

PONDERINGS ALONG THE PATH

By Nadine Boyd

Dear Compassionate Friends:

Last week our pastor spoke on faith and said a wise nun once said "faith doesn't give you answers; faith gives you courage". I wish Pastor Elizabeth would have given the author tribute, as I was unable to find it.

A friend whose family had suffered many medical traumas in the last several years and I were visiting once, and she wondered how much more strength she had to get through the ups and downs their family still faces. You are always told "God doesn't give you any more than you can handle", and we both agreed that sometimes we wished God didn't have quite so much confidence in us.

It is hard to understand why some people constantly seem to be "put to the test" through no fault of their own, whether it is serious illness, financial setbacks, or cruelest of all (as all of us know) to lose a child or sibling.

Most of us struggle with our spirituality while grieving. We wonder if our faith is strong enough to bear this terrible burden, we wonder how and why God could have let our child die, and a lot of us are pretty angry that our child died in spite of all our prayers. It took a very long time to realize I always prayed that Aaron could be healthy and happy. It never occurred to me to pray that he wouldn't die; that was so unacceptable I couldn't even consider it. It took a very long time to realize that Aaron became happy and healthy when he went to Heaven. The point is that my prayers were answered, but not in the specific way I wished.

Most of all we wonder if the loss of our child is some kind of "punishment" from God. We don't understand. We feel singled out and resentful and confused that this happened to us. We seek explanations and answers to our confusion and bewilderment. Sometimes well-meaning people who are trying to comfort us assure us "you are so brave! I just could not go on if anything happened to my child!" I always wanted to respond by throwing myself on the floor and yelling "I don't want to be brave! Someone else do this!" I always wondered if they thought they loved their child more than I loved mine because I was being "so brave". Well, we certainly didn't pray for this kind of courage. I may not have been so "brave", but I had another little child who needed me in this world and I had to go on for his sake. Gradually we realize that God didn't "take" our child. We are not being punished or singled out for something we did or didn't do. Bad things just happen, and they can and do happen to good people.

As time begins to heal our intense grief we realize that we are stronger than we think, and we carry on the best that we can. At first, we struggle on autopilot to get through the numbness and shock. Athletes talk about "muscle memory". Muscle memory is basically tasks we have repeated or practiced so frequently the brain doesn't even have to tell the muscles how to perform that task—we don't have to "think it through". Even after the human body is stretched to the very limits of its endurance it "remembers" to continue competing or functioning. This "muscle memory" is a survival tool very helpful to our human bodies going through such stress, regardless of whether we are competing in a sport or trying to survive grief. So we travel down the path to healing; step by step and often one step forward, two steps back. We try to rein in our anger when we hit the "anger" stage of grief, and day by day get a little stronger and more courageous. We also learn what really matters and who we can count on to be there for us and help us through the dark times.

Another quote that we hear is "what doesn't kill us makes us stronger". We might feel many times that we could die from grief and may want to, but here we are—stronger, braver, more compassionate, and more caring.

A thought that has brought me a lot of comfort is that God doesn't "take" our children—he welcomes them to Heaven. I sign off with another beautiful quote from Henry Ward Beecher, a reverend and social activist. He said "**Children are the hands by which we take hold of heaven**". Our children brought us a piece of heaven when they came to us, and we take comfort in the certainty we will someday join them in that heaven to which they have returned.

I pray for your continued strength and healing, continued courage in your journey of healing, and wish you comfort and beauty in the sweet memories of your child or sibling—your "piece of heaven".

In friendship,

Nadine

