

An unexpected gift for Christmas 2016

This year I cannot help but meditate on the real meaning of Christmas. Sometimes we receive an unexpected gift.

After Dennis's death, I saw how profoundly different, people experience the same situation. It has happened over and over, in many different contexts and I kept trying to understand what was the real difference.

As I struggled trying to understand, I started asking, the source I go to, **God**; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for clarity and understanding. Anyone who has experienced cataracts knows that your vision becomes foggy, and colors lack their vibrancy and seem muddied. Then I started to see. Just as it is when cataracts are removed. Clarity! The colors and crisp items that were always there become visible. In this circumstance, the clarity I received was that **Faith** provided an amazing protection, I had not quite understood until that moment. Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the **assurance** of things hoped for, the **conviction** of things not seen". The rest of Hebrews 11 gives examples of ancient individuals walking out faith.

Then the clarity continued:

- By faith, we put our trust in our All Loving, All Knowing God, as we walked beside our son, Dennis for almost 12 years with schizophrenia.
- By faith, I could hear from God that his Glory was not dependent on my son's healing. He would walk us through, promising to never leave us or forsake us.
- By faith, we could value the times Dennis experienced clarity and celebrate by enjoying him, not missing out on those moments.
- By faith, I wrote down the many lessons God has taught me along the way, and I am in awe.
- By faith, I could watch my family be healed from past hurts and resentments and truly grow to love Dennis as he was; understanding his poor brain was broken.
- By faith, we could experience November 2, 2016, in gratefulness.
- By faith, I could be calm for hours not hearing word of Dennis's fate.
- By faith, I could find my first-born son, dead, (the Battle of the mind was gone) and be grateful his heart was still intact and see and feel he looked peaceful.
- By faith, I could be so concerned for my other sons, wellbeing that the thought would come to me to address, the difficulty they must have felt all these years watching Billy and I taking care of Dennis, and picking up the pieces. Yet at that moment, to experience the gift of not having any regrets. None! No, I wish I would of..., if only I had..., what if we had done... None!
- By faith, we could immediately be grateful that we knew, Dennis was home, and he had not just disappeared somewhere and we would never know if he was dead or alive.
- By faith, we as a family could come together and see God in the situation and seek His truth about suicide.
- By faith, we together as a family allow Shawn to help find the words to gently explain to the children in a way they could understand about Uncle Dennis's broken brain, and him taking his life.

- By faith, we could have a desire to reach out of our own pain, and want to help others who may be going through similar, difficult circumstances. And not fear shame as we were honest about mental illness.
- By faith, Mike could share with boldness and hope to his friends that were so broken, that God has the final word, even in suicide, and once we are His, no one or no force can snatch us out of His hands.
- By faith, others would come to us and share stories we did not know during the Banner House years, and we could experience a healing of relationships that had once been broken.
- By faith, we could still be standing as we experienced the blessing of an amazing outpouring of God's love at the service, and beyond.
- By faith, less than 3 weeks after, I could walk into church Sunday morning and teach a class on Acts 16, and when I got to the part about Paul and Silas, praying and worshiping God in jail, not to get something, but because of who He is. I knew I was right where I was supposed to be as I could share the difference in the worlds understanding of freedom and God's, because I had been taught this lesson several years before along this journey.
- By faith, I could stand on the truth that since God has walked us through all of this he is not going to desert us now, as Billy struggled with unknown high fevers and hospitalizations, less than a month after our son's death.
- By faith, we believe and know that Dennis had accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior, and he is not just in a better place, but as John 5:24 says, he has eternal life and is in Heaven. "For it is by grace Dennis has been saved, through faith, not from himself, but a gift from God" Eph 2:8 (Paraphrased)

And because of faith, we had been protected. The most precious gift I had not seen, or appreciated fully. I realized that our faith did not change the circumstances, but we had the opportunity to see it through a Faith filter, an Eternal perspective. We could see, the thread of God's hand, throughout our journey. God has opened our eyes to see and ears to hear and blessed us with a heart to receive what God wants to reveal to us. Romans 5:5 says, "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us".

So that is why this Christmas we will celebrate Emmanuel, God with us, Jesus. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." John 3:16-18

The Gift that is available to all of us can give us new eyes, to see the thread of God's Hand through all of life.

May God bless you this Christmas

Kathy