

STEADFAST PARENTS

**Strategies to Help Your Children
Run the Race of Life *and Win***

Based on the movie *Steadfast*

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Your life might be the only Bible someone else reads.
When actions speak louder than words,
will they be enough to save someone?

Introduction

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Hebrews 12:1-3 NIV).

The Starting Line

Let us run with endurance the race set before us...
Hebrews 12:1 TLV

In the Bible, Christian living is compared to running a race. This race, though, is not a sprint but a marathon. Getting to the finish line is a lifelong race of faith which takes steadfastness. Training is required to run a successful race. As the Apostle Paul explained:

All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:25-27 NLT)

To run victoriously, we must first get in shape. We need to spiritually train ourselves, and “remove from our lives anything that would slow us down and the sin that so often makes us fall” (Hebrews 12:1).

Next, it is important to determine our course and then stay on the right track so we don't get disqualified. God sets the race before us and

He determines where we are to run. He chooses each person's path according to His divine purpose. Some might have an easier road while others may find their route more difficult. But we aren't to stop in the middle of the race and question why our course might be different from someone else's. We are to just keep running so that "the good work God began in [us] will continue until he completes it on the day when Jesus Christ comes again" (Philippians 1:6).

While running our course there may be mountains to climb, muck to wade through, potholes to go around, and rocks to avoid, but we are to continue the race, "fixing our eyes on Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2 NIV). By making Jesus our focal point instead of looking at the spectators or the things that can so easily trip us up, we will continue to run and not quit. We may stumble or even fall, but we'll be able to finish the race. The Bible encourages us to "persevere so that when [we] have done the will of God, [we] will receive what he has promised" (Hebrews 10:36 NIV).

Since the race of faith is an endurance run and not a hundred yard dash, even though we can't see the finish line we must trust in God to guide us there. At times when it seems that we are straining to the breaking point, we need to keep in mind that our competition is not the other runners. It's Satan, who will do anything to keep us from the finish line.

Motivation helps us endure to the end of the race. And what exactly is our motivation? To gain the prize. Paul summed it up this way: "Brothers and sisters, I know that I still have a long way to go. But there is one thing I do: I forget what is in the past and try as hard as I can to reach the goal before me. I keep running hard toward the finish line to get the prize that is mine because God has called me through Christ Jesus to life up there in heaven" (Philippians 3:13-14).

Steadfast Parents is designed to provide parents with training and endurance to help their children stay in the race. There are eight topics addressed in this study guide: bullying, purity, eating disorders, substance abuse, cutting, abuse (physical, emotional and sexual), suicide,

and witnessing; however, there are nine actual lessons. Because bullying is such a broad issue, there are two lessons that deal with bullying. The first one discusses bullying in general, while the second lesson focuses on bystanders.

With each session there is a video clip from the movie to watch, as well as a clip of a testimony from someone who has personally dealt with that issue. Some lessons have more than one testimony. There is also an invitational prayer with each subject, in case you haven't fully committed your life to Christ. Scenes from the movie, the testimonies, and the songs for each session are available for free by accessing this link – [REDACTED] – and will enhance your learning experience.

Listening to a song from the soundtrack is a great way to end the session as you absorb the lesson and praise the Lord for what He is doing in your life and the lives of your children. Take the time to write down your thoughts to the questions posed. An answer key to the general questions is included at the end of this book. Also, share with your children the websites that are included on the resources page for each study, and please don't hesitate to seek professional help for them or you, if needed. Most importantly, remember that Jesus is still the main answer to every problem.

For Group Study

The outline for this study consists of: 1) Opening prayer (leaders may add their own prayer); 2) Discussion groups (Setting the Pace); 3) Watching a clip from the movie, *Steadfast*; 4) Lesson (Running the Race); 5) Watching a testimony from someone who has dealt with the issue; 6) Call to Jesus/invitation (Preparing for the Finish Line); 7) Worship with a song from the *Steadfast* soundtrack; and 8) Closing prayer (Endurance).

