



GREATER COMPASSION

SCRIPTURE READING: *“Comfort, yes comfort my people!” says the Lord. The best comforters are those who have shared in the same experience.”* (Isaiah 40:1 NIV)

I boarded the plane with tears in my eyes. My jaws were tight and the corners of my mouth were drawn downward. I was glad to be among the first to board because I looked as though I was buckling under the pressure of flying, but that wasn't the case at all. I was about to cry because of what I had seen just moments before walking down the ramp onto the plane.

Because of our daughter's disabilities, we stood at the gate with tickets in hand, waiting to board early. Alongside us was a woman with her children in strollers and two disabled adults: One was an elderly man with an oxygen tank, the other a man in his thirties with a walker.

My heart went out to the elderly man on oxygen, but for some reason, an extra measure went out to the younger man with the walker. As he walked, he was very slow and unsteady, making it appear as though even a small snag on the carpet could send him toppling down. His fragility caught my attention and captured my heart. I couldn't help but wonder what it must be like to be so weak and vulnerable.

His approach to the desk was lengthy, so my eyes began to drift around the waiting area. I gave a fleeting look at my daughter who was itching to board the plane, and then around the room at other passengers waiting to board. Seeing nothing particularly interesting, I looked back at the man with the walker to check on his progress.

As my eyes fixed back on his frame, I heard a female voice say, “Can I walk down the ramp with him to the plane?” Considerate but firm, the attendant replied, “No, I'm sorry you cannot.” That's when I saw the helpless woman at the counter. It was his mother.

As a perfect stranger, I saw the frailty of this young man the instant I laid eyes on him. I could only imagine what was running through the mind of this mother. No doubt her concern for his ability to travel alone was grounded in years of experience as his primary caregiver. She'd seen how the littlest thing could become his biggest obstacle, not to mention the countless injuries incurred after attempting a task that was simple and easy for everyone else.



Doctor's visits, stitches, broken bones, and countless other ailments that had become a part of *her* life the day he was born, weighed heavy on her heart as she watched him attempt to board the plane alone. How would he manage without her there to anticipate his every need? Who would ever care for him as she had so painstakingly done all his life? She had to wonder all these things as she watched this special son leave her side.

I can't know all the things this mother felt as her son boarded the plane, but I do know how I felt as I watched the scene unfold. I rarely cry in public and do whatever I can to prevent it from happening, but their good-bye at the gate broke my heart and reduced me to tears. To my knowledge, no one else in the waiting area shed a tear over the incident, not even my husband. Everyone boarded as if it was any other day, but I could hardly speak by the time I buckled my seat belt. The scene between this mother and son played over and over in my head. First, I'd hear the mother's appeal, then the rejection, and finally the son's soft words, "Good-bye Mom" as he began his long descent toward the plane.

The mother's concerns were valid. He was the first to board the plane, followed by the man on oxygen, then the mother with her children and strollers. By the time we stepped foot on the craft, the woman's son was still working hard to maneuver his way into the seat. He made it, but it was painstakingly slow. I passed him with tears in my eyes, still thinking of his mother standing at the desk.

After a little time of prayer, God helped me understand why this scene touched me so deeply. It's because I know what it's like to be the mother of a disabled child. Watching as this fellow parent struggle to release her child from under her protective wing cut me to the quick, because it's a familiar scenario that has played out in my heart time and again. With nineteen years of adversity tucked under my belt, my heart went out to this mother in a very special way that day at the airport gate. I cried and I prayed for both her and her son, and I think it's safe to say few, if any others did. Please don't get me wrong. I don't say this to brag. I simply say it to emphasize one benefit pain and sorrow brings into our lives; the ability to show compassion and offer comfort to others in need.

Unfortunately, I couldn't put my arm around this mother at the airport gate that day. I couldn't even speak to her, but I saw her distress and did what I could do at the time. I simply prayed for them both. First, asking God to grant her peace, then telling Him that I was willing to help the young man if he needed it during the flight. With our seats on opposite ends of the plane, I wasn't sure how this would work out, but I made my offer known to God just the same. It was all I could do.



Isaiah 40:1 (NIV) says, “Comfort, yes comfort my people!” says the Lord. The best comforters are those who have shared in the same experience.” With this in mind, have you ever considered the fact that the difficulties you face in life today could help someone else tomorrow? What good is it if our suffering benefits us, but serves to help no one else? For me, being able to comfort another parent with a disabled child makes my pain worthwhile. It doesn’t remove the grief in my life, but if I can share what I’ve learned and help someone else, I can honestly say it makes it all worthwhile. Nothing is worse than persevering through a trial, learning from it, and then keeping it to myself. It cheapens the value of the lesson.

What trials confront you today? Are you facing divorce, financial ruin, a health crisis, or wayward child? Perhaps life has you by the tail and is pulling you down at record speed. There is a purpose in all that God allows into your life, you know. Have you ever wondered *what* that greater purpose might be? While I never enjoy the trials that come my way, I have learned to cherish what each test teaches me and pass it on to others. I encourage you to do the same. It will make each trial more meaningful and worthwhile.

PRAYER: *Lord, thank you for being a God who allows pain to be used for good. Please take my grief and teach me what I need to learn so I can be a benefit to those around me. Heal my wounds and expand my horizons. I praise you dear Lord, the great Physician.*

Adapted from *Freedom, Healing for Parents of Disabled Children*, by Nancy Douglas.