

Health: Rules and Virtues

What if a discussion of rules was about life as a playground?

Andy's class usually played out a desert island scenario for their lesson on living together harmoniously. However, that usually ended up with a list of class rules, and Andy wanted to change the emphasis:

"I wanted to put the emphasis on character and a community inspired by a vision of the kingdom of God, and the character and teaching of Jesus. If we imagine this world as a playground, the rules are just the fence creating a safe place to play; but God wants us to play on the swings, not hang around the fence. He wants us to live and work together in love. To do that we need to think about the people we become, not just the rules.

"I redesigned my lesson, changing the image from a desert island to a playground. I asked the class to design the playground they would really like. I asked students to describe what sort of people they would have to be to enjoy this playground together. To help with this I made links to the work they had done on Christian virtues in religious education (love, patience, kindness, etc.). They wrote their ideas in colored cutouts of people. Working from the students' ideas, the class created aims for themselves that were written as 'bee' statements. These were decorated, and all had a 'bee' logo. The bee was chosen not only because it sounds like 'be' (be-coming all we could be), but also because bees live in community.

"Rules for the ideal playground were only created at the end as 'boundary markers' stating what we don't do in our playground. The rules were written on cardstock fence posts that created the fence for the playground. The playground was drawn and displayed; the fence posts were added, the people stuck on, and then paper flowers for the bees were attached. After that, I helped the students make the link between the playground and the classroom."

What's going on here?

Andy saw his lesson in terms of the underlying vision it promoted—of rules to aid survival, or rules as boundaries, where which character can grow and experience delight.

He engaged students in actively imagining communities in terms of playfulness and delight and helped them to reflect on how that related to rules, boundaries, and classrooms.

He reshaped his practice by using a new metaphor to focus the lesson, making connections across subjects (virtues), and by finding concrete ways of enacting the framing metaphor (fence posts, drawing the playground).

What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

The Christian vision centers on the person and teaching of Jesus and the kingdom of heaven—a place of God’s peace, love, justice, and joy. This is what inspires Christians. Faith in Jesus means Christians seek to be like him, not just keep a set of rules. Faith in God’s future means people can begin to live those values now, setting up communities of different values that can serve others. This alternative way of life can offer hope to the world.

What difference does it make?

Changing the image from a desert island to a playground immediately creates a positive feel. (“Eden” means “delight,” and the world can be seen as, among other things, a playground God created.) Starting with vision and character also helped to put rules in an appropriate place; Christianity is not a rules-based faith.

Digging deeper

The Christian life is determined by vision, not rules. We are called to become like Jesus in character. It is also about all that our world could be, inspired by the vision of the new heaven and earth, where God’s peace and justice reign (Isaiah 11, Revelation 21:4). Our vision of the future can be anticipated in the way we live now. Rules have their place; they mark the boundaries, but rules alone will not make people act ethically. Rules may curb bad behavior, but faith is about much more than that. Merely keeping the rules will not

make a person a good soccer player; similarly, merely keeping the rules does not make someone a good Christian.

Some modern societies tend to stress the individual. Although this has brought a certain type of freedom, it can lead to a lack of connection with others. A lack of belonging makes it difficult to make choices with others in mind. The Bible stresses community. The Apostle Paul compares the church to a body (1 Corinthians 12:12-20), in which the parts are dependent on each other and where people bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2) and share their highs and lows. This creates a strong element of belonging both to God and to each other.



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