

When People Are Mean

The comments flickered on my computer screen, one after the next, each one seeming more mean-spirited than the last. My stomach hurt. I like to be liked. I like people to admire my work, and this feedback could in no way be construed as admiration.

A small piece I had written years ago on my old blog had been repurposed by a popular website, and readers were not happy with it. I shut my laptop and went for a little walk, spinning the questions through my head. I debated my faceless critics and formed a brilliant argument in my brain.

The argument went like this: *You're right. My theology was thin on this one, but it wasn't written to convince anyone. It was written as a small bite to get people to dig deeper and figure out what they believe themselves. But also, you're picking out splinters and missing big planks of truth ... and I frankly think you're being a little mean about it.*

That was pretty much my whole argument. And I thought that, as arguments go, it was quite contrite.

But then I stopped talking and started listening, and I heard in my heart the kind voice of the Holy Spirit, saying, "This? This whole moment of angst and anger and frustration? This is not about them. It's about you. It's not about 10 people who don't know you and never will. This is about humility ... and all it can produce in your life."

Yeah, my life message is that even though we like to avoid suffering, it can produce amazing things in us if we'll let it. So, apparently, can humility. Shoot.

It's hard to stay silent and let it work. But work it does. And it is—I can feel it. It's making me more soft and more committed to the law of kindness in the way I communicate with people. It's digging deep into the soft ground of my identity and taking out the weeds of pride and perfection that choke out better fruit.

And most of all, it's making me understand yet again that one of the most beautiful parts of life with Jesus is the unconditional love He offers ... love that wraps around us on the days we feel awesome and on the days we feel disastrous.

It's good love, strong love, and I'm so grateful for it. And I'm not defending mean-spirited people or a dog-eat-dog mindset on the Internet (which I believe I addressed here). I also won't go back and re-read, just to make myself really humble, because I'm not that cool and I don't think He's requiring it of me. But I am learning a lot from my little battle ... which just goes to show: Even the battle for humility can be beautiful (shameless book tie-in here).

Bo Stern is a blogger and author of the newly-released *Beautiful Battlifields* (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.