

I live in private subdivision with 38 properties. It's a delightful little slice of Americana; a place where my children can make chalk-art in the road with no fear of crime or traffic.

Sin, however, pervades all of creation, and we are no exception.

Tessa and Sa'ar (pronounced "Char") are a beautiful example of the American dream. She's a blue-eyed blonde, he is from South Africa with skin like ebony and a laugh like rolling thunder. These two own a home hospice service and are generally fantastic people. Two of their children are perpetually over at my house, either playing baseball in my yard or helping my own children pilfer cookies from my kitchen. Like the other neighbors we have from Muskego, France, or Serbia, these kids are part of our neighborhood family.

One particular evening last spring, I was in the process of building a garage on the back of my property. I heard an angry exchange between Brian and the occupants of a Jeep I'd never seen before. While I couldn't quite make out what was being said, I could tell it was hostile. It ended after about two minutes, and I went about my evening.

The next evening, one of my neighbors asked me "if I'd heard." When I inquired further they told me the details of the exchange from the previous evening. Brian had been drinking again, and was doing yardwork near the road. He had made the following observations:

- There was a tricked-out jeep he'd never seen before.
- It was driving slowly up and down the road, making several passes.
- The occupants of the Jeep were black.

His response to this, (which I'd partially heard the evening prior) was, to walk into the street and block the path of the road, confront the drivers and said, "WHAT THE F_____ ARE YOU DOING HERE? YOU PEOPLE ARE F_____ING CREEPY! YOU DON'T BELONG HERE- GO BACK TO WHERE YOU CAME FROM!"

-It was Sa'ar.

-He had just purchased a new vehicle.

-He was teaching his 16-year-old daughter how to drive. (In our safe, traffic-free subdivision.).

Sa'ar handled this with dignity. "Sir, I live here. We are neighbors. I live at the top of the hill. We met two summers ago before Covid."

At this point, Brian realized his error and tried to play it off, but the damage was done.

This issue buzzed about my neighborhood for the next several days. Initially I wasn't sure what (if anything) to do. After hearing from four other neighbors while jogging, walking my dog, and mowing my lawn; it became clear that something had to be done.

I prayed for wisdom and clarity on what the Lord would have me do, and in my Bible study I immediately came across Ephesians 4:15, "*Speak the truth in love*". I asked the Lord for the opportunity to say something, and immediately saw Brian standing in his yard.

For a moment, I considered the neighborhood conversations. They all included quotes such as,

-“I don't want this hateful family living near me”

-“Can we force him to move?”

-And even “*It would sure be a shame if his house burned down*”. (It’s remarkable how Satan can convince us to allow one sin to justify another).

I thought of each of these and realized they carried the same essential ingredient that Brian’s comments had: *Hatred*. I thought of Matthew 18 and asked my group of neighbors, “Has anyone talked to Brian about this?” –No one had...

In my approach to Brian’s yard, I prayed again- a silent prayer for wisdom in the moment. I asked Brian what had happened, and he again tried to minimize what had happened as a misunderstanding. I stood my ground, squared up to him and *directly quoted him; verbatim*.

“I was on the roof, brother. I saw you talking, and you were angry. It’s also worth knowing that I didn’t hear what you said from Sa’ar or Tessa. I heard it from Lisa, Mark, Shelley, and Lynn; this is now what you’re known for.”

“Brian, you mentioned to me that you’re a Christian. This is a good thing, because it means you have a pathway to fix this”

Brian broke down into tears. He put his face in his hands and said, “This is not who I am! I want to crawl into a hole and die...”

My response was rather quiet. I placed my hand on his shoulder and said as firmly as I could, “No. That’s not an option for the Christian man. Christ paid for this, and the situation calls for repentance; hiding or ignoring it would be nothing but cowardice. In this moment, You are what you fear you are: a man who did something overtly racist. Whether or not that becomes who you are going forward depends on what you do next. You need to make this right. Tessa and Sa’ar are good people. Go to them, own your actions, and apologize; ask for forgiveness. Do this, and I believe they will forgive you. Or, simply write a letter. I’ll help you write it if you’d like.”

Brian paused a moment and said, “No. This is something I need to do myself. Thank you for telling me the truth.”

Later that evening, I watched Brian walk up the hill to their house, in the rain, with an envelope in his hand. Minutes later he returned. The next night, I saw the same thing. And the night after. I later learned that he struck out three times (they weren’t home) before finally connecting. Tessa came by our house and said that he appeared to be genuinely, sorrowfully repentant. He apologized, and was granted the forgiveness he sought. She was also profusely thankful that someone had actually confronted him.

This is the power of Christ as granted to us by His Gospel message. Not that we are free to avoid sin, but that this sin (even the sin of wounding others with racism) is freely forgiven when the framework for handling conflict in Matthew 18 is followed.

I saw Brian a week or so later- he walked into my yard and shook my hand. “I still feel guilty,” he said. In this moment I was able to shake my head while smiling and said, “Nope. You leave that guilt at the foot of the cross where it belongs. Learn from your mistake, and move on.”

It’s worth noting that one last rumor about Brian was spread: Something that seldom happens had happened- *that he had apologized and been forgiven*.