

## *Professionally speaking...*

by Denise M. Paul MA, CT, CPLC

### **Finding *Grace* in Death**

Over the last 20 years, I've spoken to hundreds of parents who were mourning the death of their baby through miscarriage, stillbirth, and early infant death. It is a privilege to be on this grief journey with so many bereaved parents. I believe that parents are the experts in their own grief, and I feel fortunate to learn from them.

Recently, while facilitating a virtual Subsequent Pregnancy Support Group for UNITE, Inc. (for parents who are pregnant again, following a loss), a mother said something to the group that stopped me in my tracks. She said, "There was *grace* in Maggie's death." I was astonished and puzzled to hear that she found *grace* in her full-term baby girl's death! How could that be? I never imagined that someone could find *grace* in the tragic loss of her firstborn baby. I loved that she used the word "*grace*" instead of saying that there was a "silver lining" in her death. *Grace* is such a beautiful virtue.

*"Grace is love that cares and stoops and rescues."*

John Stott

It is important to note that this conversation happened 4 years after her baby's death, so she had 4 years to process her thoughts and allow her pain to soften. While this mother certainly recognized that her daughter's death was traumatic and tragic, she proudly stated that her birth is what made her a mother. She had the opportunity to experience the profound love that a mother has for her child. She further stated that she got to carry her baby, deliver her, bathe her, dress her, and name her. She acknowledged what a blessing it was to introduce her baby to family members in the hospital, and she found comfort in having a funeral for her. She also found *grace* in the absence of what could have been. Maggie died peacefully and did not suffer.

Maggie's mom also shared that the *grace* extended beyond Maggie's death. She found *grace* in learning what she was capable of enduring, as the profound pain of sorrow consumed her. She felt a strength that she didn't know she had. She believes that Maggie's death has made her a better mother to her son, who was born two years later. There was *grace* in the deepened relationships that she found with family members and friends who came together to collectively grieve and share in rituals of

remembrance. While she did briefly question her faith, she stated that her spirituality deepened. This loving mother talked about these blessings as “gifts” that would not be possible if not for Maggie’s death.... and that is where she has found *grace*.

This mom recognizes that there are far more difficult circumstances surrounding the death of many babies. In some cases, parents have several miscarriages and lose hope of ever having a baby. In other cases, parents are faced with life limiting anomalies in which they must make difficult choices. Some babies are born alive and suffer short, painful lives. It’s very difficult to expect parents to find *grace* in these circumstances, but it is possible.

After processing what this mom shared, I began to open my eyes to *grace* in everyday things. I’ve acknowledged so many *graces* that I now see in my own life, and I’ve pointed out *graces* that I see for others. For example, I recently spoke to a dad who suddenly lost his 17 year-old son. He was grateful that he was able to donate his son’s organs and tissues to help save others. That was where he found *grace* in his son’s death. As we focused our conversation on the topic of *grace*, he identified other *graces* that seemed to comfort him. His son was surrounded by his friends when he died, he did not suffer, his death could not have been prevented. These were all blessings that he now labels as “*graces*.”

*Grace* can be found in almost every sorrow or disappointment that we experience. I’d like to give you an example of a way that I found grace in an ordinary day in my life. Recently, an airline delayed a flight when my husband and I were traveling to California to celebrate our anniversary. The delay caused us to miss our first night in a very expensive resort in Napa, which we were very much looking forward to. We had to spend the night in an inexpensive airport hotel until the next morning when we could resume our journey. Although we lost a lot of money and we were very disappointed, I found *grace* in the fact that we were together, we were able to get a hotel room so that we could sleep, and that we still had 4 nights to enjoy at the resort. I even found *grace* in the fact that we had the financial means to fly to California and stay at a fabulous resort. It was in finding *grace* that made the disappointment bearable, and it allowed me to discover gratitude.

Life will be full of little disappointments and sometimes major tragedies. My hope is that you will be able to find *grace* in every day of your life.

*“Grace surrounds us like the soft, comforting, refreshing rain.  
Let gratitude help you find the power of that grace and see all  
your experiences in life as blessings.”*

Ardath Rodale