

How You Can Find Supernatural Hope in the Wake of the Parkland School Shootings

My husband and I want to express our deepest sympathies to the families who lost a child (or were impacted in some way) by the Parkland school shooting. Our hearts are heavy for you, along with thousands or millions across the nation. We ache for your loss.

Your beloved children died, murdered, at school—a place they should have been safe—on Valentine’s Day, of all days. The day we give cards and gifts to show love to those we care about, became a horrific day of suffering and carnage for you. Your lives have been changed. Forever altered. We are so very sorry.

When you said “goodbye” Wednesday morning, it was the beginning of a day like any other. You had no idea it would be the last time you would ever see your son or daughter alive.

My mind has gone in many directions since I heard the terrible news. But one thought I keep returning to is this:

No one knows what the future holds. We have no guarantee of another day with those we love.

We need to be more thankful for each another and for our many blessings.

Yes, even for our difficult children who drive us crazy and keep us up at night. We can start by expressing thanks for the basics: the roof over our heads, the food we eat, the clothes we wear. Let’s think about the good in our lives rather than on what’s wrong or what we wish was different.

Dear Parent of a Wayward, Troubled Child,

I understand sometimes it feels impossible to be thankful, especially when their issues are life-threatening. We get stuck on what we're upset about, the danger they're in or how they need to change. Grumbling and complaining are far easier than voicing gratitude. And as hurting parents, we have every right to grumble and complain about our children who are still *in process*. But we tend to obsess and do so relentlessly. Our reasons are endless:

They haven't overcome their issues yet. They can be rude and disrespectful, sometimes hateful. Some days we have to dig deep to find a reason to be thankful. But don't forget this one thing: they're still alive. Let *that* be your focus.

Right now, today, at this moment—your child still lives and breathes. Be grateful. This means it's not over yet. Their story is still being written, and so is yours.

A dear friend of mine told me emphatically, "As long as they're still breathing, there's still hope!"

There's. Still. Hope.

Our perspective matters. It makes a difference how we process our experiences.

What Can You Do?

Several years ago, when I despaired over my daughter, someone challenged me to start a gratitude journal; to begin each day by reflecting on the last twenty-four hours and write down at least one thing I was thankful for. I liked the idea and decided to try. As of today, my list totals over 6,500. That's a lot of blessings—big and small: I saw a hummingbird in our backyard this afternoon, and last night, my daughter told me she's proud of the way we use our pain to help other parents. I'll highlight that one!

Whenever I'm down or discouraged, I flip open my gratitude

journal and thumb through its well-worn pages. Each item reminds me of God's goodness. They direct my eyes above the storm, uplift my spirits and help me focus elsewhere. The pity party I was going to have gets canceled. After all, things could always be worse—as we saw in Parkland.

“Gratitude bestows reverence, allowing us to encounter everyday epiphanies, those transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience life and the world.” –Sarah Ban Breathnach

If you're down or discouraged about your child today, why not start a gratitude journal? Even the Bible encourages us to give thanks: “In everything give thanks” (1 Thess. 5:18a).

What can you be thankful for right now?

Prayer: God of Compassion, there have been many wonderful changes in my child's life, yet I tend to overlook them. They're still in process, but I can only see the negative that looms large. Help me shift perspective and place my focus on what I can be grateful. You've done so much for me throughout my life. In Your Mighty Name. Amen.

Please join us as we pray for the grieving families of Parkland, Florida, in the weeks and months ahead. {eo}

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