

## AN UNEXPECTED FRIENDSHIP

by Maria Houston



As I look up from the table, a woman I have never seen before catches my eye. Every Thursday my women's Bible study group gathers. Usually, the same women come week after week. As my friend introduces the newcomer, my eyes look at her face, her beautiful smile, her bright red hair. She seems friendly. Humorous. Engaging. Smart. Spunky. My kind of woman. We welcome her to our group, then tell her to get a snack and that we will be starting shortly.

I continue talking to my friends, periodically glancing up at the ladies coming in the door. Each time my eye is drawn to this new woman. I see her grab a plate with her left hand, her right hand bent and curved. I see her manipulate her belongings so her left hand is doing most of the work, with her right hand supporting. At one point her right hand stiffens, then relaxes.

I begin to ignore the women talking and focus on this woman. Her movement patterns are known all too well to me. Watching her move is comforting. She brings her plate over to us and joins the group. I study her. The way she talks, moves, interacts. My gaze must be too obvious, for she interrupts my thoughts and asks me to tell her what I am thinking. While she expects the familiar uncomfortable comment about her body, I instead impulsively shout, "You look like my daughter." An awkward pause fills the air. We both nervously giggle, ending the silence. Tears fill my eyes. I have waited eight years to meet this woman.

We both begin talking quickly. There is too much to say. Diagnoses are shared and confirmed to be the same: right-sided hemiplegia cerebral palsy due to a stroke in utero. I look into her face and feel the biggest hug the Father has ever given me.

In the past eight years I have met numerous children with my daughter's condition, but I have failed to meet an adult. I have so many questions to ask her! How her body feels. How she does things. How her parents raised her.

While I realize every stroke is different, every child is different, and every outcome is different, I have never been able to express my questions and concerns to a person with this condition. Medical doctors and therapists do not know exactly what it is like. I desperately want to speak to her. She is someone who not only lives the condition but is thriving in it. She has obtained everything I hope my daughter will experience if she desires: college, marriage, children, career, and more. I know if I was this comforted by her, then there was someone else who had to meet her.

My new friend has come into our lives at the perfect time. I am beginning to realize that I am not always the best person for my child to connect with. When my daughter was little, I knew everything

about her and I knew how to solve every problem in her life. I was her everything. But as she grows I am learning that I have to let go. I am not the only person my daughter needs to be successful. Quite honestly, there are others who are able to speak to a part of her soul that I am not able to. How good is it of the Father to provide a person who can love her in ways I can't?

A few weeks later we met with our new friend together. My daughter had been excited all week to meet someone just like her. When she comes in the door of the diner, my daughter's eyes meet hers. She quickly scans her body with her eyes. Looks at her arm. She studies her, watching every movement, comparing and contrasting how their bodies are the same yet different.

At the table the two of them begin to talk. An aspect of my child's heart is unleashed. She feels comfortable to speak like she never has with us. There are things in her heart we did not know about. She asks her questions about how she navigates this two-handed world. They share stories of embarrassment, frustration, limitations, mean girls, heartaches. They remind each other of the beautiful bodies God gave them, how they can serve God, and how there are plenty of people who love them for who they are.

While they continue to talk, my mind and heart are consumed with experiencing God's love. Over the years, I have been tempted to doubt God's goodness in allowing such a "tragedy," as the world would call it, to occur. But in this moment, watching two hearts connect, all I can do is marvel at how good God was to bring this woman into our lives and how much He loves my daughter.