The progression of this study is flexible and each chapter is stand-alone so they can be shared in any order. Discussion may take place with everyone together as one group or separated into smaller, more intimate

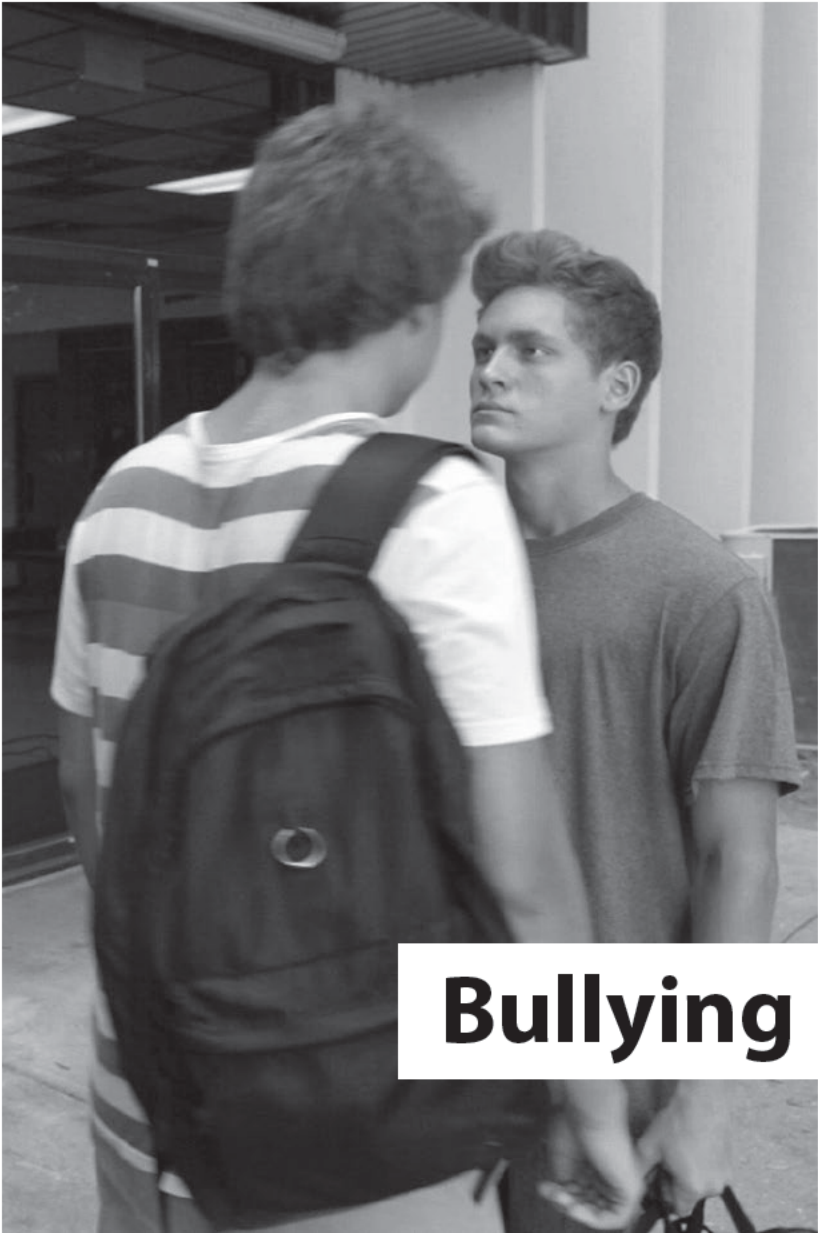
groups. The discussion period can be as extensive or limited as need be, depending on the available time frame. Simply pick and choose which questions to discuss if there isn't enough time for all of them.

To aid in preparation time, sample answers are provided at the end of this book for many of the discussion questions. The lesson portion of each study is about 15-20 minutes, while the movie clips, music, and testimony times vary. The songs range between one and half minutes to five minutes, and the movie clips and testimonies are a few minutes to around fifteen minutes. Some topics have more than one testimony. If time is limited, choose the one you feel your participants will connect with the most.

