

## CHAPTER SIX

# The Strength We All Have

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*“When the dust settles and the pages of history are written, it will not be the angry defenders of intolerance who have made the difference. The reward will go to those who dared to step outside the safety of their privacy in order to expose and rout the prevailing prejudices.”*

The Right Rev. John Shelby Spong

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The choice to sift out the seed of prejudice and toss it aside will be among the most meaningful in our lives. And those who make that choice will all have one trait in common: strength.

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**strength**, *n.* the power to accomplish something.

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To help us understand what strength means, let's review world history again. Our earlier survey of persecution showed us the harm caused by prejudiced people. We should also know that during those persecutions there were people who chose to sift out the seed of prejudice and toss it aside—members of a “dominant” group who championed the cause of the oppressed. For example, in the era of slavery in America, there were Whites who helped Blacks escape the brutality of plantation owners; as the Second World War raged on in Europe, there were Germans who helped Jews escape the fate of concentration camps.

History refers to those people as “rescuers.” Operating at their own peril, rescuers did what they believed to be the right thing. Risking their social status, property, freedom, and ultimately their lives and the lives of loved ones, rescuers chose to make their own decisions, to use judgment.

The acts of rescuers were extraordinary when you think about the circumstances. Imagine for a moment you're witness to an incident in the school hallway. One student is humiliating another student because he's a minority; you're not a minority in this environment and are surrounded by friends. If you feel that it's wrong for the minority to be subjected to this treatment, ask yourself: Do I help this person?

I suspect your first reaction is, “*Yes! I would tell the bully to stop, and then I would call a teacher!*” And that would be commendable indeed. As you continued to

think about the situation, however, your ideas might change. Perhaps it would be best to stand by and blend in with the crowd. Surely the incident will end soon and everything will quiet down. That way, you don't risk annoying friends who may agree with the bully and are having a good time. It would be an easier way to go.

Then maybe you decide that ignoring the situation wouldn't be appropriate; you definitely want to stop this terrible behavior. But what if you knew that stepping forward would mean your reputation in school might be changed forever? Could you live with being outcast by your peers and, possibly, rejected by the minority students? Would you want to eat lunch alone and perform afternoon school activities by yourself? What about going to school every day with the fear that you might be bullied in the hallway? When you think about what you have at risk, you may not want to step forward so quickly.

During times of persecution, rescuers were confronted with similar thoughts, only with much graver consequences. Let's take a look at how several of those rescuers reacted.