

Jerry Colonna:

Well, hello, Ben. It's good to see you. Before we get started, why don't we just take a moment and introduce and identify yourself however feels right to you.

Ben Perry:

Sure. Hi, Jerry. It's so good to be here. I'll introduce myself for the first time as Benjamin Perry, because that's the name that's on the book. So if people are looking for it, you gotta use the full one. But otherwise, yeah, I'm Ben Perry. I use he and they pronouns in my professional life. I'm a minister at a cool little lefty church in the East Village. It's full of art and beauty and life called Middle Church.

But I'm also the author of *Cry Baby, Why Our Tears Matter*, which is a book that explores the physiology of weeping, weeping in literature, all to ask if crying is this deeply integral part of our humanity, why don't we do it more? And then the middle chunk explores all of the social forces that keep people from crying openly. And the last third imagines, if we could get rid of all of that, what would a world shaped by that kind of open weeping look like?

I live in Maine in a little commune with my best friend since I was three and my partner and his partner and my brother and we just planted 50 apple trees this spring and we are trying to do something weird and different up here.

Jerry Colonna:

Well, first of all, with regard to your little commune in Maine, I will say I envy it. And you may have a visitor coming soon. But more than that, thank you for that really robust introduction. I will say that you and I became friends if I can use that term, over Twitter.

Which, well, what are we calling it now? X. And it's one of the delightful experiences. And I was excited when you began talking about the book, *Cry Baby*, when it came out. And I'll show you, I have the signed copy that came via the Strand.

Ben Perry:

Love that.

Jerry Colonna:

I was really looking forward to it. And I was not disappointed in the book. It's really a very quite moving book. And I was excited to have this conversation with you. I think that it's a topic we don't talk about enough and I think that you've done a wonderful job with the book. And I just wanna say that really at the start of this.

And before I sort of release it back to you, I wanted to just start off by asking a question that's implicit in your subtitle, which is why do tears matter? Why do they matter?

Ben Perry:

See how wide why do tears matter? I'm gonna start that answer personally, because that's part of where my book started, and it is sort of the bedrock for my broader understanding and framing of the question.

About in the book how I cried a lot as a young child, but then by the time I was 11 or 12 or 13 years old, I stopped crying altogether. And then I didn't cry for a decade. Between the time of my early adolescence to when I was going to seminary in my early 20s, I can't remember a single time when I cried at all. Not even in private. When I think about that decade of my life, I remember such a pervasive numbness. This feeling of, particularly in retrospect and in hindsight, of feeling dead.

In the book I write about how I would sort of watch my emotions flicker on the wall and convince myself that they were real. I would say, "oh I'm happy" or "I'm sad" or I could name it, like if you had a little color chart like you present for children, point to the happy face. I was aware of emotions but I did not feel them in any kind of real way. Any of the emotions that I felt were nearer to this baseline of numbness than they were to any kind of or real feeling of being alive. And then in my early 20s, I had a professor in seminary who asked us to think about the last time we cried, and I realized that I could not remember. And it sent me on this existential journey where I set about to reclaim that part of myself that I had lost.

And so I started this bizarre spiritual experiment where I made myself cry every day. I did that for months. And what I found at the end of it was that I just completely rewired my emotional life and all of a sudden I felt alive again. Sometimes in my professional life I'll talk about things like resurrection. And that's a religiously loaded and oftentimes weird and abstract term.

But when I think about that period of my life, when I learned how to feel again, it's one of the only words that really feels right. I just think back to this time when I just felt so palpably dead, and I was masking, covering, and uncomfortable with my sexuality, and uncomfortable with my gender, and not willing to face all of these things that I had repressed inside myself. And then I, in gentleness and tenderness, invited me to start unearthing all of that I had buried. And that process...made me a whole person again.

And so when I think now more broadly, going beyond my own personal experience, I see that same numbness reflected in so many ways in the world. We move through such incredible suffering every day, and yet we also live in this punishing isolation and silence. I have this distinct feeling, and I know it's true because I do pastoral care and I talk to people in ways that people aren't always vulnerable and willing to reveal to people they might work with. But I hear how many people are grappling with loneliness and isolation and despair. And yet we have this toxic positivity that guilds our collective life so that so many of us are increasingly carrying all this anguish, but unwilling to name it and I think crying can help to break that box open.

