

One truth shared: When you are weaker or disadvantaged, God has you right where he wants you.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:11,12

Christians are Crazy

When a person looks up the definition of a crazy person, a picture of an ironman triathlete might appear. An ironman triathlon is a race consisting of a 2.4-mile swim, 122-mile bike ride, and 26.22-mile run. A definition of crazy is not acting in a sensible or logical way due to an abnormal state of mind. Swimming, biking, and running an ironman triathlon does not sound sensible or logical. Why would anyone put their body through that much pain and suffering? The only plausible explanation can be that the person must be crazy. Except, they aren't crazy. They have normal functioning minds. So why do they act irrationally and run an ironman? For the same reason Christians endure persecution. They are focused on the reward. Whether the reward is prize money for winning or the sense of accomplishment of finishing the race, rewards motivate people to do crazy things.

Jesus calls on Christians to act crazy, not crazy in the sense of out of control and erratic, but in an irrational and unsensible way, at least according to the world. When people insult you, you are blessed. When people persecute you and say awful things about you because of Jesus, that is a good thing. Jesus wants you to rejoice and be glad when people treat you horribly. That seems irrational and unsensible. That seems crazy.

Not to Jesus. He knows what the reward is, heaven. You go through persecution or hardships for Jesus. That means you have faith in Jesus which means you are going to heaven. That doesn't make you crazy. That makes you blessed.

So, defend your faith even when someone says you're being naive or dumb. Stand up for the one who is being picked on even if you have to stand up to your friends. Be the one in the group who says that movie is not appropriate to watch. According to the world, only a crazy person would act like that. According to Jesus, that is how blessed people act.

Prayer: Lord God, you have given us heaven as our reward. Keep our faith in you strong. Give us courage and strength to suffer persecution and hardships because of our faith. Give us peace and joy in all situations remembering how awesome heaven is going to be. Amen.

Foundation Teen Facilitators Guide

Year A – Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

The Savior's Sermon

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Christians are Crazy

Starting the Discussion: This first section is intended to be light and easy, to engage and get the conversation going. Have a little fun with these questions.

Biblical "Would You Rather" (Four scenarios, choose one)

- Would you rather lie on your left side for 390 days like Ezekiel (Ezekiel 4) or eat honey and locusts, like John the Baptist, as your only food for the rest of your life (Matthew 3)?
- Would you rather wear a crown of thorns for an hour or a camel skin shirt for a month?
- Would you rather witness Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel when fire from heaven came down (1 Kings 18) or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace (Daniel 3)?
- Would you rather be in the group with the Israelites when they crossed the Red Sea on dry ground or when the walls of Jericho came tumbling down?

Connecting: This section serves as a bridge between the opening conversation and the body of the study/discussion. It should get the group thinking about the topic/text even before they've looked at it.

Can you think of a scenario, situation, or circumstance where it would be better to be worse, more advantageous to be weaker, better off by being worse off? Try to come up with at least three. (For example, in the movie *World War Z*, the zombies did not attack sick people. So being sick [worse, weaker, worse off] was actually better for you.)

Digging In: Here we want to dig into some texts or the text for the day and see what Scripture says. The questions are meant to be open ended to give a beginning of a scriptural conversation. These are a guide for a spiritual and scriptural conversation.

- "Blessed are you when people persecute you because of me." Why do people persecute Christians?
- What does persecution look like today in the world?
- What does Christian persecution look like in your life?
- Jesus doesn't just say, "Endure persecution. Grit your teeth and get through it because you have to." Instead, Jesus says that we should consider persecution as a blessing, even though it sounds like a contradiction. What is the advantage of being disadvantaged? (Hint: Matthew 5:12)

(Answer - The weaker you are the more likely you are to rely on God's strength, the more difficult your circumstance the more likely you are to look forward to the future glory of heaven.)

Note - Another way to ask the question. "What is the danger of having a life with no disadvantages or persecutions?"

- Why does Jesus mention the prophets of the past and the suffering that they endured?

Conclusion: *Here we want to wrap up the discussion, perhaps circling back to the “connecting question” above.*

What is the difference between the person who is fake happy in a difficult situation and the Christian who rejoices in persecution? The difference is important because the first leads to mental health problems and the other gives deep and meaningful peace.