

Suffer the Little Children

by Thom Gardner

Jesus... said unto them, "Suffer the little children to come unto me..." (Mark 10:14 KJV)

A little boy, perhaps in second or third grade, stands in the middle of his class that is practicing for an upcoming Christmas program. All of the students are wound up from coming off the playground and excited thinking about the upcoming program when all of their parents and families will be there to hear them sing. With everyone gathered and giggling on the choral risers, the music teacher now calls everyone to attention and the rehearsal begins. The piano sounds the introduction to the first song and the little boy opens his mouth to sing along with his classmates. He doesn't have much of a voice, but he belts out monotone offering with the same vigor that he used on the playground only a short time earlier. Now, as he opens his mouth to sing the look on his teacher's face turns from a smile to a grimace. Looking embarrassed, she stops the rehearsal and fixes her gaze on the little boy telling him in front of the whole class to please stop singing. He was the only one she stopped.

Take a moment and see this picture with the eyes of your heart. Imagine what this boy felt as his teacher threw a wet blanket over him muffling his song. Can you see the little boy who opened his mouth and his heart only to have it closed by one cutting and insensitive remark by his teacher? You can almost see his head falling into his chest. This exuberant cherub who only moments earlier was filled with joy now has eyes filling with tears while all other eyes now fixed uncomfortably on him. He was shamed and embarrassed in front of his peers and would be reluctant to open his mouth for the rest of his life to sing a song or offer an opinion for fear of being quenched once again. I wonder what kind of jobs he will consider when he grows up or

what kind of children he will raise in his house. In fact, this story was based on an actual event detailed in a healing session in our ministry center. This single "seed event" had great impact for this little boy as he grew into a man who as an adult suffered from panic attacks terrified of any change in his life.

This kind of scene is played out in the everyday lives of most folks. Thousands of little, seemingly innocuous events roll past our hearts planting seeds that affect the rest of our days. As a dad, I get a little paranoid about what kinds of seeds I must have planted in my own children. Our words and actions to our children are seeds and all of us have seen and sown both good and bad seed. Of course we need not be healed of the good seeds like positive reinforcement and parental grace. But all of us have been fertile seedbeds receiving mutated and seeds that have produced distorted and defective fruit which in turn contain more seed which will be sown in our own future generations. We are surrounded by such children as this little boy. Oh they may not look like children to us as they walk about disguised as parents and teachers and lawyers and doctors and the rest. Inside, where they really live, they are often little children with heads hung low afraid to look us in the eye, wondering what we think of them. They wonder whether we see them hiding in grown-up bodies while they are like little children playing dress up swimming in mommy and Daddy's clothing.

Before we get too indignant and upset about the teacher in this event we have to remember that her response was probably the fruit of seed in her life as well. She was living out of whatever was filling her heart. Jesus said, "*Whatever is in your heart determines what you say.*" (Luke 6:45NLT) Shameful seeds were planted in this teacher's heart

somewhere along the line. She was merely producing the fruit of those seeds. This wounded child had grown physically into an adult but inside there was a child afraid that her concert would go awry if this careless little crooner was allowed to sing. She couldn't risk the disapproval of parents and peers present there. It makes me wonder where that seed of shame was planted in her life. The possibilities are endless but to be sure her wounding of this child was the fruit of the seed planted in her life.

Though there are many sources of programming during our early years, home and family are the primary seedbed which determines what kind of fruit we will produce the rest of our lives. They are like a mirror affecting how we see ourselves; a skylight affecting how we see God; a window affecting how we see other people; and a door affecting how we see the rest of the world.¹

No, we aren't trying to excuse everyone's sin and hurtful behavior, but we need to look beyond the obvious and allow our hearts to be filled with understanding and compassion to see the other wounded children around us.

When this little boy was stifled a lie was planted in his heart like a seed. It was a lie that said something like, "You're no good", or "You're an embarrassment", or any number of other variations. I have used this true account in some of our equipping events and have been amazed at how many times it has elicited tears from the class as they recall similar events in their own lives. I have seen a few hang their heads just like the little boy as they remembered a bad oral reading experience in first grade or a parent or older sibling who ridiculed them.

In heart-healing sessions I've seen a wounded and sad little girl of twelve who was turned away from the church door because of the side of the tracks she lived on who was now dressed as a seventy-year-old grandmother trying to find her place in God. I've seen a young man of fifteen who could never do anything well enough for his father and was now wearing an expensive suit living in terror of making mistakes while he ran a major corporation. There are many children with many disguises but they are children all.

I recall ministering to a young man who in his adult life struggled to find personal approval and tended to be a loner keeping himself from deep and accountable relationships. When we prayed together we found an 11 year old boy inside of him who was given a trumpet solo to play and cut a few notes. When the concert was over the young trumpeter was found by his father back stage. The little boy expected his dad would be thrilled that he had a solo. Instead, his father, who was a public figure said, "Well boy, you blew it." Needless to say he was crushed and a seed was planted that day that brought a harvest of shame in his future. His dad's cruel and self-focused remarks planted a lie in his son's heart that drove him to perform in isolation never feeling safe in a father's love.

What are we to do with all of the wounded children around us? We might mention that all of the children we have mentioned were believers and serve the Lord the best way they could. Their spiritual condition was not the issue. The issue was the seed lies that were planted and carried around that effected their lives and relationship on every level with God and man alike. We might add that Each one encountered the presence of the Living God and found truth, order and peace in their lives

Wounded children surround us. We cover them up and ignore them but they are there. Some of them are us. The Lord is not willing to leave those children alone in their pain but longs to bring us into His presence to heal us. Beloved, our compassionate Father saw us in those evil seeding events. He was not content to stand by allow them to happen but began to lead us gently toward His healing heart. On the day of our wounding He was leading us to the day of healing in His presence. Beloved, this is the day!

The little boy in the singing class was invited back to that place of trauma and shame, a scene now filled with the healing presence of God. The place of pain had now become holy ground where the Lord took up the baton and conducted the little boy who now sang joyfully into the smiling face of the King of kings. Beloved, such an invitation awaits all the children we are. God is a compassionate and gracious God who speaks to those little children in us inviting us to healing in His embrace.

We are surrounded by suffering children—children who need to be brought Jesus. He Himself is our peace—He is the One who longs to be gracious to us and to lavish His presence and compassion upon us to bring us to truth and order and peace. He has seen us and now extends His open arms to invite us to healing saying, *"I have seen... I will heal... I will lead...and comfort... Creating the praise of the lips. Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near," Says the LORD, "and I will heal him."* (From Isaiah 57:18-19)

i David Seamands, Healing Grace, Light and Life Communication, Indianapolis, Indiana, 46253, Reprinted 2002, pages 47-52