Can you choose a Kingdom of God response to them today?