

# Honish: Even in my grief, I found God's all-encompassing love

My heart was indelibly wounded in July 2018, when my eight-year-old son Caleb died suddenly.

In prayer, God has revealed that some of the wounds that I have because of this traumatic event and the aftermath are because of my own disordered expectations of myself.

Shortly after Caleb died, there was a video circulating on social media about a woman whose family had been murdered, extolling her faith and the joy that she exuded despite the tragedy she had experienced.

I don't know how much time had elapsed since this woman's tragedy, but I felt that I too should, after only a few short months, be joyful and inspiring others with my faith.

Because of the expectations I had of myself, it was very hard to talk to others about my all-encompassing grief. I felt like I had nothing to offer anyone. I thought that because my grief was so big that if I shared my feelings people would not be able to handle it and they would leave, so I pushed them away.

Somehow, I felt that it was better to push others away than for them to walk away. In the resulting loneliness and isolation, I learned to turn to God, spending time with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, in His passion and on the cross. God also brought friends into my life with whom I felt I could share a small part of my grief. They blessed me with their presence, and I blessed them with mine.

In January, we celebrated Caleb's third birthday in heaven. It was on Caleb's birthday that God revealed to me in a particularly poignant way how He loves me (and all of us) through others.

A person very dear to me, whom I had pushed away, offered my family a gift. When it was first offered, I was mortified, and I told myself that I could not accept it. I realized, through this reaction, how much I am and have been ashamed of my grief.

I don't want people to see my brokenness, even though all of us experience grief and brokenness in many ways. I wanted to be seen as healed, holy, joyful, and inspiring, and I thought that my brokenness got in the way.

Yet it is in our brokenness that we find God. When we try to hide our flaws and imperfections, we are closing the door on God's work in our lives, much like how Jesus could do little work in Nazareth because of their unbelief (Matthew

13:58). As I deliberated whether I should accept this gift, in prayer God clearly told me, "Let this person love you." I listened to His voice and received this gift. In receiving it, I was able to encounter God and His awesome love for me.

I had hardened my heart to others for so long, trying to prevent it from being hurt, trying to avoid rejection and derision because of my own pain and brokenness, but in the process, I hurt my heart more than those people ever could have.

I didn't realize how God was trying to love me through others or the wounds I had inflicted on myself because of my unreasonable and unattainable expectations.

Yet because God spoke to me so clearly in the "let this person love you," I was able to reject the temptation to refuse a gift offered in love. As I received this gift, which fulfilled much of what I was unwilling to admit that I needed, I could feel God's all-encompassing love.

While I felt assured of God's love previously, I hadn't realized how deeply God wanted to love me through others. For one person, it was a small act of love, but it was an all-embracing act of love from God. God demonstrated a small part of His infinite love for us all, a love that brought me peace, calm, and His personal love for me on a day that brings much anguish to this mother's heart.

Let yourself be loved, in the way He wants to love you.

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