



You may not live across the street from your best friend like I did as a child, but you can shorten the distance in your relationships with childlike forgiveness. If you yearn for the freedom of a childlike heart, you'll have to quit trying to make people pay for their mistakes. They can't pay for their mistakes anymore than you can. Only Jesus can pay for sins. Aren't you glad He isn't holding a grudge against you?



"O-h-h-h Me"

Childlike Compassion

Mourn with those who mourn.

ROMANS 12:15

Not knowing what else to do, I stood motionless behind the grown son who held the hand of his dying father. It was my first church, my first months. I had never walked the road of cancer with a parishioner before. I was almost surprised at how deeply I cared for the man in the hospital bed. I didn't understand yet that God planned for me to love that bedridden man like Christ loved him. I didn't know yet that when God ordains a pastor, He provides the pastor's heart. So I just stood silently, surprised by the depth of my love, but disappointed by my feelings of pastoral ineptness.

Lester winced with pain. His medication at the time wasn't strong enough to mask his physical anguish. So his body constricted because of the pain emanating from his bones. He drew in a short breath and then exhaled slowly.

As he breathed outward, Lester rhythmically stretched out a moan, "O-h-h-h me." It was a pain-filled, mournful moan. But, at the same time, it possessed a compelling beauty. It was not just a cry of distress. It was a sigh of the soul. The more I listened, the more it sounded like a song rather than a moan.

"O-h-h-h me. O-h-h-h me."

The tender son leaned forward. I had been to seminary. I had been trained. But I watched this son carefully. His confident demeanor proved he knew how to care for his beloved father better than I. With a clasped hand and a hint of a smile, the son brought his face down close to his dad's.

Lester moaned again, "O-h-h-h me."

Then, what I never could have imagined to happen occurred. The son echoed back, "O-h-h-h me."

The white-haired patient moaned louder, "O-h-h-h me."

Again, the unfathomable echo came back from the son, "O-h-h-h me."

What was I beholding? Was such insensitivity possible? Could a son actually mock his dying father's moan?

I considered interrupting the son's echo of anguish. I contemplated pulling the man away from the bed to save his father from the humiliation. But oddly, Lester seemed comforted—not agitated—by his son's peculiar imitation. So, I stood silently and waited.

I was about to learn a holy lesson in compassion that I would never forget.

After watching this amazing father-son duet of moans for some time, I stepped out of the hospital room with the son. He explained.

When I first met this saintly, aging man, he was at home, not in the hospital. Though Lester's health was declining rapidly and his pain was increasing at the same rate, there was no place of healing like home. Lester was thankful for a fine hospital, but the hospital had no home-cooked meals, no view of Rose of Sharon Road, and no Wesley.

Wesley was Lester's two-year-old grandson. I knew this toddler to be a blond-haired barrel of fun who was bound to bring sunshine to the darkest of days. I had seen Lester's smile broaden when Wesley was around. I knew that Wesley's presence helped alleviate Lester's anguish. I knew how much he loved the little boy. But what Lester's son told me outside the hospital room that day touched my heart forever.

At home, as Lester's health worsened, he rarely walked. When he did, Lester supported himself with a walker. Each grueling step brought shooting pain. His walk was more of a shuffle, each slide of the foot an accomplishment. And with each foot forward, with each lift of the walker, Lester would exhale his usual moan: "O-h-h-h me." Step. "O-h-h-h me." Step.

- Wesley felt no guilt. Little children don't condemn themselves for another's pain. My first experience in clinical pastoral education was excruciating. I would visit the hospital in the afternoon and come home with a headache and a big dose of guilt. "How can I just go on my happy, healthy way while there are people lying in those hospital beds suffering?" I would ask. The biggest challenge for me was not learning how to minister to the patients in the hospital but how to live with myself when I wasn't there. It finally dawned on me that my worry and guilt were doing those patients no good whatsoever. Little Wesley helped his grandfather walk, but then I'm sure he bounced off without a care in the world.

- Wesley didn't need to be needed. His care was pure. He had no personal need to moan. He wouldn't have felt bad about himself if Lester had asked someone else to help him walk. Adult caregivers, on the other hand, can get addicted to their caregiving. They can become as sick as the ones they are trying to help. To have compassion for a sick person does not mean you must become sick yourself. If you are going to pull someone out of quicksand, you'd best not jump in the quicksand yourself.

Little children are the best models of compassion because they care deeply but do not become consumed by the loved one's problem. Adults tend toward the extremes. They either show no care at all or become totally lost in

the other's needs. They either never visit the nursing home or feel guilty every day they aren't there. Children show genuine love. But no child loses sleep at night feeling responsible for all the world's problems.

What makes a child's compassion so natural, so sweet?

Toddlers' hearts have not been calloused by the pain of the world. Their unscarred souls are still sensitive and soft. They are not scared to feel what others feel. They are not repulsed by another's pain.

The other day I foolishly tried to carry a glass-top table up the stairs by myself. As I lost control of it, the glass crashed around my falling body. There must have been angels protecting me. I suffered only one real cut. When our little boy discovered his dad's bleeding flesh wound on the knee, he wanted to kiss the "boo-boo" to make it better. I tried to persuade him that I needed no kiss. That didn't work. Bennett was not content to leave my knee unkissed. Though I was compelled to clean and dry the cut before the kiss, I allowed him to plant one right on the fresh wound.

I don't know that the flesh benefited from the kiss, but the soul beneath that flesh sure did. Is there a greater healing balm than a love that looks beyond our ugly exteriors? Is there a touch that better restores our wounds than the touch of genuine compassion?

Who else but a child, I wondered, would kiss an oozing wound?

Who else but Christ?

- Who else would touch a leper's open sore?
- Who else would take a prostitute's hand?
- Who else would drink a Samaritan's water?
- Who else would lend the touch of his garment to an unclean, bleeding woman?
- Who else would wash his betrayer's feet?

Who else but a God of compassion. Jesus relinquished His heavenly throne to come alongside us. John said it this way: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). It means literally, He "pitched His tent" among us. He suffered in the ways we suffer. He was tempted in the ways we are tempted. Therefore, the author of Hebrews insists, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses" (Hebrews 4:15). The prophecy proved true: "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering" (Isaiah 53:3).

The caring Christ is so different from the dying creature. He dwells in eternity. We are trapped in time. His world is infinite. Ours is limited by height, width, and depth. He is spirit. We are flesh. He is all light. The world is all dark. But compassion compels Him to come alongside.

He wanted to feel what we feel. And, oh, how He did. He felt the pangs of a hungry stomach, the pain of desertion, and the power of the ungodly. Jesus listened to the call of the devil, the crash of the storms, and the crack of the whip. He sweated. He wept. He ached.

And one dark Friday, they lifted His body to a cross. There, hanging on the cursed tree, Jesus felt the collective pain of the world. There, alone, He felt the alienation that sin had brought upon all humanity. There, as He slowly suffocated, the Savior managed a loud moan, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" (Mark 15:34). Mark translated the Aramaic words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But they might as well have been "O-h-h-h me."