

FAMILY PAGE: BLESSED ARE YOU WHEN...

FAMILY QUESTION: WHAT DO I DO WHEN I GET DISCOURAGED?

In this last beatitude, Jesus explained to his followers that they would face persecution when they lived out God's abundant love. The good news is we do not have to do this work alone. We are a part of an ancient team—a team that partners with God to bring about love and justice. Jesus also told his followers to rejoice when they faced persecution. This is not easy to say to a middle schooler or a child who may feel isolated or rejected by peers. And these feelings can often lead to deeper sadness and despair. Talk about your family action plan if someone begins to feel overwhelming sadness. How should your children let you know if they are feeling down? Who else can they talk to if their problems feel too big to handle? Who are the trustworthy members of your mental health care team? Remind your children that you are always available to support them if they feel discouraged—no matter what!

BRIEF REFLECTION

A huge crowd of people followed Jesus. He saw their hurts and pains and cared for them in many ways. He led them to a mountain and told them about God's kingdom. You can think of a "kingdom" as the way the world works or is set up. In God's kingdom, there is abundance: more than enough honor, food, money, love, power, and resources for everyone to thrive.

Jesus says, *"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* Jesus gave us a strong word of encouragement by saying again that his followers would be blessed when facing persecution. He knew some of the toughest things about living out God's abundant love would be losing friends, being disliked, hearing people say bad things about them, or experiencing harm. Jesus experienced all of these things.

But the good news is we are not alone! Jesus pointed us to the prophets—dedicated leaders who sided with the voiceless and powerless. They faced a lot of persecution! We join with people from the ancient past, the recent past, and people all over the world today—with children, teenagers, adults, older adults, and with people who are creating a world where people can live freely and without fear. But we have to do it together. We also need to keep humble hearts and attitudes because there may be times we misunderstand and persecute others. Yes, sometimes WE are the ones on the wrong side of a decision. Can you believe it? We are all always learning and growing. Jesus told us to rejoice when we are persecuted. Do you rejoice when people misunderstand you or say mean things to you? It isn't easy. But Jesus reminds us that when we make brave choices, even if they are unpopular choices, we are creating a world with a whole family of faith that looks more like God's home. And that is worth celebrating!

PRAYER

Dear God, You are our biggest joy and hope! Thank you for all our siblings of faith who encourage and keep us strong. Help us encourage others. Plant our feet in your promise to always be our support, no matter what we face. We pray others will see and know you because of our unshakeable joy. Amen.

NOBODY GOES ALONE: A SILLY STORY

This is a story about a team that worked together to bring love and justice to their community. But it's also a silly story. Fill in the blanks in the story with the words you choose from the prompts below. The sillier the words, the better!

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|---|----------------------------------|
| (1) Game that children play | (9) A food |
| (2) Game that children play | (10) Adjective |
| (3) Game that children play | (11) Noun |
| (4) Game that children play on the playground | (12) Something that is blue |
| (5) Something you can do quietly by yourself | (13) A public place in your town |
| (6) Something you say when you are frustrated | (14) An art supply |
| (7) A food | (15) An art supply |
| (8) A food | |

Nobody Goes Alone

Once upon a time there was a group of children who noticed a problem with their school playground. There was plenty of space to play (1) _____, (2) _____, and (3) _____. But there wasn't any safe space for their friend Taylor to play. Taylor used specialized crutches to walk, and the grassy surfaces of the school playground were difficult for her to walk on. One of Taylor's favorite playground activities was (4) _____, but the grass and sand made it almost impossible. During recess, Taylor would have to sit on a bench and (5) _____.

Taylor's best friend Noah got frustrated every day and would say, "(6) _____, I wish that this place were better for my friend."

One day, Taylor and Noah talked about the problem with their parents over a delicious meal of (7) _____, (8) _____, and (9) _____.

The grown-ups listened carefully and thought about the problem. "Hmmm. Did you know that Taylor has a right to access the playground? Maybe the school needs to be reminded of that right."

"YES!" Taylor and Noah both exclaimed.



Taylor and Noah made an appointment to meet with the principal (Ms. Reed) in her big, (10) _____ office. They told her about the problem, but Ms. Reed just shook her head.

"I don't know where we could find the money to make those changes this year. I know it's important, but we just can't afford it. We already used up all the money from the (11) _____ sale. Maybe next year."

Taylor and Noah were discouraged. They felt as blue as a (12) _____. Over the next few weeks they spoke with the parent leaders, other teachers, and even the school board. Everyone said the same thing, "We can't afford it." Some people even said mean things like, "Why would we spend all that money on one child? Why is it so important for her to play during recess?"

This made Noah angry, and it made Taylor sad. Noah said, "How do we help everyone understand that this isn't about one person. It's about all of us. When one of us can't play, it hurts everyone."

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking, Noah?" Taylor asked.

"I think so!" Noah responded.

"Let's have a protest in the (13) _____!"

Their parents nodded with approval.

"Sure! We can make posters with (14) _____ and (15) _____. Then we can march to the school and remind everyone that all children should be able to use the playground."

Within a few weeks, word spread, and the teachers, the school administration (that's the principal), and most of the community decided that this protest was very important. In fact, before the protest was even finished, they had convinced Principal Reed to make the necessary adaptations to the playground. Within three months, Noah and Taylor were walking side-by-side all over the playground. They felt good knowing that students would be able to enjoy the accessible playground for many years to come.