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## Chapter 1

# Cruel World

“Our class has got this! We’re gonna win Field Day! Come on!” Trey said, as he tried to cheer us on.

“Yeah,” Billy said. “Look at Mr. Wade’s class. We gotta go against them in the relay race. And look at that big girl over there. She looks like a hippopotamus!”

Everyone in my class started laughing but me. I didn’t even know who they were talking about, but I knew deep inside of me that it was wrong to laugh at people. It’s not fun being on the outside looking in, and two times this year I was on the outside. When my classmates laughed at me, it hurt worse than when I skinned my knee really bad in recess one day in my kindergarten class.

At the beginning of the school year, I got a lot of attention because they kept telling me that I was smart. But now it seemed like nobody cared that I was smart. And that

doesn't feel so good. It shouldn't matter that no one thinks I'm special, but seeing that there are two other ways to get attention—I needed one of them.

For one, you had to be really cute, like my friend Brooke. A lot of people started paying extra attention to her. At first, she always wore her hair up in a pony tail, but lately it's been flowing down her back. And it's pretty too. A perm makes my hair pretty, but not like Brooke's. She has hair like a baby doll.

The other way people stand out in the class is if they make jokes and act funny so kids will laugh. But I'm not good at poking fun at people. It's not that I want to be such a good girl; I just don't think hurting anybody's feelings is the right thing to do.

Finally, it was my turn to run in the relay race. And, guess what? It was between me and the girl who was bigger than everybody else in the second grade. Her name is Tara.

Billy handed me the baton and shouted, "You'd better smoke her, Morgan!"

We took off running. Right away, Tara started breathing hard, and I just kept going. We had to run really far, and when I reached the finish line, Tara was nowhere in sight. Though I didn't want her to catch up with me, I hoped she was okay.

Both of our classes didn't even wait to see if she was all right. They just started cracking jokes about her until I didn't wanna hear anymore.

"Maybe if she let some air out of that balloon she could

run faster,” one boy said.

“Don’t sit beside her at lunch. She’ll eat her food and yours,” another girl said.

They kept laughing at her as she finally made it to the finish line. The kids in Tara’s class were really mad at her too. I didn’t say anything and just moved along with my class.

“I’m so glad you beat that girl. If you had let that big girl beat you, we would never let you hear the end of it,” Billy told me.

It was time to take a water break, and I saw Tara standing alone with tears in her eyes. I went over to her, wanting to say something nice.

“What?” she asked me. “You got some more jokes you wanna say to me? I’m standin’ right here. So you don’t have to talk behind my back.”

“I wasn’t makin’ jokes about you,” I said to her.

“You were laughin’, and that’s just the same. You think I’m happy about my size? I know I’m the biggest girl in second grade. I don’t need kids laughin’ about it. It’s not even my fault.”

“What do you mean?”

“At home it’s just my mom, my older sister, and me. My mom works late so she’s never there when we get out of school. She brings home fast food, and I’m eating at ten o’clock every night. By that time I’m starvin’. So I eat too fast, and I don’t take time to **digest** my food. The doctor said eatin’ late isn’t a good idea. But when you haven’t had

much to eat all day, you take what you can get,” Tara explained with a sad look in her eyes.

I really wanted her to know that I cared about her feelings, so I asked, “Have you tried exercising?”

“Sometimes I try. But when I do, people around me laugh like they’re perfect and I’m not.”

Tara was getting more and more upset. “Why are people always tryin’ to pick on me? They need to leave me alone. Everyone has somethin’ they need to work on. I think it’s mostly their **character**.” Then she shoved by me and walked to her class.

Just then, Brooke and Chanté came over to me.

“What did that big girl want?” asked Brooke.

“Don’t call her that!” I snapped back.

“Well, she is a big girl,” Brooke said, spreading her arms and making wide circles.

Very sadly, I said, “You guys made her cry.”

“Well, she needs to lose some weight,” Chanté said, with no sad feelings for Tara.

“What if she’s tryin’ to lose weight but it isn’t working? What if she doesn’t have **healthy** foods at home so she can eat right? How would you feel if you had people makin’ fun of you all the time?”

“Why would people laugh at me?” asked Brooke. She added proudly, “I look good!”

