

A Mad Bull

While I was talking with a friend about a bull, he began to tell me about this high dollar breeder that had all the potential in the world to produce a fine herd. To boot, he had a gentle, easy-going personality with such a friendly relationship toward humans that one was hard put to get out of the pasture without giving the docile old bovine a good scratch behind the ears. This all ended, however, when the bull pulled up lame.

The animal had hurt his hoof seriously and it seemed like a shame to lose such an animal, so everything was done in order to heal it up. However, after long months of little or no success, all that had been accomplished was a big vet bill ... **and a mad bull**. You see, every time a two-legged creature appeared, the bull was prodded, poked, and pin-cushioned. Everything done to help the bull involved pain and pretty soon, the very presence of two-legged creatures meant nothing but grief, and there was nothing left to do but to fight back. The bull snorted and fought, he cleared the alley every time he could, and worse, the injury was often aggravated further with each attempt to doctor it. A sore, angry bull was finally sold at packer prices.

When someone is hurting, it is hard to know just what to say. Sometimes, with the best of intentions, we begin to volunteer advice that is less than helpful, and often harmful. Too, we might consider for a moment whether or not we are even qualified to comment on their pain or problem. And, after a barrage of “loving tips” and “helpful hints,” it is too easy to get indignant when it isn’t received in the spirit that it is given. Before you know it, efforts to heal have produced nothing but a sore, angry bull... then, Katie bar the door.

Notice the following:

[1] It might be better just to **be there** and say nothing. Job’s friends did their best work when they “sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great” (Job 2:13). It was when they began to open their mouth that things went awry.

[2] If you must speak, **measure your words**. Looking at a few surface circumstances and drawing hasty conclusions makes for an ugly picture. “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold In settings of silver” (Proverbs 25:11).

[3] When you’ve dispensed your encouragement, **dispense with it**. Even heretics are supposed to be rejected after only “the first and second admonition” (Titus 3:10); surely we would not want to treat our friends with less regard than dissenters. Creatures of free will tend to resent a force-fed bludgeoning, even with good intentions.

And finally, [4] **do something**, actions speak louder than words. It’s really just a convenient conscience salve to confer all that mass of wise commentary ... while doing nothing (cf. Matthew 25:42ff). Often “doing what you can” is best described as “backing off”; you cannot fix someone that does not wish to be fixed. However, self-sacrifice is always in order; “bear ye one another's burdens” (Galatians 6:2) connotes action!

When someone is hurting, physically or spiritually, we need to help. But, we don’t need mad bulls.

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