Jerry Colonna:

Yeah, I, you know, thank you for sharing all of that. As an author myself, I want to give you a gift

back, which is to hear your own words read back to you. And I will, you know, this is really from chapter one.

“Life begins with tears. And while few would desire sobbing with infant-like frequency, daily weeping is far nearer to our natural state.”

You know, I had to stop and put the book aside after those two sentences. I felt a resonance. I'll share a little bit. Several years ago, Wired Magazine did a story on me and the work I do with founders. And the headline of the story was, *This Man Makes Founders Cry*. And it became something of a joke. A kind joke, not teasing, but a kind joke. And I would go to events and people would say, well, how quickly is Jerry gonna make you cry? Right? And I often named the front row in a talk, I would do the splash zone. So you have to be careful, right? But the truth behind that, I would often say, I don't set out to make people cry.

Jerry Colonna:

I set out to help them feel. And it's the feeling that often manifests itself in the tears. And the tears, to my mind, evoke something one of my Buddhist teachers would speak about, which he called the genuine heart of sadness. And I love what you've done, both in the initial answer to my question, but even in those short little sentences, where you are connecting the process of being in touch with one's emotions, i.e. manifesting in tears, and by the way, it can manifest in laughter. But the process of that with life itself. And the opposite of that being a kind of numbness to life itself. And I thought that was extraordinary. And I'm curious if you could say more about that.

Ben Perry:

Yeah, I mean, you're absolutely right. It's interesting people have asked me as I've been going around and talking about the book, do you want people to cry more? And I'm always like, I mean, sure, but what I actually really want is for people to feel deeply. That the crying actually is in some ways not, it's an indicator, it's a thing that happens as a result of deep feeling.

Ben Perry:

And so often when people stop crying, that is a sign of so much other emotional repression that's already happened. Sometimes crying is the last thing to go. And so when we're talking about, oh, do I want people to cry more?

Jerry Colonna:

Right.

Ben Perry:

That will happen if you feel more deeply. If you are a person who truly and earnestly opens yourself to the world with vulnerability. You're just gonna cry, that's how we're wired as people, it's part of our biology. But it's that piece of opening oneself that I think is really, really crucial and a key part of truly being alive in the fullest sense of the word. And when I think about you talking

about your experience with founders...What's interesting to me about that story is how many people are walking around...needing to open up like that. Like not to, you know, cast any aspersions on your skills, your ability to open up a room, but like part of the reason why you're able to be effective in doing that is because so many people are in that place of yearning so deeply to feel more deeply that when you give them the invitation and the opportunity, they jump right in.

That's been one of the fascinating things about having written this book is I tell people about it. And then all of a sudden I'm hearing all of these stories about when they've cried or when they didn't cry or how they want to cry more. People are so hungry to feel, particularly in a world where we have this acculturated dumbness, that when you give them the invitation and you create a space where you can hold that in a way that feels safe and loved and held people are eager to reveal the fullness of themselves. And I think, you know, offering that invitation is a key.

Jerry Colonna:

Yeah, I think you just hit upon something that's really powerful, which is that the release that you might provoke, that I might provoke, the release first in ourselves, but the release that we may provoke in the other, is an indication not only of the closely held, closely guarded feelings but also that deeper yearning for connection, that deeper yearning to be together. I am often struck by the etymological basis of the word compassion, the notion of being with someone else's feelings, being with the feelings, our own feelings, is this extraordinary experience of it.

Ben Perry:

Yes.

Jerry Colonna:

And I have a suspicion I want to take you back to. There's this moment that you describe in which you started to have the insight that you had not been crying. And you talked before about the professor. And if I remember correctly from the book, it was in a class on Lamentations. Was that correct?

Ben Perry:

Hmm. Yep. Yeah, it was an Old Testament course and we were talking about the Book of Lamentations.

Jerry Colonna:

OK, take us there for a moment. Tell me about the importance of Lamentations. And I'll be a student with regard to this. And then connect it back to the tears.

Ben Perry:

It's interesting you brought up the etymology of compassion because if we're doing etymologies, one of the things that's really interesting to me is that the etymology of religion comes from the Latin religare, to bind. It's like to bind ourselves to one another. And what we know from...

Jerry Colonna:
Mm-hmm.

