

KINDNESS

Showing others they are valuable by how you treat them

The Least of These

Matthew 25:35-40

MEMORY VERSE | Luke 6:31

Mariana zipped up her coat and wrapped her scarf three times around her neck as she peered outside at the icy sidewalk.

"I can't believe they didn't cancel school!" she grumbled. "At least I've got a reason to wear my new boots." Mariana carefully pulled them on: deep purple with shiny silver buckles.

"Don't forget—you'll need to take the bus this afternoon," her mother said, searching for car keys.

Mariana looked up quickly, frowning. "The bus always smells like feet," she groaned. "Why can't you pick me up?"

"I'll be at the shelter," her mom reminded her. "They need extra volunteers with the cold and so many people coming in."

"Great," muttered Mariana. "Help everyone else but me."

Her mom just raised an eyebrow and pointed to the small, framed poster near the door. It had been there as long as Mariana could remember.

"Yeah, okay, I know what it says," she admitted.

"Read it anyhow," her mom prompted.

Mariana stepped closer to scan the words one more time, a Bible passage from Matthew. *'I was hungry. And you gave me something to eat,'* she read. *'I was thirsty. And you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger. And you invited me in. I needed*

clothes. And you gave them to me. . . . Anything you did for one of the least important of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

She glanced back up at her mother, who was waiting. "I get it," Mariana pointed out. "It's Jesus talking. Helping people at the shelter is like helping Him."

Mariana knew the work her mother did to help homeless families was important. But sometimes it just seemed to get in the way. Sighing, she shoved open the door and stepped into the icy wind.

At school, Mariana shrugged off her coat. Her friend Felicity nudged her and pointed. "Who's that?" she asked.

The seats were still empty, except for a tall, dark-skinned girl with close-cropped curly hair. She clutched her coat around her; it hung to her knees, but her feet were nearly bare in sandals.

Felicity nudged Mariana and pointed. "Who's that?" she asked.

"Who wears sandals in the snow?" wondered Mariana.

"Pretty sure that's a guy's coat," added Felicity.

No one was talking with the girl. Mariana wondered if she should go over, but as she took a step, the bell rang. Everyone dashed for their seats. Mr. Heisman, their teacher, gestured to the new girl as he sorted through test papers.

"This is Adama," he told them. "She comes from the Congo in central Africa."

The girl managed a tiny smile, but Mariana could tell all the curious stares made her nervous. "I want you to make her feel welcome," Mr. Heisman instructed. "Now let's take a look at your math tests . . ."

Adama didn't say a word all morning. At lunchtime, she sat by herself, pulling a single

container from a plastic grocery bag. Mariana watched from the table where she sat with Felicity and her other friends.

"I wonder what she's eating . . ." Mariana began.

Felicity wrinkled her nose. "Whatever it is, I can smell it over here!"

Mariana giggled and made a face, but she could almost hear a tiny voice in her head prompting—

"How would you feel sitting all alone in a new place?"

"I bet it's what everyone eats where she's from," Mariana suggested.

Mariana had almost made up her mind to take her tray and sit by Adama when once again, the bell rang, this time to signal the end of lunch. With a mix of guilt and relief, she jumped up and headed with the rest of the class to the gym.

The PE teacher, Ms. Marks, shooed everyone toward the locker rooms. "Four minutes!" she barked.

"I want you all dressed out for volleyball." Then she turned to Adama, standing uncertain on the sideline. "Adama, right? . . . If you didn't bring gym clothes, just take the bench, okay?"

Minutes later, Ms. Marks herded everyone onto the court and lined them up. "Let's see you serve and return," she said and waved toward Mariana and Felicity. "Girls, you're up."

As Mariana took her place, she noted Adama on the bench, looking a bit lost. She was distracted enough to miss Felicity's serve, glancing up just in time to see the ball hurtling her way. Mariana jumped as the ball skirted by her, but she rolled her ankle as she landed.

"Ouch!" she exclaimed, wincing.

Ms. Marks hurried over and quickly checked her ankle. "You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," Mariana said. "It's just sore."

"Sit out for a minute. See how it feels," instructed Ms. Marks.

Mariana limped toward the bench as the rest of the class continued. She sat down a few feet from Adama and was surprised when the new girl spoke.

"Your ankle. It is hurt?" asked Adama.

"Um, not bad. It'll be okay," Mariana said. Then after a moment she added, "I'm Mariana."

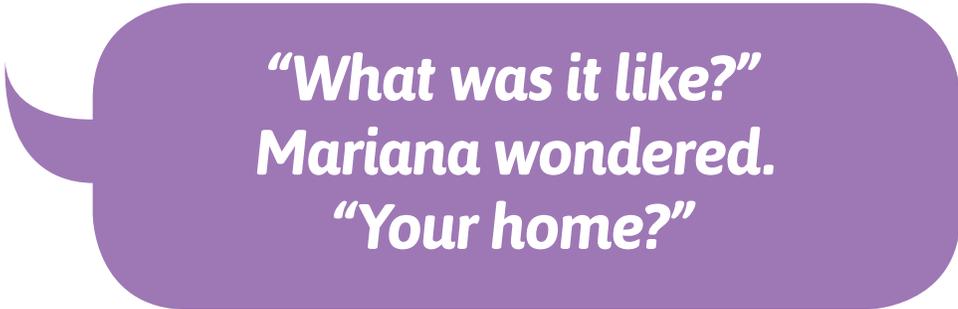
"I heard the other girls say it," Adama told her. "That is a pretty name."

"So is yours," said Mariana. "Adama. It's different."

The new girl cracked a small smile. "Not where I'm from," she said.

"What was it like?" Mariana wondered. "Your home?"

"Very beautiful," said Adama. "But . . . we had to leave when I was very young. My family, we were in a camp until we came here. Last week."



**"What was it like?"
Mariana wondered.
"Your home?"**

"Oh," said Mariana. She tried to imagine what it would be like to have no real home. To live all the time in a tent or one room with your whole family.

She glanced down at Adama's sandals and couldn't help asking, "Is that why . . . ? Your shoes . . ."

Adama looked away. "The agency did not have shoes in my size."

Mariana's eyes shifted to her own well-worn gym sneakers. She thought of her spiffy new boots, and her mind jumped to the words she'd read that morning:

'Anything you did for one of the least important of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Mariana took a deep breath. "I've got a pair of boots in my locker you could have. Brand-new. I bet we're the same size."

"Oh, no!" protested Adama. "I couldn't take—"

"Please do! They're perfect for the snow," said Mariana.

"Well, I . . . thank you," Adama said at last. Mariana grinned, and Adama slowly smiled back.

When the girls changed after class, Felicity raised her eyebrows as she took a look at Mariana. "Sneakers with a skirt?" she asked. "That's kinda weird. What happened to your boots?"

"I have an old pair at home," Mariana said quickly. "Hey, you should talk to Adama. She's really cool."

Mariana knew she wouldn't be able to get new boots again this year. But it was totally worth it to know Adama wasn't getting cold feet as she tried to adjust to a new home.



Let's
Talk!

What do you think it means to be "overlooked"?

Take a moment and discuss it with each other. Then, share with each other some of the people you know or see who might be overlooked. They might be at your school, your church, in your neighborhood, someone you pass on the street, or see at the grocery store. The truth is, these overlooked people are every bit as valuable as the people you know who seem to have it all and get lots of attention. When you're kind to someone who's often overlooked, you show them just how truly valuable they are—both to God and to others. Together, brainstorm at least one thing you can do this week to be kind to someone who's overlooked. Together, ask God to help you follow through and give you eyes to see people who are hurting or ignored by others.