

GRIEVING THE LOSS OF A CHILD

TWO CC BELIEVERS SHARE LESSONS LEARNED FROM THEIR PAINFUL JOURNEYS

Story by Christmas Beeler
Photos courtesy of the Taylor and Alfred families



Sitting quietly on his couch in June 2013, Pastor Ed Taylor was plunged into the deepest despair he had ever known. His oldest son, Eddie, had died unexpectedly a few weeks earlier. Ed's staff at Calvary Chapel Aurora, CO, gave him time off to process, to heal. But Ed didn't know how. So he just sat, feeling the dark, heavy sorrow that engulfed his heart and mind. He would never see his son again, this side of heaven. A young police officer, his son Eddie had seemed in the peak of health, training to join the California Highway Patrol. Ed's heart hurt as he thought of Eddie's love for the Lord, his passion for serving the church and keeping his community safe, and his joy over his first child—a son named Levi. A son who would grow up without his father.

For weeks, Ed couldn't think, couldn't focus, couldn't keep his mind on any task. He tried to pull himself out of it. He knew his other two children and his wife Marie needed him. But he just couldn't move.

"I felt like I'd been punched in the gut—multiple, repetitive times—with no opportunity to catch my breath. I was in shock," Ed remembered. "Then I felt God speak to me, telling me that I had to get up, get moving—that I couldn't sit there forever." He thought of Abraham, to whom God

instructed, **"Go forth ... to the land which I will show you"** (Genesis 12:1b, NASB). So Ed obeyed, taking his family to church.

"God enabled me to get up. I visited other churches so that I could worship with the family of God, enjoying anonymity as a worshiper, to regain strength from the Lord." And God did strengthen him, then impressed on him to return to his own church "to lead and serve and teach and love the flock," Ed recalled. It was a painful journey, grieving publicly, answering questions about his son's death every week—even watching some leave the church because of their pastor's new "weakness," as they called it. Yet the Lord renewed Ed's soul and comforted the grieving father with His presence.

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. PSALM 34:18, NIV

Crushed and Rebuilt

"Grief absolutely destroyed me," the pastor recalled. "I don't know any other way to put it. I really didn't think I would come back, in every realm of my life—even in the pulpit. I didn't think I would make it through. When my son died, something inside me died. I'm different. I am

servant again, and God is using me—but I'm definitely not the same guy I was six years ago."

Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. HOSEA 6:1

What helped Ed most was the reality of God's presence. "It's as if God shows up in our pain; but in reality, He's always there. What changes is our recognition of His presence. He is there in our time of need; and we are awakened to His presence, His Word, His ministry to us."

Walking the path of grief has also birthed new growth in his life. "It's a paradox: The loss of my son actually added much to my life—more compassion for people, more patience, more dependence on God."

Helping Those in Grief

He is grateful for that season of healing with the Lord. "Telling a person who is grieving to 'move on' is the worst thing you can say. You don't move on from grief. You can move forward or upward, but you don't move on," Ed explained. "We will never 'get over it.' This May it will be six years; I think of my son Eddie every single day."

Ed is transparent about his grief journey, often reaching out to others who have lost a loved one. "Too often we jump in and try to fix things. Grief is not something you fix; it's a path, a journey. Everyone experiences grief: when you lose a loved one, a marriage, a job. Sometimes grief comes from a traumatic experience."

Listening is essential. "First I try to affirm the reality of the emotion they are going through—whether they are angry or sad. As believers, we sometimes try to talk people out of their emotions rather than bring them to the presence of Jesus. Remember, Jesus displayed grief and sorrow in a righteous way," he said, citing when Jesus wept with Mary before healing her brother Lazarus (John 11). "We need to listen to that person, get to know them, and be open to the Holy Spirit. We need to let them express themselves without judgment, give them time to trust us. Then when we do open the Bible, they will receive it, and it will be a seed firmly planted in their heart."

THE LOSS OF A SON

Top right: The Taylor family holds favorite pictures of their dear Eddie, departed in 2013. Left to right are his brother Joshua, mom Marie, dad Pastor Ed of CC Aurora, CO, and sister Caitlin.



LOSING A DAUGHTER

Bible scholar Justin Alfred and his wife Janie lost their daughter Ashley, age 19, in 2006 after she was possibly pushed from a car by her ex-boyfriend.

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.
PSALM 147:3

Sorrow and Comfort

Well-known Bible scholar Justin Alfred and his wife Janie lost their daughter Ashley, 19, to a violent young man soon after Ashley had his child and gave the baby up for adoption. Janie was no stranger to tragedy, having lost both parents at age 22.

