

The two most powerful words when we're in struggle: me too. February 2017 Newsletter by Rachel Christensen, LCSW

Several years ago, my family and I were living in Philadelphia while my husband attended grad school. We attended church at our local congregation. A woman in our congregation, who was pregnant with twins, had temporarily moved into the area along with her family so she could be close to one of the best pediatric hospitals. The twins she was carrying faced a life-threatening prenatal condition in which her twins shared unequal amounts of the placenta's blood supply resulting in the two babies growing at different rates. I connected with her as I was also expecting a baby, my third boy. I would talk with her regularly about how she was doing and the progress of her pregnancy. Unfortunately, even with all the good care she received, the smaller twin died. I remember seeing her in church the following week. I didn't know what to say. All I did was embrace her and cried with her. I could only imagine losing my child and how painful that would be. My tears that day were a way of saying, "I see you and I hurt with you because I care about you."

When we are hurting, our connection with each other is what helps us move through the pain. It doesn't take away our burdens, but it can make them easier to bear. It is a special kind of love to "mourn with those who mourn and comfort those who stand in need of comfort" Mosiah 18:9. All across the world, in partnerships, friendships and families, we share tender feelings that help us get through life's most difficult challenges. All across the world, small groups gather to share and listen to each other's struggles. Brene Brown said, "The two most powerful words when we're in struggle: me too."

Recently, I read a powerful book called *Love Warrior* by Glennon Doyle Melton. In her memoir, she candidly shares painful experiences which she found were an invitation to a richer life. In her process of self discovery, she found writing became a way to reflect her true self. As she said, "There I am, the inside me, on the outside." This process began for her when one day she noticed that some of her Facebook friends were participating in something called "25 Things," a list of interesting facts about themselves. She decided maybe she could make a list too. She started with this:

#1. I'm a recovering bulimic and alcoholic, but I still find myself missing bingeing and booze in the same twisted way a woman can miss someone who repeatedly beats her and leaves her for dead.

When she stopped and read her first statement, she feels thrilled. "Yes. There I am. Right there. That's not just Glennon or found Mrs. Melton. That's not my representative. That's the real me." She kept typing, never guessing the impact this post would have on others, but especially on herself. Later that evening, she returns to her computer to an in-box full of messages. This is what she finds:

"The first is from a stranger. It reads, "I don't know you but I read your list this morning and I've been crying with relief for hours. Your list was my list of secrets. I thought I was the only one." I open a different message from an old friend: "Glennon. My sister is an alcoholic. None of us knows what to do for her." And another, and another, and another.

"My marriage is falling apart . . . "

"I don't know how to find my way out of this depression . . . "

"Sometimes I wonder if I'm not cut out for parenting. I get so angry that I want to push them down. I don't, but I want to. I feel like a monster."

I marvel at the honesty and pain. Many messages are from people I've known for years, but I'm discovering that I never really knew them. We've spent our time together talking about everything but what matters. We've never brought to each other the heavy things we were meant to help each other carry. We've only introduced each other to our representatives, while our real selves tried to live life alone. We thought that was safer. We thought that this way our real selves wouldn't get hurt. But as I read these messages, it becomes clear that we are all hurting anyway. And we think we are alone. At our cores, we are our tender selves peeking out at a world of shiny representatives, so shame has been layered on top of our pain. We're suffocating underneath all the layers."

If you find yourself "suffocating underneath all the layers," my invitation to you is to try and find a crack through that protective shield, your "representative," and share your story with someone you feel emotionally safe with. Let your connection with another person be the strength to you it was intended to be. Chances are, if you open up, you might hear the words, "me too."