

GOD PROVES HIS FAITHFULNESS AS A FLORIDA PASTOR AND HIS WIFE WALK THROUGH GRIEF AND DARKNESS

LEARNING ON THE WORD OF GOD

Story by Margot Bass
Photos by Justus Martin

Doug Sauder, lead pastor of Calvary Chapel Ft. Lauderdale, FL (CCFL), and his wife Suzanne have experienced many moments of laughter and joy. Other times, however, were filled with grief and sadness. “It’s in those darkest of moments when God sometimes speaks the loudest,” Suzanne testified. After losing three babies in one devastating year, they learned the only way through the pain was to lean on the Word of God and trust in His faithfulness.

He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved. PSALM 62:6

Devastating News

Suzanne, seven months pregnant in 1996, stood in shock in her baby’s nursery. She had just been told that her child



might be the carrier of a genetic disorder that could take his life. As she and Doug, who was then teaching children with behavioral disorders in Miami, FL, got closer to the due date, she held onto hope, thinking, *I have the faith to move a mountain. My baby is not going to have this. Our church is praying. I believe this beyond a shadow of a doubt.*

When the hospital staff laid her little boy, Jordan, in her arms, a wave of shock hit, as he had the disorder. “At that moment, everything went still,” Suzanne recalled. They were in and out of the hospital for the next nine months. “We got to enjoy this precious little boy. I treasure those nine months before he passed away in my arms,” she said.

She remembers standing at his gravesite as a surreal moment; she was unable to cry as Doug openly grieved the loss. “It was almost like I wasn’t even there. I saw the little

white box, thinking, *Is this really happening? Is that my little boy in a little white box?*” Yet what she didn’t know that day was that she was already pregnant again. In the midst of mourning, she saw God’s hand of grace moving. But within two weeks of discovering her pregnancy, she miscarried. And seven months later she miscarried again.

Moving Beyond Darkness

“At that point, I was very shaken. In fact, it was like a shroud of darkness that came in and covered my soul,” she admitted. Whatever she tried, she couldn’t shake it. “Not only were my circumstances all shaken up, but even my faith. After the third loss, I asked the Lord, *What are You doing to me? How much can I endure, and where are You in all of this?* And the ‘why’ questions started to come.”

In a moment of extreme darkness, Suzanne learned the value of worship and that God inhabits the praise of His people (Psalm 22:3). Unable even to pray for herself, she had called a friend to pray for her. “I couldn’t take in mentally what she was saying; but I still knew there was power in it.” After hanging up, she felt the Lord tell her to turn on her music and worship Him. Driving, she put on a worship song in her car and kept playing it over and over, at first just listening and then willing herself to sing. “I remember pulling into my destination 20 minutes later, singing at the top of my lungs. With tears streaming down, all I could say was ‘God’s promises are true.’” In that moment of worship, she felt the darkness that had plagued her leave, and light return. She added, “We must believe His promises with every fiber of our being. And claim them.”

I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel; my heart also instructs me in the night seasons. I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. PSALM 16:7-9, 11

Life moved on and in 1998, the couple adopted a newborn boy they called Jackson whose name means “God is gracious.” She gave birth to another son, Kaden, in 2000. “He’s our miracle baby, and not a carrier of the genetic disorder,” Suzanne stated. During that time, they also fostered several children, adopting a 2-year-old boy named Kennedy in 2004. God restored their dream of family, one powerful miracle at a time.

Doug joined the staff of Calvary Chapel Ft. Lauderdale in 2000, stepping into leadership of a new foster care ministry; it eventually merged with a community provider to become an independent parachurch ministry called 4KIDS of South Florida. “It’s all about a home for every child,” Suzanne explained. The pastors asked Doug to serve in the role after learning of the family’s story of adoption, she added. Doug served as 4KIDS’ president and as a CCFL family pastor until he became lead pastor in 2014.

The loss of the babies and resulting depression have positively shaped Suzanne, she admits. “I wouldn’t raise my hand to ever walk through the experience again, but I wouldn’t change the fruit of it,” she related. “It grew our marriage closer. I now have these incredible sons. It catapulted us into foster care ministry and adoptions.” She also has a platform to speak into the brokenness of people’s lives. “It’s helped me to see people through different lenses.

We’ve all walked through grief and darkness; I know there can be a hope and a glory to our stories that’s found in Jesus Christ.”

Learning from the Pain

Over the past 20 years, God has shown Suzanne that He is always faithful, she recounted. She has walked out that truth in every season and helps others in their journey toward hope as she leads alongside Doug. “Remember the promise that the Lord is with you in those moments and what God has already done in your life,” she shared. “**Lo, I [Jesus] am with you always, even to the end of the age**” (Matthew 28:20b). “When your eyes get off your circumstances and onto His majesty and glory, strength is infused into your soul. That builds trust and hope.”

Reading God’s Word, praying, and worship “really kept me alive during the darkest of days,” Suzanne confirmed. Every day for months, she and Doug read Isaiah 61:3: “**To console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness..., that He may be glorified.**” She advised, “There is power in the Word of God. It is living and active, and when you are going through a bad time, you grab it and find promises in it. I’ve purposed to embrace opportunities to enjoy the life God has blessed us with.”



The Sauder family of Calvary Chapel Ft. Lauderdale, FL (left to right): Kaden, Suzanne, Doug, Kennedy, and Jackson