



## A FAMILY-FRIENDLY CULTURE? COULD BE ...

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By Marilyn Sharpe

On an airplane, no one likes to hear a little one scream. This time, it was my beloved grandson. At 21 months, Hayden is a joyful, kind, funny, exuberant little boy, excited to go to his great-grandfather's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration. Sitting still is not the norm at this busy age, but Hayden is blessed with attentive, thoughtful parents who planned for novelty, distraction, soothing and snacks. All went well ... except for takeoff and landing. Hayden was in pain, and pacifier, water or juice wasn't enough to normalize the painful pressure in his ears. He screamed. Nothing comforted him until the air pressure returned to normal.

As we waited to exit the plane, the young woman behind Hayden complained loudly on her cell phone about a crying baby on the flight. "They shouldn't be allowed to fly, unless they give him Benedryl!" On and on and on she railed about how awful the flight had been. My son turned and apologized, trying to explain, but she would have none of it. Hayden's parents were humiliated and devastated. What a miserable way to arrive for a once in a lifetime, four generational family celebration.

Moments later, I was waiting to rent a car behind three young men, who began to talk about the incident. Anxious to interrupt another tirade, I introduced myself as the child's grandmother, apologizing for his crying. They surprised me, saying he was a darling little boy and they had sympathized with his suffering. They pulled the young woman aside after we left the plane, telling her that she was out of line, that she appeared to be missing an empathy gene. What a gift to meet compassionate people who speak out for children.

The weekend was packed with lots of adults, none of whom currently live with young children. All were patient, loving, and kind to Hayden. It was a balm for his family. He and his 90 year old great-grandfather, Papa Carl, were in love. The elderly, the middle-aged, the young adults, the teens were welcoming and engaged and delighted. It was a snapshot of what a culture that is truly family-friendly might look like.

Remember, even the disciples thought Jesus had come to be with adults. Jesus was so clear, so welcoming, so loving, when He said

*"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.*

*Mark 10:14-16*

So, could we create a family-friendly culture in which children are welcomed in Jesus' name? Could be!

Postscript: The three young men from the first flight were on the return flight. They came over to greet Hayden and his parents at the gate and play with Hayden. This flight, Hayden's ears and his parents' hearts were much, much better.

### FAMILY ACTIVITIES:

1. When faced with a baby or young child who is crying, try to distract or amuse the child.
2. Speak with great kindness and understanding to a parent whose child is melting down.
3. Allow a parent of a young child to move in ahead of you in the check out line.
4. Read Mark 10:14-16 as a family devotion. Ask your children what they think Jesus would do today to welcome children.
5. Catch parents being patient, loving, and comforting to a disconsolate child. Affirm the parents.