Discussion time is a great opportunity to learn more about the needs of each parent and what is going on with their children. Welcome participation by reminding everyone that anything shared in group is confidential. "What's said in group, stays in group." Encourage openness and respect. Ensure them that with many questions there are no right or wrong answers, but instead offers everyone an opportunity to share their feelings and experiences. Allow each person a chance to speak.

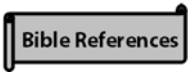
Reproducible worksheets for the discussion questions are available on our website. Please feel free to copy them for your use: www.steadfast-themovie.com/studyresources. The list of questions can be given to each person to fill out before or during discussion time, if desired. Otherwise, leaders can bypass this worksheet and instead introduce each question while discussing the matter orally. Additionally, a tips and resources handout is available at the end of each session (and on our website for copying) that not only highlights key points of the lesson, but also lists resources and helpline contact numbers. Encouraging scriptures and a memory verse are also included, as well as an invitational prayer to give readers an opportunity to come to the Lord on their own.

May the Lord bless your group time and may there be a mighty move of the Holy Spirit for the changing of lives.



Bullying

BULLYING



Luke 6:29; John 18:19–23; 2 Timothy 1:7; Romans 12:17–21; Psalm 46:1; Hebrews 13:5; Philippians 4:13; Matthew 5:16, 7:12, 10:16; James 1:5; 1 Samuel

Memory Verse: God is our protection and source of strength. He is always ready to help us in times of trouble (Psalm 46:1).



Opening Prayer: Lord, grant me wisdom and give me peace as I read Your Word, Amen!



Watch BULLYING–LESSON Video Clip



**SETTING THE PACE – Your Thoughts and Experiences/
Discussion Group**

Bullying is described as *unwanted, aggressive behavior towards someone, often repeatedly*. Let's discuss what bullying means to you:

1. What are some examples of bullying?
2. Were you ever bullied as a child?
3. Were you ever a bully?
4. Have you ever witnessed someone being bullied?
5. What do you believe make some people targets for bullying?
6. Why do you believe some people become bullies?

Activities for Groups:

Break into smaller groups. Assign each group to brainstorm and come up with a bullying scenario to act out. Watch each group perform, then discuss what can be learned from the skits.

Play Status Card¹:

Give everyone a playing card face down. They are not to look at the card. Everyone then places the card against their forehead facing out (another option is to tape the card to each person's forehead), or holds the card in their hand facing out, and walks around mingling with each other. Treat each other based on the value of each person's card: 2-6 are the lowest, no one pays much attention to them or wants to hang out with them. 7-10 are in the middle, average but not too cool. The J, Q, K, and Ace are the royal cards. They are the best, the most popular, and the ones everyone wants to hang around with. After a few minutes, have everyone get into the group that they feel they belong in based on how they were treated. Let them look at their card to see if they guessed right. Discuss how it felt to be treated that way. Then discuss Matthew 7:12, "Treat others as you want them to treat you" (the Golden Rule).



RUNNING THE RACE – Study

One of the greatest heartbreaks for any parent is to experience your child going through the torture of being bullied. It's no less heart-breaking to find out that your child is the perpetrator. Unfortunately, bullying is a growing trend that's causing devastating consequences. School shootings and countless suicides have been attributed to bullying. For instance, at a Cleveland high school, a teen described as an outcast who had apparently been bullied, opened fire in the cafeteria, killing one student and wounding four others.¹

A seventh grader shot and killed a teacher and wounded two other students at his Nevada school. He'd evidently been bullied, and one witness said, "He was yelling a bunch of things while we were running. He was yelling stuff like, 'Why are you laughing at me? Why are you doing this to me?'" He then shot himself to death.²

A twelve-year-old Florida girl jumped to her death from atop an abandoned cement factory after being viciously cyberbullied,³ while a

fifteen-year-old girl leaped off the roof of a 27-story apartment building after a petition to have her commit suicide was started online.⁴

Sadly, these are but a few of the tragic incidents that have happened nationwide due, in part, to bullying. Statistics show that over 3.2 million students are victims of bullying each year, approximately 160,000 teens skip school every day because of bullying, and 1 in 10 students drop out of school because of repeated bullying.⁵

