Spirituality
Soul Seeing



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When I was a young girl growing up on our farm, I was at one with the joy of living: free-spirited, barefoot, climbing trees, lugging my pet chicken Henny Penny around, swinging from ropes in the barn hayloft, best friends with the cows and horses. When a calf was sick, Dad said, "There's no animal Joni can't heal," which made me beam.

I was hands-on, waded in the creek with my sister, pestered Grandma in the garden and was a disaster in helping with the dishes. There was always something beckoning, something to explore and wonder about.

One day, I began to get pangs in my legs, deep in the bone. It became difficult to run, and I ended up crying in my twin bed under my dancing girl bedspread, lamenting, "What is wrong with me?!"

Mom came and sat on my bed and said in a matter-of-fact voice, "It's from growing pains."

What? I had never heard of that, but time proved Mom right. I got taller and the pains went away. Thus began my lifelong journey in understanding that the pangs of growing up can be painful in a multitude of ways.

Now at age 73, I am still going through the pangs, as are we all. The Bible has a number of references to this very thing, especially regarding birth pangs. I saw many births on the farm and understood well that when the old gray mother cat was in labor, in the end, kittens were born — something wonderful!

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That was an early lesson, and as I recall it now, I can see that adult spiritual growing pangs can lead to renewal, transformation, redemption and grace. But, alas, it is not always easy and the process can be complicated.

The Free Dictionary describes a pang as "a sudden sharp feeling of mental or emotional distress or longing: a pang of desire, guilt, regret, excitement or twinge of conscience, a pang in the heart." To me, the pangs of grief and sorrow are at the deepest levels. We tragically lost our 17-year-old son in 1999, and to this day the timeless, profound pangs of grief penetrate our hearts. What gives birth to comfort

when this happens is extreme inner kindness to self. That quality must be there in order to console the soul.

As Daniel Goleman writes in his compelling book *Emotional Intelligence*, "The art of soothing ourselves is a fundamental life skill: some psychoanalytic thinkers ... see this as one of the most essential of all psychic tools."

When my husband completed his psychology internship at the time, this idea helped us a lot. To us, God is the epitome of kindness, the pang of eternal love that encourages us when we need it most.

More recently, I've been feeling edgy about nine upcoming medical appointments I have on my calendar. Dread becomes a pang that brings anxiety. I try to remember the Surrender Novena that Michael Leach recently wrote about, and the words, "God, you take care of it."

This perception does not mean we get to avoid an ordeal. Action is still required, but the mantra helps bring serenity to the soul as long as we make a point to remember it by allowing not only distressing thoughts to be a pang, but uplifting thoughts.

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All these growing pangs we experience as we age are a language of the soul. They speak to us of inner wounds, joy, comfort and healing. Rather than resisting the ghastly pangs of fear and stress when they deliver a gut punch to the psyche, we need to listen to the potential full messages they bring that offer positivity and help.

As I write this in Minnesota, an arctic blast has moved in, with wind chills below -38 degrees. I look out the window and see our small herd of eight deer standing nervously in the extreme weather at the fence, waiting for the corn my husband puts out. They are our sweethearts, and a pang of worry for their well-being floods through me.

Then, our neighbor's tiger cat with half an ear missing peers apprehensively in the glass kitchen door looking for a snack. Filled with pangs of compassion, I set out a cup of warm water and a bit of meat, as I always do.

Our emotions are a gift, an essential part of what it means to be human. Psalm 31:15 says, "My times are in your hand," and to me, I like to think of our pangs being held in God's palm as well: a sacred place of safety, care, respect and understanding of our feelings from childhood to old age.

When I envision how all-encompassing that loving image is, a pang of gratitude fills my heart like a gentle tide flowing in.

Yes, it is something wonderful.

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