

Lysa TerKeurst Reveals the Power of Compassion

Tears from loss have such potential to draw us together.

I saw this a few years ago when I participated in some peace talks in Israel with women between whom others said peace wasn't possible.

They were divided in their religious beliefs, their national narratives and their politics.

But these women all knew loss and deep sorrow. They knew being wounded in the most painful ways. Their loved ones had been killed, some fighting for their beliefs and others caught in the crossfire.

They'd lost sons, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, daughters and husbands.

I stared into the dark eyes lined with sorrow of the woman seated beside me. Our worlds were seemingly nothing alike. She wore a burka. I wore jeans and a headband. We didn't speak with the same accent. We didn't attend the same kind of place of worship. We didn't eat the same kinds of food or discuss the same kinds of issues among our friends.

She held a folded photograph in her hand. So much sadness looked back at me. "She was my only daughter. She was beautiful. She was shot twice." I reached out and took her hand. She unfolded the picture, and I was shocked to see how young her daughter had been.

The lady on the other side of me held a totally different narrative about the same country's issues. She wore a wig and a skirt that went almost to her ankles. We didn't speak with the same accent. We didn't attend the same kind of place of

worship. We didn't eat the same kinds of food or discuss the same kinds of issues among our friends.

She held a small frame in her hand. So much sadness looked back at me. She'd lost her husband. I reached out to take her hand.

Differences made for dividing lines all around the room. Dividing lines that spanned back generation upon generation.

But there we were, hand in hand. A circle of divided women so very united by our tears. We'd all experienced deep, devastating loss.

And in the commonality of our loss, we found a peace that others said would be impossible. We weren't there to solve the problems of politics. We weren't there to debate who was right. We were there just to talk as humans. As women. As fellow carriers of sorrow.

We took time to listen. We were slow to speak. And though there was heartbreak ... and unanswered questions ... and different views on what happened and why, there was also a desire to see past our differences. After everyone had time to share, we left the circle and went into a commercial kitchen. We spent the rest of the afternoon making fruit jams together. Stirring and mixing and bringing together something much sweeter than the sugar and fruit.

I guess a political analyst might say we didn't accomplish much by the world's standards that day. But they would be wrong. What I saw in that peace talk was so beautiful.

But there's another side to pain that is brutal.

It's when we don't allow the pain to make us more compassionate toward others but rather more convinced than ever that others are out to get us. We don't reach out with understanding. Instead, we lash out, multiplying the hurt

that's been done to us into other people's lives.

We flip people off in traffic. We are unusually harsh with the cashier who got our order wrong in the drive-thru. We voice strong judgments about others just to make ourselves look better. We are determined to prove others wrong.

Show me an ugly or snarky or hurtful comment on social media, and I promise the person who wrote it is suffering from loss. And the last thing in the world that will ever fix them is for us to attack them back. If pain got them into this place, more pain heaped on them will never help them get out of it. Compassion for their loss and grace for their pain doesn't validate what they say. It just honors the reality they are more than their hurtful comment. And you might be the only one in their life right now who has the chance to help and the courage to care.

The end of that day with the women in Israel was to vote for who would get the money from the sale of the jam we'd made. And there were a lot of jars of jam, which meant this would truly be helpful to whoever got the money. Everyone had needs. All could have made a case for being the ones who received it. But as we got to know one another that day through the commonality of our tears, we voted simply for who needed the money the most. The women in burkas were given the money. And it was a unanimous vote. No one said the word forgiveness. They didn't have to. It was there. And everyone knew it.

More than a win for just that situation, it was a vote for what compassion and forgiveness can accomplish within the human race. This wasn't declaring anyone right. It was simply extending compassion where compassion was needed. It was the most beautiful sermon about what is possible with God that I've ever experienced.

And if it was possible for them, surely, it's possible for me and you.

But it starts with us living the message of Jesus' life—forgiveness. This is what Jesus modeled when He taught us to pray, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12) And it was the declaration of His death as He uttered, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34) But even more, it is the proclamation of every saved soul: "I am forgiven. Therefore, I must forgive."

Discover what the Bible really says about forgiveness and the peace that comes from living it out right now with Lysa TerKeurst's new book, Forgiving What You Can't Forget. Find out more at . {eo}

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