I just shook my head and walked away. My two best buddies weren’t listening to me at all. We had hurt someone’s feelings and they didn’t even care.

I wished I could take back all of the insults and jokes that Tara heard that day. But the only thing I had wanted was for me to be popular. We were all being mean by only caring about ourselves. Jesus wouldn't be pleased with how any of us were acting.



“If Alec is going to be my partner, then I'm not doing it,” Trey said boldly. Miss Nelson was pairing us up for the three-legged race.

There were three other second grade classes, and our class was in the lead with the most points. We didn't lead by much, and two classes were trailing us close. If we didn't win the three-legged race and tug-of-war, then we would lose Field Day. We all had to work together if we wanted to win.

Right after Trey spoke up, Billy called out, “Me either. If he's in the three-legged race, then I'm not doing it.”

“Same for me,” Brooke said, as she stood by Trey. He smiled wider than if he was getting his teeth cleaned at the dentist.

Miss Nelson handed Alec the tie he was supposed to use in the race, but Alec threw it down. “No big deal. Everybody knows I'm the best athlete in this class. Win or lose without me—I don't care!”

Even though he said he didn't care, Alec sure looked like he was hurt. He was really upset. His voice was usually strong, but it didn't sound that way now. Alec started to walk off, but I stood in his way before he could go far.

“Wait! Alec, we need you,” I pleaded.

Trey huffed and said, “No, we don’t.”

“Alec, where are you going?” Miss Nelson called out, as he dashed around me and took off.

Walking away from our class, Alec hollered back, “I’m not playin’ with them!”

“Get back here, young man,” Miss Nelson said to him. But he just sat down on a nearby concrete stump.

When Miss Nelson went over to talk to Alec, I turned and asked Trey, Brooke, and Billy, “What’s wrong with y’all?”

“Don’t even start, Morgan. That boy pushed us around for months. The last thing I wanna do is be his friend or be tied up next to him. He might trip me and make me fall just for the fun of it,” said Trey.

I said, “But you gotta talk to him.”

“I don’t gotta do anything.”

But I wasn’t ready to give up, so I tried again. “I’m sure if you talked to him, you’d see.”

“See what?” he asked.

Ugh! I just blew out real hard, rolled my eyes, and folded my arms. There was so much more I knew about Alec than anybody else, but my parents wouldn’t like it if I ever said anything. I knew that Alec’s dad had lost his job and that made him turn into a really mean person. So, I felt bad for Alec. Their dad had screamed and yelled at Alec and his brother so much that they turned around and were mean to other people.

Because I understood why Alec had acted the way he

did, I wasn't mad at him anymore like the rest of them. And if Trey knew, he'd stop being mad too. Besides, the other kids in my class wouldn't be upset with Alec if Trey changed his mind about all this. I wanted all the meanness to stop. I wanted us to have some peace as a class. But I didn't know how to make that happen. I didn't know how to help us all be friends. This was so hard.

"Why do you keep takin' up for him, Morgan?" Billy asked. "You must like him or somethin'."

"I don't like boys . . . not like that anyway." I shook my head at Billy's crazy idea.

Trey looked over at Brooke, and she smiled. I didn't know what was going on, but Brooke and I needed to talk. Everything Trey said, she went along with. She really had no excuse for being mad at Alec. I forgave her, and she should forgive him. Besides, Alec was mostly mean and stuff to the boys more than the girls.

"Brooke, can I talk to you?" I asked.

"No," Trey answered for her. "She's gonna be my partner in the three-legged race."

I grabbed her hand real tight and said, "Trey, you be Billy's partner."

"Ouch! Morgan, that hurt," Brooke said. I let go of her hand when we were away from the others.

"What's goin' on with you, Brooke?"

"What do you mean? I don't like Alec, and you shouldn't either. He didn't even tell Trey he was sorry."

"How do you know that?"



“Well, Trey said he didn’t.”

“Alec needs friends too, Brooke.”

“Alec should’ve thought of that before he was mean to everybody.”

“I forgave you, and you need to forgive somebody else. Think for yourself, and stop doin’ what other people want you to do.”

