

EXCERPT

IVP Books

Brave Souls

Experiencing the Audacious Power of Empathy

April 2, 2019 | \$23, 224 pages, hardcover | 978-0-8308-4566-8

What if empathy could save us? From the top of Mount Kilimanjaro to the borders of war-torn Syria, Belinda Bauman takes readers along her journey to empathy. With cutting-edge neuroscience, biblical parables, and stories of brave women from across the globe, she casts a vision for lives and communities transformed by everyday Christians practicing empathy as a spiritual discipline.

Empathy on the Decline

Many seem to have forgotten how to understand one another. One seminal study analyzed levels of empathy in more than fourteen thousand US college students over three decades. The results were alarming: a whopping 75 percent cared significantly less about others than the same demographic thirty years before. Studies also show that performance in the workplace correlates with empathy. Yet in a recent study, only 40 percent of “frontline leaders” were considered “proficient or strong” in empathy, with some saying they had “no time for empathy.”

In certain pockets of our culture, empathy is an increasingly popular topic; consider empathy marketing, for example. But empathy as a practice is declining. Researchers call this the “empathy gap,” with some saying empathy is heading toward extinction.

The consequences of empathy’s decline are troubling, to say the least. Indifference—or apathy, which literally means “without feeling”—is increasing. One recent *Huffington Post* headline declared we are in the middle of an apathy epidemic. Anger is more blatant in our culture as well, and public shaming is on the rise. Americans are more divided along ideological lines than at any point in the past two decades. Political antipathy is deep and protracted.

But our malaise is not limited to politics. One poll in 2016 found that more than half its respondents were much angrier than a year before. Depression, a symptom of apathy, is now considered pandemic, with 5 percent of the global population suffering from the condition, increasing by almost 20 percent every year. The saddest part is this: too often people respond with “yeah, whatever” or “we don’t care that we don’t care.”

Empathy differs from compassion, at least in the way most of us define compassion. Empathy is also a radical departure from sympathy in that it doesn’t just involve our emotions. It engages our intellect too, and it’s proven true by our actions. “Leaning into the feelings of others” is a helpful definition of empathy.

Genuine empathy may be in short supply, yet its biological, sociological, and psychological benefits are numerous and proven. Brain studies identify empathy as a key skill that can save your life and the lives of those around you. According to researchers of happiness and human flourishing at the Association for Psychological Science, people who engage empathy are smarter, mentally and physically healthier, recover from illness and injury sooner, have higher self-esteem and trust levels, and live longer. Oh, and let’s throw this in for good measure: empathetic people have better love lives. They land more dates and are more likely to marry, stay married, and produce more offspring.

For all the trends, however, embodied empathy remains elusive.

Are you personally experiencing a deficit of empathy? Is your community, whether real or virtual, more polarized than ever? More angry? Are you struggling to give empathy—to be empathetic—during a time when the world has never needed it more? Or do you find yourself frequently choosing the right mask to put on when you feel nothing?

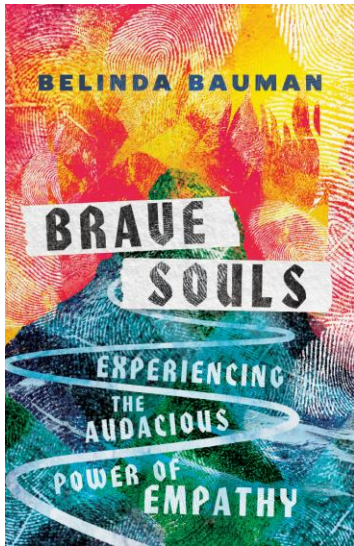


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"Belinda Bauman gives us a gift—inviting us away from merely hearing someone to embracing empathy and allowing another person's story to move us into action. The journey isn't pretty or easy, but Bauman's belief in change left me more hopeful than I've been in a long time."

Kathy Khang, speaker and activist, author of *Raise Your Voice*

Maybe a nagging question sits at the back of your consciousness and rises with each newscast, each self-help trend, or each social media post: What am I missing? In 2013 the Oxford Dictionary added the acronym FOMO, "fear of missing out." Driven by our desire to self-determine, we check status updates often to make sure we're in the center of it all. But for all our connectedness, we are subtly—and sometimes not so subtly—ignoring each other's perspectives, circumstances, and needs. Instead of seeking to understand, we quietly pronounce judgment, stoking a simmering anger. Or we smile civilly and nod, feeding the isolation among us.

What are we missing? Maybe we're missing each other. The world has settled for competition instead of compassion, civility instead of love, and transaction instead of community. But there is a better way. At the crossroads of your calling and the world's pain stands an age-old something. That something has been tattered and bruised over time, often misunderstood and dismissed. Restored and redeemed, it is a gateway—a portal into recovering our identity within genuine community. That something is what allows us to understand what we're feeling; it allows us to experience joys and sorrows. It listens and learns, is gentle but takes risks, and is kind even as it speaks the truth. And it grows best in holy ground.

We could call it love, but that seems abstract. Too vague. Too loaded. If we call it compassion, you may say, "I've tried that, and it didn't work." Let's call it empathy.

Empathy needs to be stripped of its baggage and seen anew. In its redeemed form, empathy is a pathway to change—real change. Holy empathy is where you and I meet, where we intersect, where we can move beyond superficial love or contrived compassion toward genuine love. Empathy is not an "either you got it or you don't" personality trait, but a skill that can be learned. It isn't a mystical gift or higher state of consciousness. For too long, we've dismissed empathy as irrelevant or contradictory to faith when in fact it's an essential biblical concept that offers us a gateway to the change we seek.

Empathy is a movement deep in our soul. It takes us from standing by to standing up, from sleeping to awakening. In fact, as you'll see, the laws of God and science say the world must change when we are brave enough to practice empathy with heart, mind, and soul.

Come now, and journey with me. Begin a new story.

Be brave.

-Adapted from the introduction to *Brave Souls*



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BIO

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Advocate, Speaker, and Teacher Belinda Bauman

Belinda Bauman is the founder of One Million Thumbprints, a movement of peacemakers advocating with women in the world's worst conflict zones. Belinda is also the founder of and the visionary behind #SilencelsNotSpiritual, a campaign calling churches to break the silence on violence against women.

Belinda is a speaker and contributor to *Newsweek's The Daily Beast*, *Red Tent Living*, *Huffington Post*, and *Christianity Today*. Belinda completed a master's in curriculum development at Covenant College and a certificate in lay trauma counseling from the Seattle School of Theology. Belinda and her husband, Stephan, and their two sons, Joshua and Caleb, live in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Follow her on Twitter: @belindajbauman.



One Million Thumbprints (1MT) is a grassroots campaign seeking to catalyze a groundswell of people focused on overcoming the effects of war against women through storytelling, advocacy, and fundraising. The volunteer peacemakers of One Million Thumbprints envision a world where women are free from the fear of violence, oppression, and poverty caused by war.

onemillionthumbprints.org



#SilencelsNotSpiritual is a call to action to the church to stop standing by and start standing up for women and girls who experience violence. Spearheaded by more than one hundred and fifty initial signatories, #SilencelsNotSpiritual reflects the collective voice of thousands of men and women across the global faith community. Thousands signed the statement within hours of its launch.

silenceisnotspiritual.org



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