School-age children act much differently than toddlers, who will cry out and tattle the instant someone is being mean to them. And the older kids get, the less willing they are to open up. You may not even be aware of the torment your child is going through. While your child may not verbalize it, however, there are some warning signs to watch out for:

- Edgy; angry—explodes easily
- Withdrawn
- Anxiety; moodiness
- Doesn't want to go to school; disinterested in school activities
- Clothing or other personal items are damaged or missing
- Unexplained injuries—cuts, scratches, bruises
- Fearful
- Difficulty eating and/or sleeping
- Physical symptoms—headaches, stomachaches, tired
- Getting involved with drugs and/or alcohol
- Loss of friends

Some of these symptoms can be normal for teenagers and don't indicate bullying, but that's where you must be intuitive and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you in discerning what is really going on. It's important for your children to understand that it's safe to talk to you about things. Many are reluctant to talk to a parent because of fear over how the parent will react. Not only are they afraid that the parent will over-

react, but they often are afraid of retaliation by the bully for snitching, and may also be embarrassed and ashamed. Allow them to gain some control by letting them help decide the best course of action, as long as it won't put your children in further danger. Take time to pray together and seek the Lord's wisdom on how to handle things.

God's Word gives us examples on how to manage these trials God's way. A scripture that often gets misconstrued by well-meaning parents is Luke 6:29: "If someone hits you on the side of your face, let them hit the other side too."

While some parents may advise their children to always back down, the Lord doesn't expect us to put ourselves in danger. This passage actually refers to an insult, not to physical harm. Turning the other cheek means not to return insult for insult in retaliation. We are not to be mean back, but Jesus doesn't expect us to not defend ourselves.

Therefore, if your children are victims of bullying, teach them that it's not right to seek revenge, but it is okay to stand up for ourselves. The perfect example of this comes from Jesus himself. When the guard of the High Priest slapped Jesus on the face, he didn't stand silently and wait for the guard to do it again. He defended himself with probing words: "If I said something wrong, tell everyone here what was wrong. But if what I said is right, then why do you hit me?" (John 18:19-23)

Jesus asked his attacker why he was wrongly treating him that way. In the same manner, we are not to hurt the bully back, but we are to defend ourselves wisely without anger. We should handle the situation in a way that won't cause further tension and allows us to escape safely. We are not to fear, but to be wise and use restraint "[f]or God did not give us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7 NET).

God's Word tells us further in Romans 12:17-21 the appropriate way we should handle those who mistreat us:

If someone does you wrong, don't try to pay them

back by hurting them. Try to do what everyone thinks is right. Do the best you can to live in peace with everyone. My friends, don't try to punish anyone who does wrong to you. Wait for God to punish them with his anger. In the Scriptures the Lord says,

“I am the one who punishes; I will pay people back.” But you should do this: “If you have enemies who are hungry, give them something to eat. If you have enemies who are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this you will make them feel ashamed.”

Don't let evil defeat you, but defeat evil by doing good.

Thus, teach your children that retaliation is not an option and they should do what they can to live at peace with others. However, while they are to leave revenge to God, they should still stand up for themselves and others, and report bullying to their parents and/or other trusted authority. Explain the difference between tattling (telling to get someone in trouble) and telling to keep someone safe.

Assure them that “God is our protection and source of strength. He is always ready to help us in times of trouble” (Psalm 46:1), and while you as a parent may not be able to physically be there when they are going through something, that the Lord is always there and your children can turn to God at any time. God's Word makes these very promises to us in Hebrews 13:5:

Since God assures us, “I'll never let you down, never walk off and leave you,” we can boldly quote, God is there, ready to help; I'm fearless no matter what. Who or what can get to me?” (MSG)

We can be assured that God is on our side! While the Lord may not always remove us from every situation, He will always help us to deal with our problems and will use these trials to build our character. Philipians 4:13 says, “Christ is the one who gives me the strength I need to do whatever I must do.”

Impart to your children that this strength will be different depending on the circumstances. They will need to assess each situation to decide when it's appropriate to back down and when they need to take a stand. Bullies like to dominate their victims and will often pick on those who won't defend themselves. Therefore, as long as the situation won't become more dangerous by doing so, we should ask the Lord to help us to respond like Jesus did. Acting confident may be enough to cause the bully to back down.