Ben Perry:
I'm gonna be a bad student and do the crying bit first and I'm gonna loop it back into Lamentations, I promise. But what we know from the research about crying is that that's actually one of the core functions of emotional tears, is that they solicit help from other people, that we are hardwired to respond when we see other people crying, it engenders compassion in ourselves, it makes us feel more predisposed to offer help.

Ben Perry:
We feel more tender towards the person that we see crying. And evolutionarily, this was this developed mechanism to build relationships outside of our immediate kin.

That's one of the things that humans are, that is so remarkable about humans, is the way that we form all of these beautiful relationships outside of the circle of people who share our genetic material.

Jerry Colonna:
As you're doing in Maine.

Ben Perry:
Who would have no genetic, yeah, who have no genetic reason to want, you know, for your genes to continue to live, and yet there's something hardwired in us that wills other people's flourishing and crying is this invitation to be in that kind of relationship, to bind ourselves together, to feel someone else's emotions. And so the Book of Lamentations, for those who don't know, is written right after the Babylonian army destroys Jerusalem and raises the temple to the ground, and casts the Jewish people into exile.

And it's this moment of incredible trauma, incredible pain, and written by a people who were not sure that they would ever see their home again. So it opens with the words, "How empty lies the city that was once so full of people." You can feel the aching and the yearning in those words, seeing streets that once were full of life, now being empty.

And yet, you know, what does the elsewhere, the Psalmist says, "My tears have been my food day and night in that moment of utter desolation." Crying becomes that reminder that we are actually still together, that we are actually still linked to one another, even in those moments when we are cast outside of what is comfortable or what is familiar.

And I know that personally too, because the church that I serve actually burned to the ground in 2020. Right after COVID had cast us all into our own little homes. That winter, a fire spread from the building next door and destroyed our sanctuary. And it was this moment of just adding

trauma layered on trauma.

Particularly for a community where there's so many queer folks who you know come to Middle because they've been cast out of other religious communities And they're looking for belonging, looking for a place to call home and have finally found it or finally home and to lose that home in a fire at a time where you were already Isolated from your neighbors was this almost unendurable pain and yet in the middle of that grief there was weeping there was collective mourning and people are giving each other hugs.

And three years later, our community is still alive and vibrant and has grown by hundreds of members because we were able to cry together because our tears were that reminder that we are still alive even though the building is gone. And so when I think about a book like Lamentations, I see a people grappling with unimaginable trauma that they should never have to endure, and still affirming in one another's arms. I am here and I still feel something. I'm still alive

Jerry Colonna:

It's a powerful story. And I mourn for the loss of the physical building. And I am happy that the heart of the congregation is still there, is still thriving. And that speaks to what you and all members of the congregation have created together. There's a community that is born out of the suffering.

You know, in Buddhism, there's a story that the Buddha tells of a woman who has lost her child coming to the Buddha to be consoled. And he asks her to visit every house in the village and to take from each house a mustard seed from every house that has not experienced loss. And she comes back empty-handed.

Ben Perry:

Mm-hmm.

Jerry Colonna:

And the point of the story is not to diminish her experience of loss, but to see the universality of that loss and to realize that there's a binding together that comes from the experience of acknowledging suffering, of being compassionate with suffering, of allowing, if you will, the tears, of allowing, if you will, the lamentations. So that we can come together and build that which is essential, which is the heart of the community.

Ben Perry:

Yeah, it's interesting, you know, you come from the business world and it's an interesting shift that I'm starting to see in companies and corporations too that I think for a very long time the rules of doing business was to not acknowledge suffering.

Jerry Colonna:

Right.

Ben Perry:

In the lives of workers. You put that in a bag at the door and you came and you did your job and then you went home and you picked it up on your way out the door and you went back to your life. But within the walls of the workplace at least, this is a place where you left the problems outside. And obviously, that was always a fallacy to some degree. People don't just...aren't actually able to compartmentalize like that really.

What the other thing that I think has been really fascinating is that people are realizing that that's actually not how people do their best work either. That all of us are more productive, we work better as a team, we feel affirmed and part of a project better when we actually bring all of ourselves into a space. I think particularly it's been fascinating watching, you know, millennials, we got a lot of, you know.

We took a lot of crap for like, oh, they're not going to play by the corporate rules or whatever. But actually, by and large, we kind of did. We were like, people would make fun of millennials for like, oh, they're just all so feeling. By and large, I actually mostly saw members of my generation sort of filing in and largely obeying the sort of corporate rules that were had were established before we entered the workplace, but it's been fascinating to watch Gen Z enter the workplace because they are not, and there's an emotional authenticity to this rising generation of folks who are coming into workplaces and being like, "No actually nope. That's not that's not gonna work for me."

