

A WALK IN THE PARK by Laura Shaw

"*This is MY swing!*" yelled the boy, pushing the little girl into the gravel. As she began to cry over her throbbing skinned knee, the boy took his seat on the swing, pumping higher and higher into the air. "*Wheeeee! I'm the king of the woooooorrrrrrrrrrrlllllllllllllD!!!*" he declared.

The boy's mom sat oblivious on the bench nearby chattering away on her cell phone. The girls' daddy came quickly to scoop her up, holding her close to his chest. In between hysteric whimpers, she poured out her pain to him: "*He (gasp) pushed (sniff) me (snort) Daddy (full out bawl).*" He tenderly replied, "*I know, sweetheart, I saw the whole thing. It's ok now, you're safe.*"

All of a sudden, the dad did something that surprised all those watching. He lifted his daughter up onto his shoulders. At first, she whined, "*No, daddy, I'm scared.*" He assured her that she was secure, so she tried to sit up straight, leaning forward and holding on to his chin at first. The man turned into a boy that moment, changing from a walk in the park to a giddy-up, jig-jagged gallop around the park with her, to which the little one couldn't help but giggle. As he grasped her legs firmly around his neck, she began to sit up completely straight, shoulders back and chest out. "*I'm the luckiest girl in the WoooooooorrrrrrrrrlllllllllllD,*" she shrieked with delight, throwing her arms completely outstretched in the air. She was safe and free at last.

This is the picture of the Christian life, friends. Sometimes, we're feeling blessed along the way, kind of like a trip to the park—from tire swing, to slide, to see saw, to sand. And it's a lot of fun! But then an enemy comes along (sometimes it's even a friend) and pushes us down, causing us not only a skinned knee, but a wounded heart in the process. But our Father is so loving and so compassionate that He scoops us up and lifts us high above the pain to experience His safety and the pleasure that stems from it.

Even Job understood this in the middle of his horrific pain (5:11): "*The lowly He sets on high, and those who mourn are lifted to safety.*" What a beautiful reminder for the times when we are hurt or persecuted, even if we're not sure why we're experiencing it.

Did you notice that we don't know how the story above got its start? Was the little girl racing for the swing excitedly after finding it in her view? Perhaps she was just standing in the way of the swing. **OR**, did she push the boy first as she tried to get the swing for herself? We have no idea if she was innocent or just as selfish as the boy, do we? This matters to us, because in our minds, if it were her fault, then surely the same response from her dad would not be warranted. That's the thing about God....His ways are SO not our ways, are they?

"The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will He harbor His anger forever; He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him; for He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust."

Psalm 103:8-14

God wants us to see that from His perspective is a whole other view of our circumstances. He remembers how we were formed by His hands....He knows we are not perfect as He is--that we are going to mess up in our human dustiness. Because of this flawless memory and this abounding love, His comfort and security are available to us no matter what

we've done. It is the forgiveness and grace that comes from the trust we placed in Jesus Christ to make the sacrifice for our sins, as well as the sins of others. Praise the Lord!

Which person in the park are you right now? The pusher? The pushed down? The one on the cell phone? The one scooping up the hurting? The specatator? The one enjoying the slide on the other side? From that grid, let's take a moment to picture the characteristics of God from the verses above and apply them to our hearts. We could be any of them from one day to the other, and God has something in it for us no matter – so let's allow Him to minister to us and others through our own walk in the park today. Amen.