



Faith During Grief Is Like Insurance

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*“Faith is not the
absence of fear, but the
willingness to go on
when fear is present.”*

The summer of 2011 will be remembered as a season of violent storms, and it will be marked by the many lives that were turned upside down by the havoc of mother nature. Tornadoes ravished Alabama. Hurricane Irene washed the east coast and eleven states with flooding and chaos. Winds and driving rain ravaged the country creating destruction, and flood waters broke records from a half-century ago. People were trapped in their homes. Rescue crews worked to dig through the rubble for survivors or bodies of those not so fortunate. The devastation was so wide-spread from many of these storms that it took days and weeks to confirm its toll in human and property losses.

Insurance companies stepped up to the challenge to help displaced victims. Adjusters witnessed total loss and the numbers of claims soared. Disaster assistance programs kicked in to help people across the nation. As people stricken with disaster scrambled to identify their losses, others quickly submitted insurance claims. Many hoped their losses would be covered by their wise investment in proper insurance.

Some personal items that were lost could never be replaced. Lives changed by the storms would never be the same. There would always be the memory of an individual's nightmare experience. For those people, there was nothing more they could do than rely on the faith they had in their insurance policies to help them recover some of their loss and begin to rebuild their lives.

Faith is like insurance

Faith may be defined as: “a strong or unshakeable belief or loyalty and trust to a person or thing.”

When we are grieving, faith is a lot like insurance. It's there to protect us and help us, but it can't prevent bad things from happening. Storms happen. Fires destroy. Accidents prevail. Sickness and disease threaten life. Death occurs.

Life hands us tragedy, challenges and lemons. But a wise investment in an insurance policy *before* the disaster helps us feel secure that we are in “good hands.” The policy is there to help us pick up the pieces and restore some

normalcy to life. It doesn't promise to restore what was lost; it just assures us that it understands what we lost, and it will do its best to help us recover.

Isn't that how the principle of faith should work in grief? When life has been turned upside down by the loss of someone loved, many of us rely on our faith to guide us through. We believe that the stamina we built over the years in our spiritual self-worth will help us restore meaning, purpose and dignity to our shattered lives. Instinctively, we know it can't restore what we have lost, but we also trust that it can guide us through the difficult days ahead.

When Faith is Challenged

Without a faith system, or when our faith system is wavering, we may not tolerate the unbearable pain and loss quite as well. We may feel abandoned when we need God most. We may be angry at God and act out against the principles that we once thought could protect us through just about anything. We are afraid. We stumble, and we lose the grip that kept our lives in balance. We falter. We are human; we are hurt.

My faith was shaken by my loss. When my son died as a result of suicide, I felt abandoned and very angry. I couldn't understand why this had happened to me. Initially, I wasn't willing to allow my faith to help me through the early days. I wanted to rebel and fight against things I couldn't control. I felt helpless and fearful and most of all disabled because of my sorrow.

Looking back, I realize that my anger escalated because I couldn't control what had happened. It wasn't until months later, that I realized that God wasn't hiding from my anger and threats, nor did He abandon me. He was there all the time probably trying to console me, but I couldn't hear Him. I couldn't feel Him because His touch was soft and loving, and I had grown angry and unapproachable. I couldn't feel Him because I lost my sensitivity to human touch. I couldn't hear him because my head was filled with the sound of the inner voice of self pity. I couldn't see Him because my tears clouded the vision of His heavenly countenance in my prayers. All the years I had invested in my religion and my faith, were overshadowed by my lack of confidence in the "one" absolute foundation that could restore my hope.

I was in good hands, and I had something that could help restore normalcy to my life if I just used my investment wisely. I could collect on all the benefits it offered me. My policy was paid in full and executable on demand. It was waiting for me to submit my claim.

It's not uncommon during grief to rethink your relationship with God and evaluate your religious or spiritual belief system. Both are in jeopardy after you've experienced one of life's most difficult challenges. Faith may not be

destroyed during grief, but it may be challenged. This is a normal consequence of grief and typically is temporary.

In a community after natural disaster strikes, residents, neighbors and friends work together to restore order where chaos has turned the world upside-down. Their unselfish gestures of goodwill give us faith in the common good of man. We recognize that we are not alone. We can have the same self-assurance through our faith.

When faith grows stronger during grief.

Some people grow even stronger in their faith after loss. They are not challenged by setbacks, anger or disbelief. They are single-minded and rely heavily on the insurance they've established. They have few doubts, and their trust is absolute, so they feel secure and protected. They use their faith to focus on finding hope in something greater.

Everyone has the opportunity to get to that point, even though it may take some time to reestablish a trusting relationship with God. Once we have expressed the anger and bitterness that devoured us, we find that faith is the one stable thing we can rely on. It is the foundation of support that carried us through other life adversities. All the senselessness and frustration make a full circle and allow us to see that faith (though not seen) is predictable.

A minister at a recent bereavement convention we went to explained his anger with God after the death of his eighteen-year-old son who had died in his sleep. He admitted that before his son's death he felt protected or exempt from having something this terrible happen to him. He was a man of God and had dedicated his life to God. In his book, *Life After the Death of my Son,* Dennis Apple describes his struggle that lasted over a decade. He felt unworthy to preach God's message. But he knew that he couldn't pretend that because he was faithful, he would not have bad things happen in his life. It took time for him to recognize that his faith, though challenged, was the only thing he had to depend on.

Just as I need to review my insurance policy occasionally to see that it covers all possible disasters, I need to review my relationship with God to assure myself that my faith can sustain me when life throws me a curveball. It requires investing in sound principles and educating myself on the benefits it offers. It means establishing trust, so when the next rainy day slips into my life or the next storm turns my world inside out, I can feel confident that I've done all that I can do to cushion my fall and put me back on track. There is no way to predict grief's impact on my life when it happens. Since each grief experience is unique, the only way to be prepared for its inevitable affect is to practice my faith, believe in its value, and trust in my investment. Even faith can't promise to restore all that I've lost, but it can assure me that it understands what I've lost, and it will do its best to help me recover.