

TRY A LITTLE TENDERNESS

By Maria Shriver in Maria Shriver's Sunday Paper

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Inspire Hearts & Minds. Move Humanity Forward



"There is no charm equal to tenderness of heart." -Jane Austen

Earlier this week, I thought I was going to write this Sunday about the long lines people have been standing in to vote. Then I thought I was going to write about Amy Coney Barrett's testimony in front of the Senate. Then I watched the dueling town halls on Thursday night and thought, "OK, I'll write about that." (As usual, a lot happened this week, and there was a lot to think about.)

But then Pope Francis got me. He always gets me.

This week, the Pope wrote: "Tenderness is the path of choice for the strongest, most courageous men and women."

Tenderness and courage in the same sentence. I love that! I know you can get the news of the week anywhere, so instead, I want to focus on these words. Embodying them could really benefit us in the coming weeks.

If ever there was a time for courageous men and women to step forward, it is now. But how we step forward is the key. We are inundated with examples of people stepping forward with rage, anger, and the intention to rile us up, confuse us, gaslight us, and scare us. It's a lot, but when the Pope suggested stepping out with tenderness, I took a deep breath. It was a breath of relief. It made me feel like, "OK, we've got this. We can do this. Here is the path. Here are my directions."

Now, I didn't grow up with tenderness. I didn't hear the courageous people around me even speak the word. But I have felt tenderness in my life and I know that it can be life-changing. Bestowing tenderness on an individual allows a person to feel seen. It allows them to soften and feel their worth.

That's very different from just being told you are worthy. When you actually "feel" worthy—when you feel seen, valued, and understood—you feel as though you belong. You feel as though you can stand up, put your shoulders back, and speak up. Tenderness bestows courage, and it requires courage to bestow tenderness.

Once you become awake to tenderness, you can see how much more powerful it is than rage. I know we are taught to allow fear to be a motivator, but what if tenderness is the motivator we need to heal the cracks in our society—the cracks that we are all responsible for, and yet all capable of healing? What if we tried to bestow tenderness on someone whose political views enrage us and trigger us? What if we tried to bestow tenderness on that boss who frustrates us? That sibling who has always irritated us? That child who exhausts us?

I've tried arguing with facts. I've tried shaming and blaming. I have even tried time-outs. But miraculously, whenever I shift away from these and bestow tenderness instead, everything shifts. It really works. It works on the other person and more importantly, it works on myself.

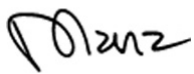
At the end of my mother's life, I tried tenderness on her when everything else had failed. My mother was a warrior. She was tougher than any human I've ever encountered. She was intimidating to the most powerful people on the planet, and she was a towering figure to me. Yet when I mustered up the courage to treat her with tenderness, she melted before my very eyes. I regret waiting so long, but I didn't know tenderness was ever an option.

I share the Pope's words this morning because they feel like a collective calling. They are a collective invitation to all of us, regardless of our religious affiliation, to dare and try something new. Something different.

Our planet is sick. Our politics are sicker. Our institutions are crumbling, and our families are breaking under the weight of it all. And our people—you and me—well, we need a new way, a new idea. Or even a new take on an age-old practice (see our piece on grounding below).

It's usually when one has tried everything else that one becomes open to the scariest and bravest option of all. That is when we find the courage to try tenderness. In this moment, we need to be courageous enough to put down our egos and try something that really scares us, something that really requires our courage. Why not? We have nothing left to lose.

Love,



PRAYER OF THE WEEK

Dear God, please help me bestow tenderness on those around me. May I remember that tenderness isn't weak but courageous. Bestowing it on others is one of the strongest and bravest things I can do. Amen.