“When my parents and sister were killed in that plane crash, God gave me Psalm 139, which says He appointed our days. I knew Satan hadn’t ripped me off,” Janie recalled. “But when Ashley was killed, I said, *Lord, I know You comforted me when I lost my mom and dad and sister—but this is my daughter. Yes, I know she is in heaven, but I wanted her here.* Death had never seemed so final to me as when she was killed.”

Still, even on the hardest days, she recounted, “Jesus met me every single time. He was so faithful.” In the hospital waiting room, two Christian women she didn’t know took her hands and prayed with her. Then, as Janie sat at

the bedside where Ashley lay dead, a lady chaplain came in on her day off. “She said that her son had been murdered a year ago, and she wanted to share with me the comfort God had given her. The words she spoke were like words from heaven—straight from God. I went back later to bring her flowers, and nobody knew who she was. I don’t know if she was an angel or what. But I saw God’s faithfulness in it.”

May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant. PSALM 119:76, NIV

God even brought comfort through Ashley’s friends at the Christian high school where Janie was a Bible teacher. Janie recalled, “The next few days after she was killed, I was crying all the time. There was pain and sadness, but there was a comfort there. My students came to me: ‘Keep your eyes on the Lord; trust in the Lord.’ That’s what God has done—given me this outpouring of His love from fellow believers. It was so abundant and so comforting—just amazing,” she testified. “God made us strong. I can’t take any credit for it—it was just like a medicine, the balm of Gilead.”

God Uses the Pain

Feeling led by God, Janie was open and honest with her students: “It became an opportunity to warn these young people. I told them, ‘Ashley’s boyfriend claimed to be a Christian, but look what happens when you get with someone who doesn’t have their eyes on the Lord, who asks you to do things against His Word.’ And they listened. God has brought many benefits and opportunities from it.”

Another time, a woman whose daughter was murdered approached Janie at a retreat. She had bottled up her grief and fear for nearly 20 years, and it had affected her other daughter. “This woman started sharing with us—it was like a dam had burst in this woman and in her daughter. It was like the daughter was set free from her fear. God showed me that He could take something so hard and use it for His glory, to show that what He did for me He can do for others. I have been comforted by God that I might be able to comfort others.” She reflected, “And the more that I have shared with others, the more I have been comforted by God.”

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the

comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.
2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

At a church in New Mexico, Justin testified about forgiving Ashley’s killer. Janie related, “A man there had quit going to church. His son had been murdered; the killer was in jail. This man was just eaten up and was going to commit suicide. He couldn’t forgive the guy who did it. That morning he came to church.” The man was so touched by the Alfreds’ story that he came to them afterward, confessing his anger and suicidal intentions. “He went to lunch with us, and we got to share with him. The Holy Spirit changed this man; he was able to forgive that murderer.” The man began attending church. “He started going on mission trips. It’s been awesome to see what the Lord has done in his life. All credit is to God, to put us in those places in those times.”

The greatest blessing in this tragedy for the Alfreds has been knowing their biological grandson. Adopted by a nearby Christian family just before Ashley’s death, he is now 13 years old. When in third grade, he was asked to write about his hero. Janie recounted, “He wrote, ‘My birth mom was my hero. She loved me so much that she gave me to my mom and dad.’ That has been one of the greatest blessings to me, that he knew she loved him.”

Rejecting Bitterness

The murder investigation revealed that the father of Ashley’s child had been cruel, manipulative, and violent with her for two years before Ashley was killed that day—yet Janie and Justin knew they could not hate him. “Years before, Justin’s unforgiveness toward his own father nearly destroyed our marriage. He was angry, and I grew bitter toward Justin. But God brought us through that and taught us the value of forgiveness; He restored our marriage. I believe God was preparing us for when our daughter was murdered. We knew that we couldn’t let bitterness take hold of us again.”

Justin holds a black belt in karate, Janie explained, “So he knew how to hurt him. But the Lord spoke to his heart: that Justin’s vengeance is impure, imperfect, and incomplete—and that God’s justice is pure and perfect. He also gave him Psalm 46:10a, *‘Be still, and know that I am God.’* Be still (*raphah*) means to ‘let it drop,’ to let drop his hands—his weapons—and to trust God. I believe that’s where his healing started. ... We pray for [the killer’s] salvation; we don’t want him to go to hell.”

FINAL WORDS OF FAITH



Peter-John Courson, son of Pastor Jon Courson of Applegate Christian Fellowship in Jacksonville, OR, died on Feb. 5, 2019, from cancer. The 42-year-old co-pastored Applegate with his father and brother, wrote two books, and has hosted a daily radio program/podcast. According to his father, “He’s had 20 years of non-stop medical difficulties,” including Crohn’s disease and surgery for a brain tumor. “He faced death unflinchingly. Nothing speaks louder or more impactfully than the way he navigated pain and difficulties, trials, and ongoing challenges. Pete is living his best life [now, in heaven],” Jon stated.