Jerry Colonna:

Mm-hmm.

Ben Perry:

...and demanding something different either by, you know, refusing to play along or by just leaving and, you know, moving with their presence. And I think what people are starting to realize is that if they want to attract top talent, if they want to create the kinds of spaces that actually nurture incredible work, we are going to have to live differently because people are done with putting themselves in a box by the door when they walk into work in the morning.

Jerry Colonna:

I agree completely and I'll tell two stories, one from a not-too-distant past and one just from last week.

The first, several years ago, after an appearance on CNN in which I, in conversation with the reporter, the reporter started to cry. And she bravely left that in the report. After that experience, I got a phone call from the head of HR at a very, very large software firm who asked me to come speak to the senior leadership team and about some of the notions of how we handle mental stress, distress within an organization. And I said to her, and this is a very well-regarded

company, I said, well, why are you asking me to come in? Do you guys seem to have it figured out?

And she told me a statistic, I don't remember the exact number, but she said that healthcare claims for depression and anxiety, and this is important, for the children of the executives in the company had gone up 30, 40, 50% in the previous couple of years. And this is pre-pandemic.

Now, the reason that comes to mind is when we live in an environment, when we are socialized to lock down those emotions. It is not just the individuals who pay that price, but it is all those around them. And those children who were filing for healthcare claims for depression and anxiety, those are the Gen Zers who are coming in. So that's one story.

The second story speaks, so what that story does, and what we've been talking about, I think, speaks to a responsibility that those of us who have power and whether that power comes from us to us from role or from projected onto us by our identity, by our place in a heteronormative binary leaning structure, whether that comes to us because of those experiences or not, we have a responsibility to lift the burden, if you will, that our fellow humans carries. And that brings up the second story, which is this notion of our responsibility. We first met a few months ago. We had some dialogue back and forth. And in that time, we've had more mass shootings.

We are speaking today on August 29th. And just this past weekend, we had a white supremacist murder three black folks who were doing nothing more than going about their business shopping at a dollar general store after trying unsuccessfully to invade a historically black college campus.

But this is also what, a week, maybe 10 days after a 66-year-old woman mother of nine, shop owner, was shot and killed for flying a pride flag outside of her own store. We speak of lamentations, we speak of responding to suffering. There is suffering all around us.

Ben Perry:
Yep.

Jerry Colonna:
And, and I think that the training that many of us have gone through to not feel what we feel as human beings has this horrific effect of shutting us off to the suffering that we see around us. Because when we're numb to our own feelings, we tend to be numb to the pain and suffering around us. Does this resonate with you?

Ben Perry:
Yeah, it absolutely does. The relentlessness of the suffering is part of why numbness becomes an adaptive strategy. Because to feel the weight of that horror day after day after day is in a very literal sense unbearable. But the other thing that I always want to talk about when I talk about the social forces that suppress crying, and more broadly the social forces that instill that kind of

numbness, is that is an intentional choice because that numbness, the broad cultural, like numbness in a population, behooves people who want things to stay the same.

Jerry Colonna:
Right, the status quo.

Ben Perry:
Yeah, that, you know, gun manufacturers would very much like for you to not feel the weight of your anguish the next time there is a mass shooting, which will be tomorrow. If you actually felt the full weight of what it means for there to have been 471 mass shootings so far this year, if we actually sit with that, even for a moment, even for a second, if we let the weight of that absolutely unconscionable tragedy touch our hearts in a real kind of way. What we come away with is an absolute refusal to continue living this way. And I think more and more people are getting to that place.

You see all kinds of grassroots organizing happening all over the country right now, beautiful things happening in Tennessee, just to name one example of folks who perhaps at one point in their lives were people who would defend the Second Amendment or whatever that means, who were gun rights supporters who all of a sudden have realized that this is just absolute lunacy and we can't continue to live this way and it is literally killing us to do so. I think more and more people are starting to have that moment of conversion where all of a sudden the suffering hits in a kind of way that you can't go back to the numbness.

Jerry Colonna:
It's, you know, in the journey that I have been on, starting with writing *Reunion*, the book that's coming out in November, and just really opening myself up to the experience of folks not like me. In the most profound ways, what I have come to see most directly is that we are allowing babies to be murdered.