Other guidelines to share with your children to prevent bullying include:

- Avoid being alone
- Stay away from places where bullies hang out
- Keep calm
- Ignore a bully if possible
- Stay near adults—most bullying does not happen when adults are around
- Be self-confident—body language can express this: stand straight, head up, and don't avoid making eye contact

When it comes to cyber-bullying, children may be even more reluctant to tell a parent for fear that their computers, phones and other electronics will be taken away. While this seems like the logical way to keep our children safe, instead it makes our children feel like they're being punished. To prevent them from feeling even more victimized, instead change passwords, phone numbers, block the perpetrators, keep records of the messages, and report the cyberbullying.

In Matthew 10:16, Jesus warns us about troubles and tells us how we should act: "Listen! I am sending you, and you will be like sheep among wolves. So be smart like snakes. But also be like doves and don't hurt anyone." Impart to your children that when they need to be smart but don't really know how to handle something, the Bible advises: "Do any

of you need wisdom? Ask God for it. He is generous and enjoys giving to everyone. So He will give wisdom” (James 1:5). Teach your children that the Lord will give wisdom to all who seek it.

When this wisdom leads your kids to run from a situation, reassure them that they shouldn't be ashamed to do so and that doesn't make them cowards. While David didn't back down from Goliath, years later when King Saul decided to kill David, the same man who stood up to a giant fled from the King (1 Samuel). There are times when wisdom will tell them to flee, but that doesn't mean they're weak. That just means they are listening to and trusting in God to help them determine what actions to take in each given situation.

But what if your children are the perpetrators? Bullies suffer as well as the victims, so it's important to take action. They may endure depression, struggle academically and with jobs, get involved with gangs and drugs, and often will become even more aggressive in adulthood, which can lead to abusive relationships. Here are some warning signs to be aware of when determining whether your child may be a bully:

- Fits of rage; easily loses temper
- Lack of empathy for others
- Dominates his or her peers
- Overly confident/cocky
- Physically larger and stronger than peers
- Hates to lose
- Blames others for everything
- Enjoys power and control
- Derives pleasure from other's pain
- Impulsive
- Gang activity; vandalism; increased use of drugs and/or alcohol
- Lacks social skills

- Defiant
- Tests authority
- Problems at school/home

As with victim status, having some of these traits doesn't mean that your children are or will be bullies. Again, pray to be made aware if this is truly the case with your kids. However, if there is evidence of bullying, then steps should be taken. Your children need to be made aware that this type of behavior will not be tolerated. Make sure no bullying is going on in the family dynamics, give clear consequences, and teach your children about having compassion for others. Instill in them the Golden Rule found in Matthew 7:12: "Treat others as you want them to treat you." Seek professional help if needed.

While it may be despairing to deal with children who are bullies, remember how God shows mercy and grace to even the worst of sinners, and that God has the power to change them.

As parents we should impart to our children that above all, they should handle themselves in a way that is a good example to others and brings glory to God. The Bible says, "In the same way, you should be a light for other people. Live so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

In the movie, *Steadfast*, Jesse is relentlessly bullied. His main antagonist is Brady. While driving drunk one night, Brady's brother causes an auto accident that kills Jesse's mother. Instead of facing what his brother had done, Brady takes his anger out on Jesse for Brady's brother being in jail. He uses his misplaced resentment to continually harass Jesse. Not only does Jesse have to deal with the bullying, but also with the loss of his mother and of his father, who uses his own grief to become a workaholic and completely ignore Jesse.

Coming from a non-Christian home, Jesse doesn't know the love and grace that's found in Christ. When he becomes overwhelmed, Jesse

has no hope to get him through the trials. He feels all alone in his pain and doesn't have the strength to persevere.

Moriah, on the other hand, has faith and a relationship with her heavenly Father. She is constantly teased by a jealous Claire. There are times when Moriah breaks down, but she still continues to act in the right way. She defeats evil by doing good. Moriah has hope and the strength of the Lord to guide her, and her actions become a testimony to Claire who knows nothing about God but wants what Moriah has. Moriah is able to handle her bullying in a way that glorifies God and helps someone else.