“Morgan, I’m glad we’re friends again, but you want me to think like you. You want me to be just like you. You’re talkin’ about me following Trey but you want me to follow you. I don’t wanna be Alec’s friend right now, and that’s my choice. He wasn’t a nice person, and I’m not going to be nice to him because you want me to. Okay? Now the race is about to start. Are you going to be my partner so we can go after the other team and win the race?”

I nodded and followed her over to where everyone was getting ready for the race to take place. When I looked over at Alec, he had his head down. I was still **determined** to find a way to make him feel like part of our class. Yes, he’d been mean, but there was a reason. Most of the class was just being rough on him, and they needed to stop. After all, we were going to the third grade soon and we needed to start growing up a little more.

When I thought, *what would Jesus do?* I knew the answer right away. Bottom line: I was not going to give up on Alec. And if Jesus were here in person, He would help us all to act nice toward each other. So since I was here, I had to be like Him.



Since we were having so much trouble getting along with each other, we lost the three-legged race. Now our class was tied with Mr. Wade’s class. The tug-of-war contest would crown the champions of Field Day.

There was a ten-minute break before the big event. Our class still wanted to win, so everyone huddled around so Trey could give us a pep talk. It wasn’t my idea, but I went along with it.

“Okay, now. We need to get our act together, guys. We need our five strongest boys and our five toughest girls out on the rope. We gotta win for the class. We can do it! All we need to do is **participate** and pull together so we can win!”

Before he could finish telling us what to do, which was getting on my nerves because nobody made him class captain, Miss Nelson stepped into the middle of our group.

“Guys, you have one classmate who’s sitting over there alone and wants to join in. The rule is that everybody is supposed to participate in at least one event, and Alec hasn’t done one. Somebody had better go over there and talk to him, or the coach will **disqualify** our team.”

Miss Nelson didn’t even have to ask twice. I dashed right over to Alec. I didn’t care what anyone else had to say or what they thought about it. But, as soon I got to him, he let me know that he didn’t want to hear what I had to say.

“What do *you* want?” Alec said, turning his back to me.

I stepped over in front of him and said to his face, “Alec, we really need you so we can win.”

“No, you don’t. You’re just sayin’ that to make me feel better.”

“No, really. Miss Nelson just said that everyone has to participate in at least one event or we can’t win. I’m not makin’ this up.”

“But they don’t want me, and I don’t wanna be anywhere I’m not wanted.”

“I’ve seen you and your brother playin’ all kinds of games in the neighborhood. You know you’re the bomb athlete, Alec. Why would you let someone tell you that you’re not?”

“Because . . . I deserve it! Okay?” he said, just before he got up to walk away from me.

But I wasn’t going to let him get away with it. “No! Let’s talk, Alec. Why do you have to run away and act like such a baby?”

He stopped and turned back to me. “Why do you care anyway, Morgan?”

“Because if they just knew everything that happened to you then they’d know why you acted the way you did.”

“No way! I’m not tellin’ them any of my business. Think about it, Morgan. My dad was goin’ through a tough time, and he was hard on me. But he didn’t come to school with me and treat people bad. I did that on my own. And if it wasn’t for how I treated people, then maybe I’d have some friends. But maybe next year will be better. I’m tired

of actin' tough and I wanna change. I wanna be nice so kids will like me."

He was making a lot of sense. Just because someone was rough on you didn't mean you had to be rough on other people. Maybe sitting over here alone had helped him to think about it.

"Have you told them that you're sorry?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders like he didn't know.

"What kind of answer is that?"

"I don't know. I tried to talk to them but they don't wanna talk to me. I probably said I'm sorry. Why?"

"You don't have to make anybody like you, Alec. But if you really wanna make friends, then be real. Talk to people. Haven't you been bored sittin' here by yourself watchin' Field Day all day by yourself and not havin' any fun?"

"Yeah. We could've won that three-legged race," Alec said with a grin.

"Okay, so can we do tug-of-war now, please?" I asked, just as I heard Miss Nelson calling both of us.

He smiled and said, "Cool."

We jogged over to the rest of the class. Miss Nelson put Alec and Trey at the back of the line. I was in front of Trey. Brooke was in front of me. Billy was in front of her. The rest of the kids, along with Chanté, were closer to the front.

Waiting for the whistle to blow, we were holding on tight.

