

5 Things to Do When Tragedy Strikes Your Family

It was a sunny September day in the year 2000, and I was driving home from work, ready to clean up and go to a prophetic conference with friends. I was about to turn on the dirt road to go up the hill when I saw my parents' vehicle turn on the concrete road and slow down toward me.

Seeing this, I rolled down my window as I saw my father do. He said, "I'll need you to park your truck and get in with us, son." Without saying anything, I followed his instructions and got in to the rear passenger side door and said, "OK, I'm prepared for the worse."

My dad said, "It's the worst ... deputies came today and said they found your brother Eli." Upon saying this, his voice seemed to fade in the distance. It was like I was punched in my stomach and lost my breath. I immediately reached forward to touch my mom's shoulder, who then held my hand.

Everything else seemed to be on auto-pilot and in slow motion as shock affected each one of us. We had to deliver the devastating news to my grandma, and then make some phone calls in order to pick up my little brother from a friend's birthday party to tell him the heartbreaking story.

From there we went to my oldest brother's house and waited for him to return from work. While waiting there, I had to make a phone call to my twin brother who was on the east coast, serving in the Navy. I told him the tragic news over the phone, and I started to cry, hearing his response. He was released on emergency leave orders to help us prepare for the funeral service. Our family would never be the same again.

Suicide has been said to be like someone throwing a grenade into the middle of a family and expecting them to put

everything back together again after it explodes. In our particular situation, Eli had fought drug addiction since he was 11. He received treatment and was sober for one great year, but relapse is commonplace.

I prayed often for him, and after the drugs damaged him severely, we tried to have him placed in a psychiatric hospital. But after a court hearing, they released him. A few months later, we received the devastating news. Even though I was asking why God didn't answer my prayers, all I could do was run to His presence in the secret place of prayer, church revival meetings and street ministry.

I was a part of a ministry team that saw people receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit as well as salvation wherever we went. I shared my situation and the love of God with anyone who would listen. People walked in to our services saying they felt something urge them to stop by, we would pray for them, and they would be filled with the Spirit. Although I was in deep grief, God was using my late brother's story to bring people to Him.

During this time of deep pain and turmoil, I learned that if tragedy strikes your family, you should:

- **Honor your loved one's memory.** Write or draw about them, give photos to other people and share personal memories with friends and family. Laugh and cry as you remember them.
- **Turn your loved one's personal story into one that can help others.** Some people provide scholarships in their loved one's name or raise awareness and share their story wherever God opens the door, whether it is at schools, AA meetings or churches. Share the story. It will help others and also be like healing balm on your heart.
- **Pray, and pray a lot. After a tragedy, you will need the Holy Spirit more than ever before.** It is a difficult

road to travel, but He is there with you as you navigate everything.

- **Surround yourself with a community of people who pray and love you.** I am so thankful for the team we had, who carried the responsibility of ministry and were a constant encouragement to me, laying hands on me, praying and seeking God during my grief.
- **Give God your emotions.** He created them and He can handle your rage, anger, sadness and tears. My emotions were similar to a roller coaster ride. When tragedy strikes, you may not be able to state where you are emotionally, but give everything to God. He will comfort you (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

It has been nearly 16 years since we received the devastating news. Because of this experience, I vowed to do anything I could to be used by God and help bring others out of darkness. Some of the emotions I felt then have dulled or faded, while other emotions seem fresh at times. But no matter what, I ask the wonderful Holy Spirit to help me and He never fails.

Life has its challenges and difficulties, but when you walk with the Spirit of God, He is with you through it all. John 14 says, "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Counselor, that He may be with you forever: the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, for it does not see Him, neither does it know Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you fatherless. I will come to you" (John 14:16-18, MEV). {eo}

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