

Widow Encounters 'Miracle From God' Just Weeks After Husband's Publicized Suicide

As Kayla Stoecklein prepared for her husband's memorial service, she shared a personal story on the church's blog about the "miracle from God" she encountered just weeks after her husband committed suicide.

Inland Hills Church Pastor Andrew Stoecklein died by his own hand in late August after a lengthy battle with depression and anxiety. His memorial service will be held Sept. 8 at California Baptist University.

He left behind Kayla and their three sons.

Kayla told her children over the weekend about her husband's death. Her oldest, 5-year-old Smith, explored his grief through a coloring book with his mom.

Kayla describes the sweet time in a blog post:

On the day I broke the news to the boys, Smith and I spent some time drawing together in a coloring book titled When Someone I Love Dies. It is a strange, forced feeling to be discussing death with a 5-, 4-, and 2-year-old. I can see Smith's brain working tirelessly just like mine, attempting to wrap his young mind around this new reality.

Something unexpected that has been helping us this week is butterflies. You would probably laugh and make fun of us, but we can't seem to escape them. The first few pages of our new coloring book examined change. The book instructed us to draw an egg, a caterpillar, a cocoon and then a butterfly. It was a simple way for a 5-year-old to understand that life is ever evolving, ever changing.

Just a few hours after we finished coloring, I went to close the curtains in the family room. To my surprise, there was a tiny green caterpillar attached to top part of the curtain. What is a caterpillar doing in our house? How did it crawl up so high on the curtain? The door has been closed all day, how did it end up there? Usually, I would have squealed and run away, but I was so stunned that I picked it up and showed the boys. Without skipping a beat, Smith told me, "it's a miracle from God."

Smith, in his childlike faith, believed God sent us the precious little caterpillar to remind us that He is near. He is in the details. He is connected and He cares. I agreed with Smith, and we both cried over that little caterpillar. We quickly found a jar and some leaves, and now we are taking great care of our new pet whom Smith named, "Little Buddy." We now get to sit back and watch Little Buddy evolve and change before our eyes.

Now, again, today in the midst of my quiet time this morning, the image of a butterfly jumped out at me from a book. In the book, the author says, "I started to think a lot about butterflies and how if you cut them out of their cocoons or help them out in any way, they will never develop the strength they need in their wings to be able to achieve takeoff. They have to struggle out in order to come into their own. Flight only comes after the fight." (Levi Lusko, *Through the Eyes of a Lion*).

Right now, I feel like a caterpillar trapped in a dark cocoon. It feels like a full-on battle, a full-fledged war. I didn't choose this. I don't want this. I just want to be a caterpillar again. I don't want to be wrapped up in grief and pain; I don't want to walk through this; I don't want to be smothered by anxious thoughts about my future and the future of our children. I want this all to go away so I can be free again.

Today I am reminded that although I hate it, God has me right where I need to be. I can feel Him wrapping his loving arms around me. I am fighting it, kicking and screaming, but I can feel the Holy Spirit infusing me with His strength. I can feel God protecting me and holding me close. I can feel the safety and security in my own little cocoon. It may take years until I am ready to fly, but I know the fight won't last forever. One day, God will release me from the darkness and despair. He will show me a life of hope and a future full of purpose. I will no longer be a carefree caterpillar, I will emerge a new creation, a beautiful butterfly, and I will soar to even greater heights. I can't see any of it now in my dark clouded cocoon, but I know that I am safe. He's got me right where I need to be, and He has great plans for my life and the lives of our boys.

Kayla says she continues to grieve the loss of her husband, yet continues to rely on Scripture to carry her through.

A #CareForKayla GoFundMe has raised more than \$280,000 for the young Stoecklein family.