

You should think about this the next time something bad happens to you and you get discouraged. Bad things happen to kids, you know. People they like don't like them; gang members try to push them around, maybe threaten them, maybe even hurt them; they make grades that they don't think are as good as they ought to be. You know; disappointments happen in life.

Nelson Mandela was in prison for 27 years because of his political beliefs. And we talked once about it. And he walked out of there with enough mental and emotional strength to take all the support that he had generated by becoming the symbol of South African freedom and to win in a landslide the first free election they had had in 350 years and to do it in a way that brought people together across racial and political lines instead of driving them apart.

When I went to South Africa, Nelson Mandela, for example, arranged for me to have lunch with legislative leaders. And one of them was the leader of the most militant right-wing white party there, who had once threatened to restart a civil war if Nelson Mandela got elected President. And Mandela sat down and talked to him and convinced him he ought to be part of the political system. And then when I came to South Africa, instead of having me eat lunch with all of his allies, he had me sit down and eat lunch with this fellow.

I have a minister friend who ran into President Mandela at the airport in Johannesburg, and he came up to a little 5-year-old white girl, and he asked the young girl if she knew who he was, and the young girl said, "Yes, you're President Mandela. You're my President." And he looked at this little child now, after all his life, and he said, "Yes, young lady," and he said, "If you study hard in school and you learn a lot about things, you, too, could grow up to be President of South Africa."

Hillary and Chelsea and I have all become friends of President Mandela but also fascinated by how he survived 27 years in prison—there was over a decade in which he didn't have a bed in his cell, a dozen years of breaking rocks—an experience which cost him seeing his children grow up, ultimately cost him his marriage, and subjected him to all sorts of physical and emotional abuse. And he walked out of prison, got elected President, invited his jailers to his Inauguration.

So I asked him one day, I said, "How did you do this?" I said, "How did you go without

hating them?" And he said, "Well, you know, I did hate them for a long time, about 12 years." And he said, "One day I was out there breaking rocks in prison, and I thought, look what they've taken away from me. They've taken the best years of my life. I can't see my kids grow up. They brutalized me. They can take everything. They can take everything from me but my mind and my heart. Now, those things I will have to give to them. I don't think I will give them away." You think about that—"I don't think I will give them away."

The morning Nelson Mandela got out of prison, it was an early Sunday morning in America, in the Central Time Zone. And I got my daughter up, and I took her down to the kitchen and turned the television on and sat her up on the counter—she was a little girl—and I said, "I want you to watch this. This is one of the most important things you'll ever see." And some of you remember when Mandela took that last long walk to freedom, when he was coming out of the prison.

So I asked him, I said, "Now, when you took that last walk, tell me the truth, didn't you hate them again?" He said, "Yes, I started to." And he said, "I was also scared because I hadn't been free in a long time; I was actually scared. And I was filled with anger. And then I thought to myself, when I become free, I want to be free. If I still hate them, I won't be free. They've had enough of my time. I'm not giving them any more, not another day."

This is a very long answer to a child's question, but it's an important answer. That's why he's the most interesting person I've met, because I don't know another human being that suffered so much for so long and came out so much stronger and richer and deeper than he went into his period of suffering.

And so I ask the children here and the parents here to think about it when times get tough. And I ask America to think about it when we have all these racial and religious and political divisions that we think are so big; we spend all of our time trying to solve the problems in Northern Ireland, the Middle East, and other places in the world. None of the people—practically none of the people that are involved in any of this stuff around the world and nobody here in America has ever been through anything—anything—like what he went through.