"You know I don't want you to play, right?" I heard Trey say to Alec.

“Yeah, but you like to win even more. And with me on the team, we can win.”

The next thing we knew, the coach, Mr. Bradley, blew the whistle.

“Pull!” Billy yelled out. “We’re goin’ forward, pull back hard!”

“I don’t care if we lose,” Trey said, not really meaning it.

“Hey, man,” Alec told him. “I’m sorry I hurt you. There was a lot goin’ on at my house, and let’s just say I’ve got a lot to learn. But I won’t mess with you anymore, I promise. Besides, you showed me somethin’. I’m not the only tough guy at school.”

Trey laughed at that. “Yeah. I was tired of you pushin’ me around and tellin’ me what to do.”

“Well, let’s just say I got the message,” said Alec.

Finally, when the two of them stopped talking, I said, “Okay, so y’all need to pull! We wanna win!”

Then Trey and Alec both pulled as hard as they could. Everybody was trying really hard. We kept pulling until Mr. Wade’s class crossed over the line—and we won! Hooray! Miss Nelson’s second grade class was the Field Day champs, and all was right with the world!

After the game was over, Trey started talking to Alec, and everyone else did too. Alec, Trey, Brooke, Billy, Chanté, and I went to the cool-off area to get some snow cones. We had earned them, and we were ready to enjoy those flavored ice drinks. They’re so yummy!

As the group stood around the table eating our icy reward, the special education class was finishing their last race. I hadn't spent a lot of time with kids who have special needs. But a few of the kids were standing around the table with us, waiting on their cool treats. Some of the kids in our group started laughing at this one kid named Tim. As he ran toward us, one of his knees bumped up against his other knee. The kids were making one joke after another about him.

"Freak!" Some girl called out that **cruel** word, as Tim made it to the snack table.

Everyone started laughing at that. I really don't know why I did it, but I laughed with them and said, "Yeah, he really is a freak." I guess I was trying too hard to fit in with the other kids.

The next thing I knew, Tim was standing in front of me screaming and knocking over the treats. He knew we were all laughing at him, and he had heard me call him that terrible name. It didn't matter that another girl said it before me. In his mind, it was all my fault. I felt bad that I was part of such a cruel world.

## Letter to Dad

Dear Dad,

I hope you are taking good care of yourself. I've learned that I can't eat late at night. I need time for my food to digest before I go to sleep.

School is almost over, and today I learned a lot about what character is. I know that you must be a good person at all times. But I helped people today and I hurt people too. This one girl is not healthy and needs to lose weight. The class picked on her, but I tried to stand up for her. But later I made fun of a boy with special needs.

I was determined to do better, and I got Alec to join us in the tug-of-war game. That was good because the principal would disqualify us if we didn't let Alec play. The class learned we all needed to participate, and we won.

Kids can be cruel, Dad. I'm one of those kids, but I'm trying to be better.

Your daughter,  
A lot to learn, Morgan

## Word Search

R E A D U N G G O O D B  
O O K S T H A T S B S T  
R J Y F I L A U Q S I D  
E P A R T I C I P A T E  
S E H M Q U H C P E P N  
O R E O U C A R A Z A I  
L R A R I X R E P I T M  
U Y L G L D A U A R C R  
T S T A T E C L E P I E  
I J H N S M T B J L C T  
O A Y D I G E S T Z I E  
N M O M O O R E L E A D

**CHARACTER**

**CRUEL**

**DETERMINED**

**DIGEST**

**DISQUALIFY**

**HEALTHY**

**PARTICIPATE**



## Words to Know and Learn

1) **di·gest** (dī-jĕst) *verb*

To break down food so it can be used by the body

2) **char·ac·ter** (kă'r'ăk-tər) *noun*

A person's behavior showing goodness and honesty

3) **health·y** (hĕl'thē) *adjective*

Being well and not sick

4) **de·ter·mined** (dĭ-tŭr'mĭnd) *adjective*

Showing purpose; intent; having a firm goal

5) **par·tic·i·pate** (păr-tĭs'ə-pāt') *verb*

To take part in something

6) **dis·qual·i·fy** (dĭs-kwŏl'ə-fĭ') *verb*

To keep someone or something from joining a team or group for not following the rules

7) **cru·el** (krū'əl) *adjective*

Causing pain or suffering



## Chapter 2

# Trouble Costs

“Morgan Love! What did you say to Tim to make him so upset?” Miss Nelson hurried over and asked me.

