

Pastor Returns to Pulpit After Losing Daughter in Nashville School Shooting

It has been two months since the tragic shooting at the Covenant School in Nashville, Tennessee.

Pastor Chad Scruggs, Senior Pastor at Covenant Presbyterian Church, lost his daughter Hallie in the shooting that claimed the lives of two other 9-year-old students, Evelyn Dieckhaus and William Kinney, along with three staff members of the school: Mike Hill, Katherine Koonce and Cynthia Peak.

The shooter, former student and trans-identified activist Audrey Hale, was killed by responding law enforcement officers during the attack on March 27.

On Mother's Day, May 14, Pastor Scruggs took to the pulpit for the first time since losing Hallie and answered the question he and his family have been asked the most: How are you doing in the aftermath of this tragedy?

"The answer you'll typically get for us from us is, 'we don't know,'" Scruggs said. "It's not a bad question, [we] just don't know how to answer it yet—don't know how to judge what doing well is or doing not well.

"We're kind of searching for a new baseline in life right now," he adds.

Even in his grief, Pastor Scruggs spoke love over the congregation at the beginning of his sermon.

"First of all, we love you," says Scruggs. "'We loved you before March 27th and we love you more now because of how you've loved us, so ... we love you.'"

Scruggs then addressed what life was like after losing someone so precious to a family that it is akin to losing a piece of oneself.

“‘How are you doing?’ Well, we’re learning to live with a part of us missing—like losing an arm, perhaps—knowing that the phantom pain of that lost arm will always be there with us,” explains Scruggs.

“Just know that, from our perspective now, it feels impossible to ever pretend the arm will regenerate or that it will ever feel whole this side of heaven,” he continues. “So, I’d say we’re learning to live with sadness and I would tell you that that’s OK—you can do that—learning to live with sadness.”

Scruggs explained that his family was living out Isaiah 40:28-31, which reads:

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might He increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

“At this point,” he said, “[we’re] not yet soaring on wings like eagles, not running without weariness, but that third category, somewhere, trying to walk without fainting.”

Grief is no respecter of persons, as all Christians can expect to encounter it at some point in their life.

Pastor Bill Johnson of Bethel Church in Redding, California, shared his personal story of grief when his wife of 49 years, Benni, died from a long battle with cancer on July 13, of 2022.

Johnson shared invaluable, Spirit-inspired wisdom from the depths of his grief that he felt led to share with people around the world to help them during their times of sorrow.

“Pretending all is well when it isn’t doesn’t help. I must anchor my soul to who He is and what He has promised. Otherwise, I will spend my days wandering without a sense of purpose, never settling into why I am alive. Who He is remains the foundation of my life,” Johnson wrote in *Charisma* magazine.

“Pain, loss and disappointment are unavoidable in this life. If that weren’t true, there would be no reason for verses such as, ‘God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose’ (Rom. 8:28, NASB). This beautiful promise helps us to see that the master chef is able to take the worst parts of our lives and work them into a recipe, creating a masterpiece that illustrates His goodness.” {eo}

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