How to Respond When Someone Means You Harm

Naively, I would like to think that everyone I encounter – and especially those with whom I develop an association or friendship – is well-intended toward me. That is, I assume they want the best for me just I want the best for them. I try to hold this attitude, even when something occurs to make me questions the motives of the other party. But, as the cliché’ goes, that is sometimes “easier said than done.”

Jesus was a master of understanding the intentions of others. He constantly encountered people who meant him harm, both to his reputation (See Matthew 16:1, 19:3, 22:18 22:35) and physically. Jesus knew what others were trying to do to him.

Jesus’ understanding of the ill intent of others is on full-display as he is being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, an event that leads ultimately to his death. Look at how Jesus handled the situation even though he knew exactly what others intended:

Matthew 26:47-50:

**47**While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. **48**Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.” **49**And he came up to Jesus at once and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” And he kissed him. **50**Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you came to do.”[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+26&version=ESV#fen-ESV-24101f)] Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. (emphasis added)

Others have faced similar situations. David, for instance, knew that Saul wanted to kill him. Saul was jealous of David (I Sam. 18:9) and is described as “David’s enemy continuously.” ( I Samuel 18:29). Saul ultimately tries to enlist others to kill David, including Jonathan, David’s best friend. (I Samuel 19:1-2). David was distressed that Saul was trying to kill him. He understandably asks, “What have I done? What is my guilt? And what is my sin before your father that he seeks my life?” (I Samuel 20:1). Jonathan spoils Saul’s ploy by scheming with David a way to warn David when Saul tries to kill him (I Samuel 20). The scheme worked and David was able to escape harm.

Have you ever had someone who you think was trying to harm you? It probably wasn’t as extreme as what Jesus and David faced. Maybe it was to hurt your chances of a promotion. Or to make you look bad in the eyes of others. Maybe it was something the other person mistakenly thought would harm you but it would not. Still, they tried.

What should our response be? Is it as simple as “turning the other cheek” as Jesus instructed in Matthew 5:38-39? How much harder is it when you know that the person is intentionally trying to harm you?

For our discussion, consider the following questions:

1.) What should you do if you suspect, but are not sure, if the person is trying to harm you?

2.) How should you respond in a situation when the person is trying to harm you?

3.) Is there ever a situation when you can try to inflict harm on a person who is trying to hurt you?

I look forward to our discussion.