Spirituality
Soul Seeing



(Unsplash/Sven Brandsma)



by Becky Eldredge

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

April 20, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

I plopped down on our couch next to my husband one ordinary weeknight evening a few months ago with a sigh of relief. My body welcomed the comfort of my pajamas as a sign that it had made it through another day. My mind greeted the couch cushion as a sign that it had permission to begin turning off the million thoughts that ran through it daily. My spirit was weary from surviving another day of accompanying my grieving children. I yearned desperately for rest. I leaned back, closed my eyes, and felt the softness of the couch holding my own aching and grieving body. I offered another prayer of help, wondering if God was tired of my desperate pleas that I uttered in angst all day:

> God, we made it through today. Thank you. May our children rest tonight. Help them. Help us. Help me not lose hope.

A year earlier, we lost a young person very close to us by suicide. The night of his death created a seismic earthquake in our lives. Grief felt like it consumed every ounce of joy in our children and in us. The loss of their smiles, their laughter and their joy widened my own grief. Day after day, night after night, we all just put the next step forward. It felt like survival daily. This night, as I collapsed on the couch, it felt no different.

With my prayer finished, I opened my eyes and reached for the remote control, preparing to help my brain relax before facing another possible night of restless sleep. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw our middle daughter making her way from the kitchen into our den toward us. I could feel myself brace for the tears or hard questions she might bring this evening. The ache in my motherly heart began to throb.

As she approached, I saw and heard something so exquisite it took my breath away. Her smile. A glimmer of light in her eyes. She laughed.

She stood hovering over us telling us a story from her day. She radiated with joy. I soaked in the beauty of this daughter of ours. I felt awestruck. I fought tears back as she laughed again. Her laugh pushed back the darkness of my heart and filled me with hope. She finished her story and then turned and went back the way she came, her laughter continuing to reverberate in my entire being.

Advertisement

My husband and I looked at each other, neither of us able to speak. We simply held each other's gaze and let the tears pour down both our faces, both knowing we'd just experienced a life-altering moment of hope. When we were finally able to speak, we laughed in disbelief and said in awe, "Abby's laugh returned."

For days, Chris and I talked in wonder, savoring the gift of her laugh. We both felt scared to fully trust its return. We would talk and chuckle in disbelief. Our laughter reminded me of the laughter of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis (Genesis 17:15-17; Genesis 18:10-15; Genesis 21:1-6). God told them that the longing of their heart would be answered through finally having a child. They laughed in disbelief, half hoping that God could answer their prayers and half doubting it could be true. The miracle did happen for them. They bore a son and named him Isaac, which means "one who laughs or rejoices." Like Abraham and Sarah, the miracle happened before our eyes, but we were still not sure if the return of her laugh was real and here to stay.

A week or so later, Abby came and flopped on our bed before bedtime with a smile on her face, a glimmer in her eyes and joy in her voice. She shared about her day and we heard it again: her laugh, piercing the darkness, sounding the cry of hope. Our laughter joined hers that evening, making a chorus of joy deepening belief in me that death and grief was not the end of her story, of her siblings' stories — or of our family's story.

I fell asleep that night with renewed hope. I believed in the return of her laughter. The prayers we offered to God that night were ones of gratitude that there was more than the darkness of death in our lives, and that somehow God began to move us out of darkness and into light.

The ups and downs of grief remain in our family, but we are buoyed in hope: hope that sounds like the laugh of our daughter and looks like the glimmer of light in her eyes; hope that appeared one ordinary weekday evening peering over our couch; hope that continues to expand.

It feels very fitting that the laughter that birthed hope in all of us came from our daughter Abby's mouth. There was no better prophet to herald the return of hope than her. After all, her full name — Abigail — means "my father's joy."