It was such a weird feeling. I felt like I was spinning around and stuck in a strange dream. I didn’t know what came over me. Some kids were laughing because I was in trouble. Brooke and Chanté were upset and didn’t want to see me in trouble. Knowing I was in big trouble, I was in shock.

It only took a few minutes for things to change. Just as quickly as we had won Field Day, everything went wrong. Wanting to be cool, I was trying to be with the in-crowd. So I laughed at Tim and repeated a bad name about him. Why didn’t I know that my actions would hurt his feelings? And now the choice I had made was going to hurt me.

“Morgan, I’m talking to you,” Miss Nelson said, tapping me on the shoulder. “You need to give me an **explanation** for what happened! The principal is on her way over here, and Dr. Sharpe is going to want to know too.”

Before I could answer her, the principal walked up. “What is going on here? Why is Tim upset?” Dr. Sharpe asked.

Snow cones were all over the ground, and Tim was down there smashing cups and flavored ice. He was really making the whole scene worse.

Dr. Sharpe helped Tim to his feet, and everyone tried to calm him down. Pointing toward me, he kept shouting, “She joked at me! She joked at me!”

“Is that true, young lady? I want you to tell me the truth.”

Our principal remembered that I was the one who told the whole story about what went on between Alec and Trey. Back then I was trying to avoid trouble and now I was the center of it. After all, I did laugh at Tim along with everybody else, and I did repeat a bad name about him. Because I was a part of the joke, I just had to be honest.

“Yes, ma’am. It’s true.”

“I’m so surprised at you. You are one of our most prized students and until now your character has been **exceptional**. What happened?” said Dr. Sharpe.

“Oh, Morgan, what were you thinking?” Miss Nelson joined in, shaking her head. She wasn’t pleased with me at all.

“Miss Love, since this is your fault, I want you to clean

up this mess and then come with me to my office. Do you understand, young lady?” Dr. Sharpe said.

All I could do was look at her and then bow my head. It hurt to hear kids from other classes that I didn’t even know talking about me.

“Oooh, that’s what she gets for laughin’ at a special boy. Look at her, she’s not so smart now,” one girl said.

“We should throw more stuff down on the ground for her to pick up,” said another girl.

“I wish you would throw more stuff down there,” I heard Trey say.

Then he and Alec got down on the ground to help me. Was Alec my friend after all? I didn’t even think he knew what the word help means.

When Mr. Brown, the custodian, brought over a broom and a waste basket, Chanté and Brooke also joined in and the five of us picked up all the smashed cups and the slushy mess.

“Morgan, can you believe this?” asked Brooke.

“Are you kiddin’ me? We were just havin’ fun. No one was tryin’ to upset Tim. Now I gotta go to the office, Brooke. And I can’t believe it. It’s Field Day, and I gotta go to the office. I wasn’t the only one who said it, but I’m not going to tell on someone else because I’m in trouble.”

When we were finished cleaning, Dr. Sharpe told me to follow her.

Alec whispered, “You’re gonna be okay, Morgan. Stay strong.”

I nodded. Walking a little behind Dr. Sharpe, I prayed, *Lord, I'm so sorry. I guess this is what will happen when I join in on something that's wrong. I guess that's what Mom means when she tells me to think before I act and do something stupid. I didn't mean for that boy Tim to get upset. I just wanted to be cool like my friends, so I followed the crowd. And now I'm in big trouble. This is just great. Help me, please.*

On the way to the principal's office, I kept hearing sobbing in the hallway. Then as we got closer, I could tell it was Tim.

"I'm still trying to calm him down," a teacher's aide said to the principal.

"Are you happy about this, young lady?" Dr. Sharpe said, motioning for me to take a seat.

All I could do was hang my head down. I felt lower than an ant crawling on the ground. Tim was taken to another room, and I was left alone with Dr. Sharpe. I knew a long talk was coming, but I deserved it. I was wrong, and I needed whatever punishment she was going to give me.

