

When You Feel Like a Burden...

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Several months ago, my husband and I were at the airport, going through security. As I was waiting for them to clear my wheelchair, an elderly gentleman shuffled through the screener, immediately setting off the alarm. The TSA agent asked if he had anything in his pockets.

The older man looked slid his hands into his pants and pulled out an antique engraved pocketknife. "Oh, I forgot I had this. I always put it in my jeans." He handed it to the TSA agent asked, "Will you give me my pocketknife back after I walk through? Or can you hold it here till I get back from our trip? It's really important to me." His voice was pleading.

The agent looked understanding and offered, "You can't take it through here and we can't keep it for you. But at the front of the airport, they will ship articles like this for a fee. You'll have to go back to take care of this and then come through security again."

The man's face fell. He was too frail to do all that on his own. He locked eyes with a younger man who had gone through security before him. The older man said, "Son, I'm so sorry to trouble you, but can we get this mailed back to me. I don't want to lose this knife."

The younger man stepped forward. "Oh, Dad. Really? You are such a screwup! Whenever we do something, it's always like this. We're going to be late for our flight and I can't deal with your idiot knife."

"I'm so sorry, son. I know I've messed up again, but you remember when I got the knife. I just forgot to take it out of my pocket. I don't fly a lot. Please help me."

The son glared at him and said sharply "Dad! You're making a scene here. I don't want to talk about this right now in front of everyone. You always make things so difficult and that's why I didn't want to travel with you. Just go back through the stupid screener and I'll figure it out."

I turned away. I couldn't watch this anymore. I was crying when I saw Joel headed towards me, bringing my wheelchair. As soon as I sat down, he knelt and asked, "Are you okay? What happened?"

I tried to explain because I felt so foolish crying over this incident between strangers. I had a strong response, but I could barely articulate why. Finally, I said, "When you are dependent on other people, you feel like you have to be perfect. So when you make a mistake that results in extra work for someone else, you feel like even more of a burden. What that son said is what I assume people are thinking."

Joel reassured me I was never a burden, but I've thought about that incident numerous times, wondering why I had such an emotional reaction.

I had immediately identified with the father, who felt like a burden, and had made a simple mistake - a mistake he couldn't fix for himself. He was at the mercy of someone else. But I was also convicted about my own impatience, especially at my children when they were younger. I remember being livid at my daughter, when she realized she had forgotten her ballet shoes as I dropped her off at her recital. I had apologized later, but in the heat of the moment, I had lashed out, exhausted and wondering whether I could be back in time.

As I brought these thoughts and emotions to God, I realized that both the caregiver and the person receiving care need God's grace and mercy. Here is what I've been learned:

If you are the caregiver:

Think about how the person who needs help might feel. What is hard about the situation for them? Before you speak in anger, pause and take a breath. (James 1:19-20). *Ask God to give you strength, compassion and grace in the moment*, even if their mistake or negligence is costly and inconvenient for you. (Philippians 4:13; Colossians 3:12, 13). ***Focus on all the ways this person has blessed you and enriched your life.*** (Philippians 4:8).

Remember God made us to live in community, to contribute to the needs of others (Romans 12:13) and bear one another's burdens (Gal 6: 2). When we serve others, it is as though we are serving Christ himself (Matthew 25:40). **The Lord will reward you for what you are doing** (Luke 6:38), **so do not grow weary of doing good** (Galatians 6:9) **and serve in the strength that God supplies** (1 Peter 4:11).

This moment, this inconvenience, has been handpicked by God for you. It is for your good as much as it is for their help (Romans 8:28). God may use it to point out your own sin. If you have been impatient or rude, confess that to God and the other person and ask for forgiveness and grace (1 John 1:9).

If you are receiving care:

Remember and rejoice that being dependent teaches you humility and reliance on God. His grace is sufficient for you and his power is being made perfect in your weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). ***He is using your suffering to teach you perseverance, refine your character and prepare you for a weight of glory that is beyond all comparison*** (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Remember that people usually want to help. They may seem annoyed in the moment but that irritation may not have anything to do with you. *It is a greater blessing to give than receive* (Acts 20:35) *and God will reward them for their generosity* (2 Corinthians 9:11).

Pray for your caregivers (James 5:16). *Be gracious and thankful* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).
Overlook slights and offenses when you can (Proverbs 19:11) **and speak the truth in love always** (Ephesians 4:15).

Whether we are feeling like a burden or we are bearing the burdens of others, ultimately all of us are called to “[cast] the burdens of this world upon the strong shoulders of the one who alone is able to bear them up.”