

The Old Man and the Sparrow

by Jen Nail

Show compassion and kindness to all.

—Jen Nail



An old man sat on a park bench feeding the hungry sparrows. He watched the birds intently, intrigued by their selfish manner. Every morsel he set before them was immediately snatched up with no concern for those who had received none. For a moment his eye caught a smaller, injured sparrow watching and waiting as if his time for food would never come. He was not aggressive like the others, because his leg was injured. It was obvious if any more strain was placed on it, the bird would be unable to move. The man saw this and put the rest of the morsels in his pocket. After a few moments, the rest of the sparrows gave up. As the strained sparrow began to hop around searching for the leftovers, the man pulled out the rest of the bread and shared it with the hungry one. He then picked up the bird and placed him in his coat pocket. The man took him home, tenderly wrapped tape around the frail bird's leg and nurtured him for a few days. Eventually, the leg was stronger, and the sparrow flew free.

The old man thought about what had happened. He realized he was like the little sparrow in this competitive world. You see, the man was mentally disabled. For years he had been pushed aside by bigger, stronger and more aggressive people. He had tried his hardest to “stay in the game,” but because of these handicaps, he was unable to keep up. He, too, waited around for those leftovers that he began to think were all he deserved. The man wished someone would take him under his coat and mend his hurting, help him to feel better and give him another chance to make it in the world. Unlike the bird's leg, he knew his disability could not be cured in a week. But the man felt that with help from a compassionate person, his outlook on life could be repaired.

I wonder, *Why have we as a human race pushed aside those we consider less fortunate?* I ask, *Why have we pushed them aside, and in so doing, missed the greatest learning opportunity?* I ask now, *Why haven't we had the courage to live by this one simple idea: show compassion and kindness to all?*

From the halls of high school to the lines at the grocery store, rude and insensitive comments are tossed around at many others' expense. We act as though our words aren't piercing every inch of the target's body like a sharp sword. We act as though they can't hear our tactless laughter. Where and why did this reasoning begin? Whether or not an answer can be found, this way of thinking still remains, and action must be taken against it.

Kindness and compassion are not difficult concepts to understand or put into action. With just a little effort, lives can be changed forever. Rather than walking past the disabled girl who has just fallen and dropped her books, pick them up and help her back to her feet. If you are feeling especially kind, say a few encouraging words. Convince her that, "It's not that big a deal; no one saw anyway!" Show the kid who sits in back of class that his ideas are important, too. Engage in a conversation with a person who most people only discreetly laugh at.

Rather than giving in to rudeness and being insensitive, do what is right even if some think it's odd. Be like the old man who watched out for the sparrow on the edge. Bring that hurting person close and give them a new start. Try to make that one moment you are around more positive, and by that, you will affect their whole day, possibly even longer. Be like the old man and show compassion and kindness to all.