"Morgan, you are a smart student. You pass all of your tests, and your grades are very good. Overall, you're a great student. However, you're only as good as the things you do. As quickly as you make a bad decision, your character can get ruined. Why would you pick on this young man? Clearly, you can see that he has a **disability**."

Though she asked me a question, I didn't really think she wanted me to answer because she kept talking. I wanted to cry so badly, but I needed to be a big girl. I had

gotten myself into this mess, and I had to take the punishment that came with it.

All I could think about was my classmates getting their ribbons, eating snow cones, and having lots of fun. But here I was sitting in the principal's office scared of what was going to happen to me.

It seemed like Dr. Sharpe had already talked to me for hours, but it had only been about five minutes. I knew that because I kept looking at the big clock on the wall. Thankfully, her phone rang, and she told the person on the line to "send them in."

*Send them in? I thought. Were the police here to take me away? Who is here? My folks! Oh, no!*

Even though I was in her office and in big trouble, it never dawned on me that she may have called my parents. But right away, I was relieved to see two people come in that I didn't even know. Then, as soon as they started talking with Dr. Sharpe, I knew they weren't happy at all.

"Morgan, these are Tim's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Clark," said Dr. Sharpe, motioning for them to have a seat.

Mrs. Clark began, "Hi, Morgan. We were just outside talking to your teacher, and she speaks highly of you. I know you probably got caught up in laughing at my son because he was getting picked on. At first, that probably didn't seem like a big deal. But this is the problem. My son is very intelligent and sensitive. And today you guys broke his heart. Even though he has a disability, he's come so far in trying to get out and enjoy life, but today I think you all

set him back. I know you're young, sweetie, and you've got a lot to learn. We just want you to think twice before you make our son, or anyone else, the object of a cruel joke. Some people may seem different to you, but they're people just the same. They have feelings just like everyone else."

"Yes, ma'am," I said, unable to look at her. "I'm real sorry."

At that moment, I couldn't hold back the tears any longer. I hadn't only broken Tim's heart but obviously his parents were very hurt too. I never wanted to do any of that. It was a dumb thing to do, and maybe it was gonna be hard for me to pay the price. But somehow I was gonna make it up to them. I had to.

My back was to the door when they left so I didn't even see two other people walk in. But pretty soon I smelled Mom's perfume, and I felt Daddy Derek's strong presence. Without me even turning around, I knew it was them. I was shaking.

Mom didn't waste any time. "Morgan! Why were you sent to the principal's office? I had to get your dad from church, take Jayden to Mama's house, and rush over here because you were cutting up. Girl, you know I don't appreciate this, right?" she said, not paying any attention to my watery eyes.

"I just wanna hear it from her first," Daddy Derek spoke up. "Morgan, did you really pick on a child with special needs? That's hard for me to believe."

Mom cut in. "I love Morgan with all my heart, Derek.

And, yes, she's a very smart girl. But kids are kids and you can't just think that your kids are better than others. Everyone's child can make a mistake, including ours. They called us up here because she was laughing and joking along with her friends. The principal knows what she's talking about. Tell him, Morgan."

She was so upset with me. I could tell how much I'd let her down by the way she was talking.

I had never been in trouble at school. And I certainly didn't want to **inconvenience** anyone by having my parents go out of their way to get me. Now I was feeling worse than I already had been. When was this going to stop? I made a mistake. Okay? I feel bad about it. Okay? I learned my lesson. Okay?

It was time for me to tell how I felt, so I stood up and said, "I'm sorry! Yes, I did it. I didn't mean to hurt anybody. Yes, I was laughin' with the other kids, and I called Tim a bad name. I was just tryin' to be cool like my friends. I didn't want Tim to hear me. I understand that I let you down, Mom. And I'm so sorry!"

Mom just looked at me and said quietly, "You let yourself down, Morgan."

"Dr. Sharpe, what is her punishment?" Daddy Derek asked the principal.

"I don't want to suspend her with only one week left in school, but this behavior is unacceptable. She will have one day of in-school suspension."

I felt like I had swallowed a whole frog and it that was



jumping around in my throat. Suspension? In school? People were gonna walk by and see me through the glass doors with my back turned, doing tons of work. But doing extra work wasn't the thing that was getting to me. What would hurt the most was being away from my friends.

