

John Pavlovitz – A Reflection on Everyday Life....and Everyday People (Adapted)

The day my father died, I was at the supermarket buying bananas.

I remember thinking to myself, “This is insane. Your dad just died. Why the hell are you buying bananas?” But we needed bananas. We’d be waking up for breakfast tomorrow morning, and there wouldn’t be any bananas—so there I was.

And lots of other stuff still needed doing too, so over the coming days I would navigate parking lots, waiting in restaurant lines, and sitting on park benches; pushing back tears, fighting to stay upright, and in general always being seconds from a total, blubbering, room-clearing freak out.

I wanted to wear a sign that said: I JUST LOST MY DAD. PLEASE GO EASY.

Unless anyone passing by looked deeply into my bloodshot eyes or noticed the occasional break in my voice and thought enough to ask, it’s not like they’d have known what’s happening inside me or around me. They wouldn’t have had any idea of the gaping sinkhole that had just opened up and swallowed the normal life of the person next to them in the produce section.

And while I didn’t want to physically wear my actual circumstances on my chest, it probably would have caused people around me to give me space or speak softer or move more carefully—and it might have made the impossible, almost bearable.

So many people around you; the people you share the supermarket line with, pass in traffic, sit next to at work, encounter on social media, and see across the kitchen table - they’re experiencing the collateral damage of living. They are grieving someone, missing someone, worried about someone. Their marriages are crumbling or their mortgage payment is late or they’re waiting on their child’s test results, or they’re getting bananas five years after a death and still pushing back tears because the loss feels as real as it did that first day.

So many human beings you pass by today are fighting to find peace and to push back fear; to get through their daily tasks without breaking down in front of the bananas or in the carpool line or at the post office.

Maybe they aren't mourning the sudden, tragic passing of a parent, but wounded, exhausted, pain-ravaged people are everywhere, everyday stumbling all around us—and yet most of the time we're fairly oblivious to them:

Parents whose children are terminally ill.
Couples in the middle of divorce.
People grieving the loss of loved ones and relationships.
Kids being bullied at school.
Teenagers who want to end their lives.
People marking the anniversary of a death.
Parents worried about their depressed teenager.
Spouses whose partners are deployed in combat.
Families with no idea how to keep the lights on.
Single parents with little help and little sleep.

So many people are grieving and worried and fearful, and yet none of them wear the signs, none of them have labels, and none of them come with written warnings reading, I'M STRUGGLING. BE NICE TO ME.

And since they don't, it's up to you and me to look more closely and more deeply at everyone around us: at work or at the petrol station or in the produce section, and to never assume they aren't just hanging by a thread. Because many people are hanging by a thread—and our simple kindness can be that thread.

We need to remind ourselves just how hard the hidden stories around us might be, and to approach each person as a delicate, breakable, invaluable treasure—and to handle them with care.

As you make your way through the world today, people won't be wearing signs to announce their mourning or to alert you to the attrition or to broadcast how fearful they are—but if you look with the right eyes, you'll see the signs.

There are grieving people all around you.
Go easy.