And I speak in dramatic language because I don't know any other way to allow the feeling to cut through. Because as you point out, if we remain numb, then I don't know how things will change.

Ben Perry:
I want to share a story. And apologies in advance because I'm already crying a little bit and I'm probably gonna cry more. So actually, no apologies. That's my whole, that's the book. I'm done apologizing. But there was the shooting at the gay nightclub in Colorado, I want to say last summer. Yeah. And...

Jerry Colonna:
Right. Colorado Springs. Yeah.

Ben Perry:
...that happened on a Saturday night. And that Sunday, I was set to lead worship and then I was

meeting up with a bunch of queer friends to hang out in Brooklyn together. And I read about the shooting on my way into church because I hadn't been on the news and I was supposed to lead the time with the children. And you know, what do you, what do you say?

And I just was not okay and I was not in any kind of state of mind to be able to lead or give a comprehensive message. And so I sat down with the kids and I cried. And I said, listen, I want you to know that this morning I'm not alright. There's no part of me that's okay. A bunch of people went out last night because they wanted to dance. They wanted to experience beauty and ecstasy and the wonder of being alive and they died because of who they are. And there's nothing, there's nothing, nothing that will make that okay.

But it's alright. That's what it means to live earnestly and authentically. That some days there are going to be days where you wake up and you cry. And that's not a failure. That's not a weakness. It's the very best of who you can be.

Ben Perry:

And after I had worshiped that morning, I went and I hung out with the friends who I had planned to hang out with. And we had planned to go out dancing and we all got there and nobody was really in a dancing mood. So we were just hanging in my friend's apartment. And one of my friends said, you know, this is what—This is what they want.

And so my friend put on dance music in their living room and we danced and we cried together. It was a weird mingling of joy being with one another and grief.

But it was that affirmation that I found in somebody else's arms that that's the kind of thing that will lead us out, that will birth the world where these kinds of senseless tragedies don't happen. It's not going to come because we pretend that we're strong and that it doesn't shake us to the very core of our being. It's going to happen when we are courageous enough to be vulnerable and to weep and to keep dancing to continue to be alive in defiance of all the forces that want us to say numb, dead before we finally die.

Jerry Colonna:

Thank you for all of that.

You brought me back to that moment.

You brought me back to, I don't remember the year, but I remember the date, December 14th, the Sandy Hook shootings. And I remember the date because it's my birthday. And I remember I was leaving my office in New York. I was headed home to Long Island. I was in my car and I'd left early and was my habit, I turned on the radio and CNN, and I remember choking because of tears. We're so strong.

And I think, my dear friend Ben, one of the pastoral gifts implicit in your book is a pathway to

how to be with unbelievable suffering. It is to allow ourselves to lament. It is a lot to allow ourselves to feel what...

Yes, the forces of mendacity don't want us to feel, but to be fair to all of it, the forces that we have internalized, the internalized structures that say, that even in a moment where you might have been caught up into it, let me apologize to Jerry for crying, right? And we both chuckle at the irony of that.

The fact is, you know, in a sense, I think that in a world where we are constantly making others, where we are constantly, we have razor wire floating in the Rio Grande to prevent children from seeking sanctuary. Right?

In a world where, and I'm not alleging that our immigration process isn't broken. Of course it's broken. But the answer is not more suffering. Right? And I'm arguing, well, you know what it is, Ben? I'm tired of my own helplessness.

Ben Perry:

It's interesting that I just apologized for crying because it's a sign of how deeply ingrained these patterns are. Not because I'm like some superhero or something, but just, I mean, I have literally spent the last three years working on a book about tears, about why they're crucial, about...

Jerry Colonna:

And why they matter.

Ben Perry:

...my own, yeah, my own, really digging into my own journey of no longer being a person who apologizes for crying. And I really have changed the way that I move through the world, I cry all the time now and I don't apologize for it. And yet here I am, just reflexively apologizing because that's how deeply ingrained these things are. But one of the things that I think about when we're asking how do we deliver that different world where we don't wake up just tired to our bones, dreading the next shoe dropping.

It's interesting that you brought up Sandy Hook because...I remember, likewise, being distraught and then turning on the television and watching President Obama. And what did he do? He could have delivered a fiery speech about gun violence. It would have been right. He could have, you know, castigated the NRA and said that you have these children's blood on your hands. He would have been, again, absolutely accurate.

