



The Boy

I was flying across the country to see my newly, early born nephew when I noticed a seven year old boy sitting across from me. Perhaps it was because I was freshly tuned into young life that I noticed with interest his moodiness, his ceaseless questions and his insistence. When the flight attendants passed out headsets, he popped his scrappy looking mop of hair a bit higher—a lone, small sentinel among aisles of grownups. His mother had walked her rhinestone, kitten-heeled feet up to the bathroom leaving him alone to fend for himself in his search for a headset.

The boy raised his hand, waving it to gain attention. No one noticed. He popped it up and down, up down, up down. He wasn't silent, either. I counted three times that he called out variations on the theme, "Excuse me, I would like a headset."

The flight attendant

"I'd like a headset, please." No response.

who spoke with a faint British accent failed to see him. She didn't notice the small waving hand, the

requests, and the straw-colored tousled head. Even when the boy timed another pop-up on the seat, pushing himself up with scrawny arms on the armrests, craning his neck to make eye-contact, she walked right by his row. The boy remained unseen. It wasn't out of ill-will; it was just that he was small and his voice not so loud. How like many women, I thought, who often must rely on striking looks or beautiful clothes to gain the attention a man can command simply by his body size or deeper voice.

The boy made one last attempt, raising his voice which wasn't all that loud, "I'd like a headset, please." No response.

The boy leaned forward in his seat, poking his older brother through the seats, "Get me a headset." His brother didn't crack an eyelid. The kid slumped down.

Ignored, Overlooked, Dismissed

When his mother returned I whispered to that her son would love a headset. She was able to get him one in no time.



After the movie, *Nacho Libre*, in which I laughed much louder than the boy or anyone else watching, I heard the boy asking his mother for crackers. She must have forgotten because five minutes later when flight attendant #2 brought me water, he piped up again. This attendant was a petite Chinese woman whose eyes sparkled with shimmery eye shadow up to her brows. The mother encouraged her son to ask for himself. He said clearly again, “I would like some crackers.”

In coolly annoyed, ultra-patronizing tones Shimmer Eyes said, “WE will be serving refreshments in a LITTLE while!” It was a dismissal, and I could see her re-direct and mis-direct her annoyance into his young soul at being asked. The small shoulders slumped again as he dropped his eyes to his tray table which held a boring looking homework sheet.

But he accepted it. He wasn’t going to get crackers or water and he took it like a little man.

Patronized, belittled, underestimated

Don’t I feel like him sometimes?!



That boy made me think of Brennan Manning’s *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, where he explains some of the childlike humilities. Children are open-minded. They want to learn from life. They’re not self-conscious or worried about what you think of their outfits. Children in Jesus’ time did not count. They were not noticed. They often felt ashamed and inferior. And because of their lowliness, Jesus valued them.

Jesus said we must allow ourselves to be treated like that little boy—overlooked, ignored, dismissed, underestimated. He put it like this,

She was Jesus to that boy.

“Unless you become like this little boy—yeah, the one over there being ignored on the flight—unless you become like him, you will never enter my kingdom. See, he’s humble. He’s not demanding his ‘rights.’ He’s not saying, “Look, don’t you know WHO I am?” Nope, he’s accepting it. You accept it, too, knowing that I will care for you much better than a flight attendant with shiny make-up.”

When we were on our 3rd round of refreshments, Shimmer Eyes had a helper with her soda trolley. I hadn’t noticed this flight attendant before. She also was Asian, but plainer, not just because she wore no make-up and had sensibly pulled her hair back into a long ebony braid, but because her face was broad and



flat, speckled with large blotchy freckles and blemishes that she did not try to cover up. I was drawn into watching her because her soul shone had sparkled much brighter than any glossy, shimmery, cover-all make-up could.

Jesus will whip out another package of crackers...

The boy requested crackers again. This time he was heard.

She turned her warm eyes on him, listening patiently to everything he said. She got him an extra package of crackers and a soda. She even asked him again, "Is there anything else I can get you?" He grinned and shook his head happily, ripping open his crackers.

She was Jesus to that boy.

Jesus said we are his children. He'll take care of us—like that last flight attendant—listening to our requests, even when our mothers are gone and the people in our lives (teachers, coaches, friends) belittle and hurt and overlook us. If we need it, He'll whip out another package of crackers because He delights in us, even when the world doesn't listen and doesn't care.



At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 18:1-4).

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