

Blood Breaks the Barriers
By Daniel A. Bunker
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This metaphor was written as a story for High School students. It takes place on a High School campus and deals with some of the issues they face every day.

The lunch bell rings and I step out into the quad and look around: I'm an alien in a foreign land. Which group will I be apart of today? My eyes scan the circles as I stare into blank looks of isolation and despair. The campus is filled with human bodies, but what happened to our humanity? Our human flesh has long been covered with separation and division in the name of fashion and identity. Within minutes, students disperse from classes and end comfortably in their own groups.

Over by the stage are the rich athletes, defined by carved bodies and pimped out trucks with 20-inch rims and loud stereo systems. They stare at me with threatening looks of superiority and arrogance. Across the hall is a cloud of black clothes, bright hair colors, piercings and tattoos. No one crosses into this hostile territory of sad stares and silence. Down the hall students dance to the latest hip-hop, sport the latest pair of Jordan's and propel the evolution of American street-slang. I see no humanity here, only fragments of humans hiding in their tight knit groups of inclusion: preps, jocks, blacks, Asians, Mexicans, Armenians, hip-hop, emo, the list goes on and on. No one dares to cross the invisible lines of hostility. You could cut the tension with a knife.

Suddenly the groups start to come together. Students run from all corners of the campus and rally around in a circle in the quad. The scene is filled with chaos and excitement as students circle up. It's the one thing that never fails to bring the campus together in unity: a fight. All the resentment and division that exists is brought together to witness the exciting event of bloodshed; nothing new here! But this time it's not one group against another, but every group against one student. I push my way through the crowd to see an unidentified student, one I've never seen before. He doesn't fit into any of the groups, a true loner. I overhear a conversation next to me: "who is that kid?" someone asks, "I don't know" another responds, "No one really knows who he is. They say it's some kid who tried to speak a message of love and peace. He walked straight into a crowd where he didn't belong. What was he thinking? Didn't he know he would get himself beat?"

The violence escalates and kids from all over campus unify in hate: spitting on him, punching him in the face, kicking him on the ground. Caught up in the moment, I run up to his already bloodied body and deliver a stern blow to his jaw. In his anguish, he keeps murmuring something to himself about forgiving us for what we are doing. By the time campus security gets there, it's too late. The student lays there, unmoved, his white t-shirt stained with the blood of our rage. Everyone returns to the comfort of their cliques, leaving his mangled body lying out in the quad.

It's hard to describe what happens next: it's as if the heavens align to give us a sign. The fire alarm screams aloud, but there is no fire. Sprinklers go crazy, the ground starts shaking, and the sky turns black. And then it just stops. With everyone still reeling from what just happened, we see him. The student that we killed, he is alive! Still in his bloody shirt he starts walking towards us. Fear overtakes the campus as the victim is

renewed in strength. What will be the death count in this newest fit of campus rage? In their anxiety, students reach for their cell phones to call their loved ones.

Everyone on campus is expecting the same thing; we have seen the story before: a loner is rejected by the cruel system of campus division only to send a message to the world in blood. Bullets scattered on the ground and images flashing on the news. Broken bodies carried out and faces blank from shock and despair. We can already see tomorrow's newspaper heading: Local student seeks revenge in latest school shooting. We brace ourselves for the sound of bullets and students screaming in fear. But he doesn't have any guns, only bloodied hands and feet. There will be no more explosions of hate today! He comes with shocking news: we are forgiven for the beating in the quad. We all stand together in shock: thugs, nerds, cheerleaders, our jaws are on the floor. Everyone is stunned in silence and we don't know what to say, we have never been in this situation before.

Then it happens: I look around again and suddenly our clothes start to fade: the distinctions of our groups start to crack and our humanity is being revealed. The black trench coats and baby blue polos fade into a unified color of red. Our faces are still uniquely ours but our disguises fade into the likeness of this one student. As we expected, he sends his message in blood, but it's a different message from Columbine and Virginia Tech. This kid flips the system upside down! He exposes us for what we really are: humans trapped in a system of violence and division. I am suddenly hit like a ton of bricks by the overwhelming realization of what just happened. I contributed to the death of the only kid on campus who didn't fall into the evil and pain of our separation, and he didn't strike me down. Not knowing how else to respond, I fall to my knees, tears of joy streaming down my face. I peer up from the haze of my teary eyes to see that our groups have disappeared and we are one group, with the resurrected student in the middle. Instead of coming for revenge, he has come in love, to bring us together in peace rather than violence. I pick myself up off the floor and music starts to play. A campus-wide party! All together, we begin to dance in celebration as one tribe of students, our clothes still bleeding red, marked with the blood of the one we killed.

This parable provides a new lens for viewing the significance of the atonement in our High School campuses that are plagued by hate and exclusion. The student is representative of Jesus, who died at the hands of the other students because he tried to break down the evil system that was controlling the High School campus. After his death, he was raised from the dead. When everyone expected the student to come back and retaliate in violence, he instead chose to offer forgiveness and peace. This view of Jesus and the cross may be different from anyone you've ever heard. I invite you to reflect on what the parable is saying about Jesus and how it affects our lives by discussing the questions below.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Have you experienced the division and alienation described on your High School campus?
2. Why do you think the students rallied around violence?
3. In the story the student that nobody new was representative of Jesus, who wound up getting killed on a cross for the way he lived. In the parable the student is the ultimate outsider. Have you ever thought of Jesus this way? If you are an

- outsider on your campus, what do you think Jesus' life and death says about that? What about if you are popular and excluding others?
4. You would expect that if our cliques are divisive and harmful, people would welcome someone who tried to break down division by speaking a message of love. Instead, the students retaliated against the one "unidentified student" by beating him in the quad. Why do you think people were so angry and wanted to beat the student? What is it about Jesus' message that made people want to crucify him?
 5. In the parable the author also identified himself as one of the people participating in the mob of violence. This implies that he is responsible for the death of the student. Do you think that in some ways we are responsible for the death of Jesus? If so, how?
 6. What do you think would compel the student to try to bring peace and unity onto the campus if he knew it would lead to his death? If you tried to do this on your campus, what do you think the result would be? Do you find yourself outraged at campus division or do you fall into cliques and accept it as the way the world is?
 7. In the parable, the students all expected the student to come back in violence and retaliation after he came back from life. Why do we automatically expect this? If you were that student and you were able to come back to life and meet the people who murdered you, what do you think your response would be? What does the student's response say about Jesus and God? Is this in agreement or in tension with how you normally view God?
 8. In the parable Jesus' death brings together everyone in a great big party. Why do you think Jesus' death is able to unify everyone? What do you think this says about what the church should look like?
 9. At the end of the parable the students are able to experience a unity that brings them joy and allows people who once hated each other to dance in celebration together. This party is centered around the one student, Jesus. How is this image compared to how you normally view heaven? Have you ever experienced a time when people were unified in celebration because of the love of God? If so, what is that like? If not, what do you think that would look like?
 10. The student in the parable calls everyone into the party, even the people who had just killed him. He offers forgiveness and invites people to join him in living a new life that is different than the normal behavior on a High School campus. Do you feel God inviting you to take part in His way of living? What do you imagine this looks like?
 11. Jesus calls his followers to proclaim his message to other people and to live like he did. If the student in the parable was representative of Jesus, what might it look like to follow Jesus on a High School campus? What do you feel God calling you to do?

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