But he didn't do that. He stood at the podium, and he cried, and the courage to enter that moment and do the thing which is the only natural and proper response when you're gazing upon slaughtered children.

And it was really, it was fascinating to watch in the ensuing days, all of the people in the

right-wing ecosphere, making fun of him for crying. People using, like, memes about James Van Der Beek on Dawson's Creek, or, you know, calling him a woman, or all the other things that people said. And the only thing that did was expose the inhumanity of a system that could gaze upon such tragedy without feeling.

Ben Perry:

And I think when more of us take...that moral responsibility seriously, and begin to lead authentically through our own tears, but more broadly authentically through our own emotions.

We invite a better world and we are part of being the midwives that bring it into being.

Jerry Colonna:

I couldn't agree with you more. There are a lot of things on policy that I might have disagreed with, but that moment of leadership from Obama has stayed with me forever. And yes, this is by some rights a podcast about entrepreneurship. It's certainly a podcast about leadership. It's certainly the work that I do.

Ben Perry:

Mm-hmm.

Jerry Colonna:

And part of what I think we're both saying is that there is a deeper, there is a call, there is a need for an unapologetic embrace of the fullness of our human experience as a, and I will assert as part and parcel of what we might define as leadership in order to use whatever privilege and power my body carries to affect the world in a way that I know is the right moral world.

I can get into an argument about the Second Amendment. I can get into an argument about free speech. I can do all that intellectualized. But there is no moral world in which fourth graders coming into school for one of their last days before summer vacation in Uvalde, Texas should be shot. There is no moral world. There is no world where the number one cause of death for trans youth is suicide.

Ben Perry:

The number one cause of death in children, period, is gun violence.

Jerry Colonna:

The number one cause of death in children, period, is gun violence. And there is a linkage between our racism, our anti-immigrant nativism, and all of the things that we're talking about here, our transphobia, our homophobia, our patriarchy. There is a linkage between all of this, where the result ends up being the same.

Children are being murdered. People shopping in a supermarket are being murdered. People going to a nightclub murdered for who and how they love a shopkeeper demonstrating her

alliance murdered.

Ben Perry:

Thank you. Thank you for bringing up trans suicide in a conversation about children being murdered because we don't often talk about it that way, but that's what it is when people are intentionally creating a world where kids by dint of who they are don't feel like the world has space for them. That is not a...

Jerry Colonna:

We may not be pulling a trigger but we are complices in a murder, because we're not making it safe for human beings to be human beings. And I think that those of us who have power have a moral and ethical responsibility to push against that world.

Ben Perry:

And I think when we talk about, "How does change happen?" it's also really crucial to remember that by and large, people aren't changed by intellectual debate and not anti-intellectual by any stretch of the imagination. Books are great, learning is great, but actually anybody who studies how and why people change their beliefs, none of them come away with the understanding that, oh, by and large, people are changed because you presented them a different, some more data. You gave them a graph and they went, oh my God, that graph, because the way that human brains work, if the data affirms our preconceptions, we go, oh yes, you know, that supports what I believe is true. And if it doesn't, we come up with all sorts of reasons why that graph is actually bad data, whether it's, you know, fake news or any of the other things that people sort of will say as a reason to not integrate this new information into their lives because it violates a previously held worldview. What actually changes people is feeling. People change when they feel something. So that's one of the reasons why I believe storytelling is so incredibly powerful. I was just part of a beautiful project here in Maine where we...had queer folks from all over the state, a good friend of mine is a beautiful portrait photographer and he volunteered his time and he took lovely portrait shots of them and then we got another community member who was a framer to frame them and everyone wrote their own little reflections and we put them up in a local coffee shop house to the exhibit and then

We really weren't sure who was going to show up, but all of a sudden, you know, the opening night came and there were like 200 people in the room. All of these, this whole community coming together to listen to these stories that are too often not told. And at the very least are not often told in people's own voices. We're very used to talking about queer people.

Culturally, but very rarely are queer people given, particularly just everyday queer folks, not leaders or I mean leaders in their own lives, but you know not you know people who are frequently given megaphones but just hearing from everyday folks about the way that they live and love and are trying to make a life in the world.