"How will this affect my child's school record?" asked Mom.

"It will be noted on her record that Morgan received an in-school suspension," Dr. Sharpe said. "But that will be a better outcome than giving her a home suspension."

I started to cry so hard that my head was hurting. I knew I was taking punishment for something I actually did. Yes, I laughed and called Tim that name, but someone else said it first. I just didn't think it was right for me to get another person in trouble. That girl should have admitted what she did.

Mom didn't even care how I was feeling. She said, "No need to cry now, honey. You should've thought about that before you made someone else cry. Laughing at someone and calling them harsh names is never a good choice. Now wipe those tears away and we'll deal with this when we get home."

Dr. Sharpe was writing out my suspension notice. Before she handed it to me, she said, "Morgan, you are a bright student. But you have to think about your actions before you do them. If you want to be a leader, you can't do something just because you see other people doing it. Always hold on to your high **morals** and good character. Do you understand?"

I nodded and tried to smile.

Then she made me wonder why she asked me, “Do you like sports?”

I nodded again.

Dr. Sharpe went on, “A football player wants to win the game and would never go out onto the field without wearing the proper equipment, right?”

“No, ma’am.”

“That’s correct. And if you want to be a winner, you can’t go through school without the right equipment either. Having good character is part of the equipment you need to be a good person throughout your whole life.”

“That’s right, Morgan,” Daddy Derek said, as he patted me on the back. “You can learn from this, honey.”

They were right. I heard what they said, and I was going to have to remember it. I wished I could take back everything that went wrong, but that couldn’t happen. Boy, was I going to be in for it when we got home.



As soon as we walked into the house, Mom didn’t waste any time yelling. “Go to your room right now, until we decide on your punishment, young lady!”

I had never, ever seen my mom like this before. She was really angry with me. My parents’ room was right next door to mine. Even with my head under the pillow, I could hear them arguing.

“This isn’t like her,” Daddy Derek said.

“It doesn’t matter if it’s like her or not. She did it, and now she has to take her punishment. I’m sick and tired of her acting out. We can’t let her just get away with this.”

“What do you mean ‘sick and tired’? This is the first time we’ve had any problems out of Morgan,” he said to her.

“She pouted all last summer and the first part of the school year. You never saw it because she was with her dad. But Derek, I’ve had enough. I can’t let her get away with this kind of behavior. I must punish her.”

Oh, my goodness. They were angry with me and now they were becoming angry with each other.

Then Daddy Derek said, “No, you don’t have to do anything.”

*Thank you. Please talk her out of it, I thought in my head.*

“I’m the man of the house, so that should be my job.”

“What?” Mom said. “That’s my daughter. I don’t want you to discipline her.”

“What do you mean? She’s my daughter too, isn’t she?”

Oh, no. This is not what should be happening. This is really bad. They were arguing over how to discipline me and the whole thing was my fault. Suddenly, their room door slammed and I got scared.

I got up and quietly shut my door. Then I fell onto my knees and prayed, *Oh Lord. I’ve done it this time. I’ve made a real big mess. I hope that Tim and his parents are okay. I want my parents to be okay. Help me, please.*

As I grow up, there will always be things in my life that will **tempt** me. So I’m gonna have to learn how to make

smart decisions. I can't do something that I know is wrong just because everybody else is doing it. I know better than to follow people into a store and take some candy just to be cool, so why would I think it was okay to make someone feel bad? I didn't wanna hurt Tim's feelings. I did it because my friends thought it was cool.

Besides, it's not just about staying out of trouble. It's about doing the right thing. So it's better to do what Jesus would do rather than what my friends would do. And I know the Lord would never laugh at someone.

Just then the telephone rang and I saw on the caller ID that it was Brooke's number. I quickly picked it up.

"Hello?"

"Hey, it's me and Chanté. Can you talk?" Brooke was almost whispering.

"I'm sure I can't. My parents are arguing and mad, and I'm in big trouble," I whispered.

"Sorry about everything," Chanté said softly.

"It's not your fault. Tim heard me call him the name that everyone was laughin' about."

"I tried to tell you that he was right behind you," said Brooke.

