

Courage: to do what is right



Making excuses can seem like the easy way out, but in the end, it never gets us anywhere. This week's portion (30:12-13) acknowledges how tempting it is to find excuses to avoid doing something positive, and urges us to overcome them and reach our goals. In our story, some kids have to decide whether to let a good excuse, excuse them.

GOOD EXCUSE? NO EXCUSE

By: Nesanel Yoel Safran (names in the story have been changed)

Olivia, Lydia and Amy sat beneath the gray, darkening sky at the corner, waiting for the volunteer van that was going to take them to their weekly after-school 'cheer-up' visit to the local nursing home.

"You know, I really have a ton of homework to do this afternoon," Lydia complained. "I wish I hadn't agreed to do this visiting thing."

"Yeah, I know what you mean," Amy chimed in. "I know it's a good deed and everything, but I'd really rather go check out the clearance sale at Best-Dressed. I hear they have some really good clothes on sale cheap." As they were speaking, they noticed the familiar, blue volunteer van approach, but instead of slowing down it drove right past them.

"Hey, what happened?" Amy called out.

"I'll bet it's that new driver again who forgot we were part of the pick-up route!" Lydia huffed. "Now what do we do?"

"We go bargain hunting!" Amy's face lit up like a light bulb.

"Huh?"

"Well, look, it's not our fault the van didn't stop for us, and now we're off the hook. Come on, guys, let's go across the street to the mall!"

"I guess really I don't have that much homework, why not?" Lydia smiled.

"C'mon, Olivia," Amy called. "You said you wanted a new fall outfit."

Olivia crossed her arms, then scrunched her face and shook her head. "You know, I just don't think we should miss our nursing home visit. The old people really enjoy it," Olivia said, thinking of Mrs. Katz, the patient who'd she'd been assigned to visit.

"Maybe, but the van drove right by us. So we have a good excuse not to show this week," Amy scowled.

"I don't know. My mom always says 'a good excuse is still an excuse.' It's really only a ten-minute walk away. Why don't we just go for it?"

Olivia's two friends looked at her like she was out of her mind.

"Walk it? It's enough that we agree to go at all. Forget it - you coming or not?"

"Um, no," Olivia said. "You guys go ahead if you want. I'm going to keep trying."

Olivia watched her friends walk off, sighed, and started on her way. After a moment, she felt a drop of rain on her face, which soon grew into a light but steady rain. Hmm, maybe I should forget about this crazy idea? Olivia thought. After all, no one would expect me to walk in the rain. I do have a legitimate excuse. She was about to do an about-face and join her friends at the mall when the thought crossed her mind: But a legitimate excuse is still an excuse. Pulling her hood up over her head, Olivia valiantly marched on through the rain until she arrived. She'd barely had a chance to take off her coat when Sharon, the home manager, came running her way. "Oh, Olivia! You made it after all! Mrs. Katz was so disappointed when the van showed up without you. She said she waits all week for your visit." The young woman lowered her voice to a whisper and added, "You know, it's unfortunately the only visit she ever gets ... her family never comes." Suddenly, despite her wet clothing, Olivia felt a sunny, warm feeling inside and knew she'd done something very good by not letting an excuse - even a good one - stop her.

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GOOD EXCUSE? NO EXCUSE Relevant Engagement Questions

Ages 3-5

Q. How did Olivia's friends feel when the van didn't stop for them?

A. They felt that since they had a good excuse not to go to the nursing home, they didn't have to go.

Q. How did Olivia feel?

A. She felt that even if you have a good excuse, you should still do what's right.

Ages 6-9

Q. What life-lesson do you think someone could learn from this story?

A. Many times when we set out to do something worthwhile, it won't be easy and it is tempting to quit, especially if there seems to be a good excuse to do so. But we gain and grow so much by pushing on, nevertheless.

Q. Do you think Olivia would have been wrong not to have gone to the nursing home visit after the van passed them, etc.?

A. No, she would have been within her rights. It really was a legitimate excuse. But she became great - and we can too - by not letting 'good excuses' stop us from reaching our goals.

Ages 10 and Up

Q. Who do you think lives a happier life - someone who allows good excuses stop them or one who doesn't? Why?

A. There is no dream, no worthwhile accomplishment, that doesn't at some point present itself with a good excuse to give up. Only a person who keeps going anyway will achieve the great joy of accomplishing their dreams.

Q. What does it mean to rationalize?

A. It is a process of using our mind to generate excuses to allow us to do what we want even if it's not right. This type of excuse-making can really hold a person back from spiritual growth and we should always be on the lookout to avoid it.