And the response has been gorgeous. We've had invitations from all over the state to bring the

exhibit around. We're gonna go do some exhibits in more rural areas that are grappling with homophobia and are trying to change and understand people who they may hear things about but don't personally know. I think that kind of storytelling opens an opportunity for people to see the world differently than if I just open up my book of statistics and I talk about the rate of trans suicide, that actually doesn't really change people's hearts and minds as much as seeing a beautiful picture of a trans person and hearing in their own voice the way that they're just trying to live a good moral life, a good life full of joy and tenderness the same way that everybody else is.

When you have that feeling it invites a different kind of change. And I think crying is tied all up in there, that if we can get people to the point where they are crying about people they do not know, they are going to feel connected to them in a way that transcends that individual experience, and all of a sudden they are now vested in their survival and their thriving in a way that they were not before.

Jerry Colonna:

I think that's beautifully said, beautifully said and well connected. You know, I agree with you that the transformation that we seek, in a sense, is rooted in our hearts, not in our minds. And it's opening that heart, allowing the heart to be broken, open, so that you can experience that other.

John A. Powell, the legal scholar and founder of the Center for Othering and Belonging, talks about our hyper-individualistic nature in our society. And in a sense, tears, or why tears matter, is because it is a pathway to break through that hyper-individualism that says you're there and I'm here, and your life doesn't matter as much as my life matters to me. And yet, every single wisdom tradition that we have developed as a species has said, no, you matter to me, and I matter to you, and together, we actually matter together.

Ben Perry:

Well, and one of the things that tears do is expose that lie, that lie that we are all living isolated and alone, that where our success is not connected to our neighbors, that our thriving is not interlinked. When we cry, it is this visceral, somatic affirmation of our interconnectedness.

Particularly the way that, you know, empathic tears function, the way that if I see you crying, Jerry, my own heart begins to feel tender. And we know that even for people who have been acculturated to the point where they see tears as a kind of weakness, if there's a big open ostentatious bout of weeping, like, people still respond, even if it is only to denigrate or to, like, there is some kind of feeling that gets dredged up because that's just who...are as humans, when somebody else is crying, our own spirit is disquieted. We see that, you know, really clearly in little kids. Anybody who's worked with, you know, toddlers knows that if you have a whole group of toddlers and one of them starts wailing, it's only a matter of time until the rest of them do, because they have not had that instinctive response to somebody else's suffering, you know, acculturated out of them.

I think that when we can feel that for ourselves, when we cultivate that vulnerability and tenderness, that bringing tears nearer to the surface, and we start all of a sudden feeling vicariously through other people in all these different kinds of ways, we see all of the interconnections that are of course always there. And it highlights just the brittleness of this masquerade that we are all individual autonomous units out for our own survival.

Jerry Colonna:

I think that that's a brilliant point and what I realize is that in some ways the tears represents the opposite of that brittleness it creates a flexibility it creates a feeling sense of resilience to withstand the suffering that is all around us.

Ben I want to thank you both for coming on the show and for writing *Cry Baby* I have a prejudice when it comes to books. And that is that I much prefer books where the author shows up and is themselves in the book. It's the way I like stories. And from the opening to the closing of this book, my friend Ben is there.

And that means a lot to me. I know that from my own process, it can be hard to put yourself out there. So I just want you to know that it's really appreciated. And I think it's an important book. And thank you so much for coming on the show to talk it through with me and helping me see things that I did not always see before.

Ben Perry:

Thanks so much for having me on the show, Jerry. It's been an absolute delight and tender wonder to get to have this conversation with you. Can I leave folks with the little benediction at the end of my book?

Jerry Colonna:

Oh, that would be wonderful.

Ben Perry:

This is a... I write the whole book and for the by and large it's a secular book at the end of a secular audience but, you know, professional habits die hard. So when I got to the end of the book I wanted to leave people with a blessing for crying. So this is that.

"If you've lost your tears, may you find them again. Know that you are never beyond redemption. and worthy of full emotional life. May crying nourish you, a balm for the wounds you still carry, and a salve on fresh hurt. As droplets fall, may they water new growth, and may our collective weeping shape a world better than the one we inherited. May we attune ourselves to grief and hold the places we are broken, repairers of the breach. May cries long silenced to be heard in full, yeast for our communal rising. Hold each other fiercely, not to build a future where every eye is dry, but one where we weep copiously from the joy and tenderness of living."