

Daring to Feel Again

Still stuck in Isaiah 58, and the very first verse is shouting my name today in a not-entirely-pleasant way.

“Cry out loudly, don’t hold back! Raise your voice like a trumpet” (v. 1, HCSB).

Isaiah goes on to implore us to weep and wail because those with whom we share a neighborhood or a city or a country or a spinning globe are far from flourishing.

If I’m honest, I have some trouble here. My emotional tank is pretty much empty. Or maybe not empty. Maybe just used up on things closer to home. I’m spending a lot of energy dealing with the stuff inside the walls of the Family Stern. It’s hard to move my heart outside to other places and feel for them as well. I stay away from sad movies. I’m careful with the news I read. I know it’s cowardly, but it feels like survival. Fear and self-absorption, dressed up like wisdom.

The thing is, it hasn’t always been like this. I used to care so much about orphans brutalized in other countries and a generation of American teenagers being beaten up by our culture. They were wedged in my heart in a way that kept me up at night, dreaming of solutions and strategies for change. Now I push aside the heavy thoughts, certain I can’t afford to feel sad about anything else and that I only have enough to take care of my own people. Only enough bread for my own house.

Through this fast, however, God has been whispering to me something dark and stormy and dangerous, and it’s this: It’s OK to feel again. In fact, He’s telling me it’s more than OK—it’s right and wonderful, and though it seems like it will break me, it will not. It will actually strengthen and expand my heart in ways that let me breathe deeply again.

This singular focus I've had on the sorrow in my own world is like daily submitting to water torture—the constant dripping of one drop in one spot leads to miry, myopic living. Today I can feel Him gently lifting my head to look around at our beautiful, broken world and saying, “See it. Feel it. Serve it.”

Without the willingness and supernatural ability to feel the pain of those sick with hunger and poverty and loneliness, we will never have the passion to become the healing we are called to become: Christ in us, the hope of glory. That counts for something. That ought to matter.

Jesus, make it matter more to me than ever. I can't do everything, but I can do something, and I want to hear my something today. I want to be re-called and reclaimed for this grand adventure of bringing hope to a hurting world.

Part of a prayer I love by Walter Brueggemann makes a bold ask, and I'm shouting it up to the heavens for myself and my church:

We are listeners, but we do not listen well.

So we bid you, by the time the sun goes down today
or by the time the sun comes up tomorrow,
by night or by day,
that You will speak in ways that we can hear
out beyond ourselves.

It is your speech to us that carries us where we have never been,

and it is your speech to us that is our only hope.

So give us ears. Amen.

Bo Stern is a blogger and author of the newly released *Beautiful Battliefields*. 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

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