

A Prayer to See Behind the Battle

Editor's Note: Bo Stern's husband is fighting a rare disease called ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease.

A couple of weeks ago, I was grabbing some groceries at Safeway when I noticed a man in a wheelchair who was in very bad shape. His pale face shook from tremors and from working to keep his head steady. At first I thought maybe it was ALS, but his healthy weight made me think otherwise.

Steve had just gotten his wheelchair, and I noticed this man's chair was red instead of blue, and I wondered what brand he had chosen and why, and just as I looked up, I caught the eye of the woman behind him. I don't know if she was his wife or not, but it was clear from her angry expression that I had been looking too long. She rolled her eyes at me in disdain, clearly sick of feeling gawked at by countless passersby and protective of the man she loved.

My stomach sank. I wanted to talk to her—to apologize and explain that I wasn't staring out of curiosity or even sympathy, but empathy. I've been in her shoes.

In fact, her shoes are my regular footwear. I know how it feels to want to scream that the man you love is so much more than his condition or his wheelchair. And I hate that I made her feel like an oddity instead of what she was: a **fellow-soldier**, living on the **battlefield of sickness and disability** and trying to function in a world that doesn't always understand.

Later, I thought about how easy it is to look at someone and imagine we know their motives. I have done it a million times. I've settled for a surface-level understanding, which is often more dangerous than no understanding at all.

I need to remember that behind every face is a backstory, a

history, **a struggle**. And those stories make some more beautiful and some more broken (and maybe, for some, a little of each). And so I wrote this prayer, and I'm committing to pray it often so I can learn to see people more clearly:

Father of all who are breaking beneath the weight of war,
straighten and strengthen my vision
to see past skin and shell,
beneath bravado and bluster,
and into the long-buried story.

Focus my heartsight on what eyes can't see
to love without reason,
hope without limits,
and truly believe
that everything possible with You
is dwelling in me.

Christ,
the Hope of Glory,
let me see.

Bo Stern is a blogger and author of the newly-released *Beautiful Battliefields* (NavPress). She knows the most beautiful things can come out of the hardest times. Her *Goliath* came in the form of her husband's terminal illness, a battle they are still fighting with the help of their four children, a veritable army of friends and our extraordinary God. Bo is a teaching pastor at Westside Church in Bend, Ore.