Following is an excerpt of Peter-John’s last teaching message to his church family, delivered less than a month before he went to be with the Lord:

Following is an excerpt of Peter-John’s last teaching message to his church family, delivered less than a month before he went to be with the Lord:

I don’t know what tomorrow holds. Neither do you. But I have a peace from God in my heart that’s guarding my mind and soul.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. PHILIPPIANS 4:7

The peace that I have within me is incalculable. I have never [before] had this kind of joy within me in terms of what my future holds. I have [heaven] ahead of me. And it’s not just a distant future—it’s getting closer.

Here’s the bottom line. We all agree that Jesus is the Son of God who died and rose again from the dead. And we know that He’s coming back again ... and we have this hope. I am so thankful, excited to see what’s going to happen in my life in the next day, week, or month; and in your life, as well, because we’re all in this together. As believers in Christ, we’re all heading to heaven together. I can’t wait.

She testified, “Through those very difficult times, God grew us and taught us what it meant to know Him and walk with Him and partake of His faithfulness.” ***Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness*** (Psalm 37:3).

Pastor Ed Taylor also made a conscious choice to reject bitterness. When well-meaning believers said painful things, “At first I was shocked, but then I realized that they were trying to connect with me, to relate with me in some way. So I chose to see it in that light.”

Looking carefully ... lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.

HEBREWS 12:15

In his online article, “From Bitterness to Betterness,” Pastor Ed writes, “Bitterness is always waiting for a place to take root in our lives. The loss of a loved one is a common opening for bitterness to fester, especially the loss of a child.” He refers to the widow Naomi in the Book of Ruth who spoke “from the depths of pain: ‘Don’t call me pleasant, call me bitter.’ She even blamed God for the losses. Yet God was in the midst of this situation even if she didn’t see or feel it. So often in times of death, we ... blame God, especially with deaths that feel so untimely. Thank God that Jesus Christ has overcome sin and death!” Ed added, “We all face the temptation of bitterness. As we experience the deaths of loved ones, of dreams, of desires, bitterness is waiting to take control. Yet our hope in Christ is an anchor of our souls lifting us upward. Trust Him.”

God Meets Us in Our Pain

“You may be in so much pain right now that you’re afraid to tell anyone,” Ed shares on his website. “God is able to work in your life right where you are. He is able to get

you through it—just you and Jesus.” And He is the only One who can, Ed added, “for the things of the world cannot fill those broken places in our hearts.” Ed cited the sure, personal promise of God: ***“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me”*** (Psalm 50:15).

“When our son Eddie died in 2013,” Ed said, “our lives became one long cry for His presence and His help: *Don’t give me something, Lord. Give me You!* God uses these times to get more of us and to give us more of Him. He wants our whole heart offered afresh to Him.”

Ed added, “It’s easy to think that if we only understood, it would be easier. I don’t think so; the pain would still be there. The answer to our grief is not understanding, but faith: trusting that our God is with us, that all of our suffering is temporary, and the blessings of heaven await.”

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. ROMANS 8:18

“The Word of God is the greatest consolation and comfort we have, as we know His Word and trust Him,” Janie said. “The enemy wants you to be mad at God, to turn away from God. It’s okay to ask God those questions, to cry out to the Lord—the psalmist did. He would always come back to God: ***‘But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head’*** (Psalm 3:3, KJV). Or like Job, ***I know that my Redeemer lives*** (19:25a). In other words, ‘I know my Redeemer lives and loves me.’ To know His love is to partake of His love. I’m so thankful that I have that relationship with the Lord. He sustains me.” 📖

edttaylor.org/category/grief

5 THINGS NOT TO SAY TO YOUR GRIEVING FRIEND

from Pastor Ed Taylor

- **“I know exactly how you feel.”** You don’t; every grief is different. Instead say, *“I’m deeply sorry for the pain you’re feeling.”* (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)
- **“How are you?”** Obviously, they are likely doing horrible. Focus on the present moment: *“How are you right now?”* (Psalm 46:1)
- **“You’ll get over it.”** Death is not something a person gets over. It is more encouraging to say, *“I pray for you regularly.”* (Philippians 1:3-4)
- **“God works all things together for the good of those who love Him.”** True, but at the wrong moment it could be misunderstood or hurtful. Instead say, *“Jesus loves you. He understands grief.”* (Isaiah 53:3)
- **“You look pretty bad today.”** Pointing out the obvious can seem critical. Express concern: *“I love you and haven’t forgotten you.”* (Proverbs 15:13)