So, how will your children handle things? Will they feel hopeless or will they be filled with the peace that only comes through knowing Christ? Whether our children are victims or bullies, it's important for us to instill in them that they are children of the Most High God. Victims are not defined by what a bully might say or do to them. They are who God says they are! The Lord created us in His image and we are beautiful to Him.

Likewise, Jesus will forgive even the worst of bullies. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord. "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).

By not being victims ourselves to ignorance or indifference when it comes to what is going on in our children's lives, and by advocating for our children, we can help them to be steadfast in whatever comes their way.



Watch TESTIMONY-BULLYING Video Clip



PREPARING FOR THE FINISH LINE – Invitation

If you have been beat up and beat down way too long and don't know what to do anymore—if you need the strength to deal with situations in your children's lives, and want to have the hope, peace, protection, and

wisdom that can only come from the Lord Jesus Christ, please repeat this prayer:

Lord Jesus, I ask you to come into my life and forgive me for all of my sins. I believe in my heart and confess with my mouth that You died for my sins but rose on the third day so that I might be saved.⁶ With You I never have to go through life alone, and I am an overcomer! Thank You, Jesus, for Your gift of eternal life. In Your precious name I pray, Amen!



WORSHIP – Listen to the Song *LET IT GO*



ENDURANCE – Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, please protect my children from bullying. If my children are victims, Lord, please give them wisdom, peace, and safety, and let them know they are not alone—that You are always with them. If my children are bullies, Lord, please give them compassion for others. Fill them with Your love so they don't have to build themselves up by beating others down. And if my children become witnesses to bullying, Lord, please give them the courage to stand up for what is right. For me as a parent, Lord, guide me in how I should handle each situation and give me favor with my children. Thank You that through You we are more than conquerors! In Jesus' name I pray, Amen!

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR YOUR CHILDREN – BULLYING

Memory Verse: God is our protection and source of strength. He is always ready to help us in times of trouble (Psalm 46:1).

Ways to prevent bullying:

1. Pray to the Lord for help.
2. Act confident.
3. Diffuse with humor if possible.
4. Avoid being alone.
5. Stay away from places where bullies hang out.
6. Remain calm.
7. Keep near adults.
8. If in danger, don't be ashamed to run.
9. Talk about it with a parent, pastor, school counselor, or someone else you trust.
10. Never buy into anything that bullies say about you or do to you.

You are a wonderfully made child of the One True King.

Ways to deal with cyberbullying:

1. Be careful of what you post and who you “friend.”
2. Block bullies from your social media and phone.
3. Report cyberbullying to the internet service provider, the website, and/or cell phone company.
4. Contact police if threats of harm are made.

Help Lines:

- 1-877-332-7333 Real Help for Teens Hotline
1-800-273-8255 24/7 Crisis Call Center
1-800-420-1479 CyberBullying Hotline—call or text
1-866-444-6996 Anti-Bullying Hotline
1-800-273-TALK National Suicide Prevention Hotline

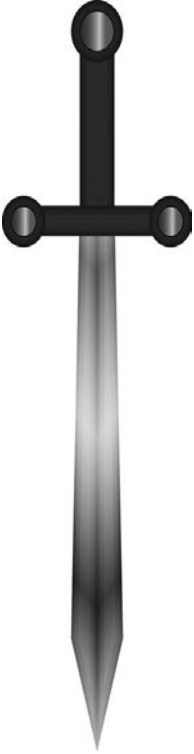
Links:

www.stopbullying.gov

www.bullying.org

http://www.stompoutbullying.org/livechat_portal.php

Sword of the Spirit:



For God did not give us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and self-control (2 Timothy 1:7 NET).

So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the Lord your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you (Deut. 31:6 NLT).

You, Lord, are the light that keeps me safe. I am not afraid of anyone. You protect me, and I have no fears (Psalm 27:1 CEV).

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord (Leviticus 19:18 NASB).

Don't let evil defeat you, but defeat evil by doing good (Romans 12:21).