

"She Was in Need" – Regardless of This Game

The long-running TV reality show Survivor recently aired what is considered the most powerful episode in its 48-season history. During an "immunity challenge," 23-year-old Eva Erickson was trying to navigate a ball through a table maze. It required dexterity and patience and proved to be challenging for her. Time after time, the ball dropped off the side, and she had to start the maze again. Eva was the last contestant from her tribe to attempt it. If the opposing player finished before her, Eva's tribe would be destined for "tribal council," where they would have to vote out one of their members. Her tribe tried to encourage her as her frustration escalated, and Eva put more and more pressure on herself. She cried out loudly, "Why can't I do this?" She was drowning in overstimulation. After many attempts, Eva completed the table maze and received a hero moment from her tribe. That is when she totally broke down and began an uncontrollable meltdown.



Wisely, the show's producer realized the enormity of the moment. Jeff Probst gave the OK for a former teammate of Eva's to cross tribal lines and calm her down. Eva Erickson and Joe Hunter were now on opposing tribes but had initially been on the same tribe. She had previously confided in him about what she would need during a meltdown. None of the other players knew that Eva had been diagnosed with autism, and when she gets overstimulated, she becomes ungrounded and loses control of herself. It took several minutes of comforting her as Joe carefully brought her "back down out of it." "Eva, you are in a safe place," Joe assured her.



As he always does after any drama in the game, Jeff Probst asked, "What just happened here?" Without shame, Eva opened up about her autism diagnosis. At an early age, doctors told her parents that "Eva wouldn't amount to anything, would never hold a job, and would never be able to live independently. The best she could hope for was to marry another person with autism." Eva said her parents never gave up on her and put her through so many treatments to get all the support she needed. "And I was able to enter school and be mainstreamed. I never viewed autism as a roadblock to success. It's not something to work around; it is just who I am. Everyone who has autism should not be ashamed to ask for help and to receive it," she said.

Jeff Probst, the show's producer and host, questioned Joe about "tipping his hand about an alliance with Eva." Survivor alliances are usually kept hidden from others so that they are not used against a player in the game. Joe's answer to Jeff was, "I want my kids watching to know I'm going to be the man I want them to be, the people who I want them to be, regardless of this game. And that's what you do, and that's who I am. So, if it exposes, it exposes, but she was in need. And I would want someone to treat my daughter that way if they were playing this game." Jeff Probst even choked up when he talked about being a parent and wanting to see people treat his kids like he saw Joe treat Eva in that moment.

So, we ask ourselves, "What just happened here?" Prior to this episode, Eva was a strong competitor. Back home, she was the only female on a collegiate ice hockey team and a PhD graduate student. Eva could hold her own in competition. Survivor is a cut-throat game that tests your limits as you navigate 39 days with little food and shelter, competing to be the "sole survivor" and a one-million-dollar prize winner. The challenge in Survivor is keeping friendships alive when the game is designed to tear friendships apart. At the beginning of the game, Eva knew that she needed an anchor in case she had an episode. Joe was that anchor, but with the reshuffling of tribes, he wasn't in a position to "have her back." Yet, Joe had promised to "be there for her, even if it tanked his game." That is as genuine as it gets. What Joe did was not strategy but compassion. Compassion is a caring response to the needs of others and a desire to alleviate their distress. Joe's act of kindness and compassion transcended the game. When we have an opportunity to help someone in need, let us put aside our "agenda" and our goals and let our motives be purely about helping a person in their time of need.

The Bible Says: *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Colossians 3:12). (see also Isaiah 54:10).*

Question: What kind of man or woman would God want you to be?



Closing Prayer: Dear Lord. Guide us never to put our goals for achievement or advancement ahead of other people's needs. Instill in us the compassion to step up in other people's time of need, regardless of the personal sacrifice. Amen.