"So what happened when you were in Dr. Sharpe's office?" Chanté asked.

"I got a one day suspension in school."

"Oh, that's not too bad," Brooke said. "It could've been worse."

"It's not so good either."

Brooke said, “Well, the whole class felt bad. Alec and Trey were talkin’ about how they hoped you weren’t in serious trouble. It’s weird how you got them to be friends again.”

“I know, right? Who would’ve thought?” Chanté added. “Well, anyway it’s too bad that you won’t be in class. You’ll probably get bored being by yourself and everything.”

“You don’t have to make her feel bad about it,” Brooke said.

“It’s okay, I did it to myself. I’m findin’ out that when you do the wrong thing, you have to take your punishment.”

All of a sudden, my room door swung open. “Oh, no! Morgan, I know you’re not on that telephone! When it didn’t ring a second time, your mom and I thought the caller hung up. The last person in this house who needs to be talking on the phone is you. Hang that phone up, now!” Daddy Derek said, raising his voice.

“Bye, y’all,” I quickly told them.

“I’m sorry, Morgan,” Chanté said.

“Me too,” Brooke said, before I hung up the phone.


“I can’t believe this. I’m in there talking with your mom about what happened and here you are on the telephone acting like you’re not in trouble. Do you think that it’s okay to get an in-school suspension for making someone feel bad and then come home and everything will be the same? Well, that’s about enough.”

*Uh, oh, I thought. Here it comes.*

“There will be no television until we say so. You’re going to get in there and learn how to do the dishes. If you’re old enough to joke on people, then you’re old enough to clean up the kitchen. And if you think you’re so smart that you can talk on the phone while you’re in trouble, then—”

I knew that for the rest of my life I’d think twice about everything I did. I didn’t wanna make any more bad decisions because—trouble costs.

## Letter to Dad



Dear Dad,

You won't believe this, Dad. I had to go to the principal's office today and give an explanation. She said I was an exceptional student, but that I was wrong for laughing at a student with a disability. I was wrong, Dad, and I feel horrible. It was an inconvenience to Mom and Daddy Derek because they had to come to the school and get me.

Dad, I can see you reading this, and I know I've let you down too. I do have morals and I know right from wrong. I wanted to fit in, and I laughed only so people would think I was cool. It was wrong for me to tempt other kids to be unkind too. Don't worry, I'm in big trouble. Mom and Daddy Derek were fussing about how they would discipline me. I messed up so bad that I have them arguing.

Dad, even though you may be mad at me, can I ask you to pray for your daughter? Please? I'll get it together soon. I need you here to help me. Come home, Dad.

Your daughter,  
A lot to learn, Morgan

## Word Search

E M E X I S T R I J S M  
E X C E P T I O N A L U  
D B P F L A S H C Y A S  
I I O L N L W C O D R E  
S E S I A E Q A N E O U  
A X T C B N U R V N M M  
B C P O I T A D E Z A S  
I E R U R P I T N D X R  
L P A P D I L O I K I O  
I T Y O N A L I E O M E  
T E M P T R A J N L N K  
Y O U A R E N I T E O X

**DISABILITY**

**DISCIPLINE**

**EXCEPTIONAL**

**EXPLANATION**

**INCONVENIENT**

**MORALS**

**TEMPT**



## Words to Know and Learn

- 1) **ex·pla·na·tion** (ĕk'splə-nā'shən) *noun*  
The act or process of putting information into plain words
- 2) **ex·cep·tion·al** (ĭk-sĕp'shə-nəl) *adjective*  
Well above average; something or someone who is special
- 3) **dis·a·bil·i·ty** (dĭs'ə-bĭl'ĭ-tē) *noun*  
A physical or mental condition that prevents being able to do something
- 4) **in·con·ven·ience** (ĭn'kən-vĕn'yəns) *noun*  
A situation or something that is difficult or untimely that causes trouble
- 5) **mor·als** (mô'rəl, mŏr'-) *noun*  
Rules or habits of conduct that express standards of right and wrong
- 6) **dis·ci·pline** (dĭs'ə-plĭn) *verb*  
To train according to rules or principles
- 7) **tempt** (tĕmpt) *verb*  
To try to get (someone) to do wrong, especially by a promise of reward