

When a Loved One Loses Faith

We had already been concerned about our son, so when the phone call came that he was no longer believing, it was not a complete surprise. The call confirmed our fears. He had tried to remain in faith, and many escorts in faith had tried to help and support, but sin was too difficult for him to battle, and sin overcame.

A Time of Grief, Soul-Searching

Grief and sadness overwhelmed me. Confusion and soul-searching filled my mind and heart. What had we done wrong? Why did God allow this to happen? Would I ever feel joy again? Even if I knew it was not true, it felt like, in rejecting faith, our son had rejected us as parents and everything we valued and had tried to teach. I felt like I no longer knew my own child. I felt anger about his choice.

I remembered and struggled deeply with the story of Eli and his sons in the Bible. Had we as parents been too lenient? Or had we, on the other hand, been too harsh? Oh, how I wished I could go back and handle past situations differently! In the course of many confused discussions between my husband and me, old parenting disagreements came to the surface. It was so easy to find blame in one another's parenting style. I could find no comfort anywhere, and my own mistakes and weaknesses as a parent stared back at me in the mirror. Even the comforting words of the brothers and sisters in faith found no resting place in my heart. And I doubted my own desire to remain believing.

Our other children saw our grief, while they themselves grieved. Later, some of them gently reminded us that they still wanted to believe. They did not want us to forget them in the midst of our grief over one. It was a good reminder. I began to think about our other children who still desired the water of life for their own hearts. I also realized I was in peril of losing the joy over my own gift of faith. Many discussions were needed in the family, and support and help from believing escorts was essential. Feeble, tired prayers rose to the Heavenly Father, and the gospel was needed in our home many times.

Love the Lost One

How does one then treat a family member who has lost faith? At first it feels strange. Our family, as we knew it, had changed. There was a spiritual gulf that could not be overcome. How do we love this child but not the sin? How does this person now fit into our family? Do we change the way we do things, our family traditions? Together my husband and I agreed that we didn't need to change anything; God's Word and faith would still be the center of our home. Looking back, the best advice I received from a sister in faith upon hearing about our son was: "Love him, love him, love him!" Reeling from all the emotions that I had initially felt, it was good advice. It helped me to put aside the negative emotions I had tried on, and to humble myself to extend love, compassion, and respect, and remember that we are no better than our unbelieving loved one. We are all sinners. Faith is a gift of God. We have the good fortune to have our own sins forgiven.

We wanted to communicate with our son in the aftermath of his decision. In the beginning when discussion seemed difficult, my husband found that writing a letter was a way he could express his thoughts calmly and openly. As time has gone on, we are thankful that we have been able to have difficult but good discussions with our son, focusing on what God's Word says about sin, and being open about our own weaknesses as parents. He has told us he has not been offended, and for that we are thankful. We have worked to keep the lines of communication open and to keep him as a close part of our family. We have wanted him to know that we are ready to preach the gospel to him and we still love him. He is our son. He is always welcome in our home. But doubts still linger: Have we done the right thing?

Recently a visiting brother from Finland spoke about Judas Iscariot and the events of Passion Week. The sermon spoke

to me as an example of how one should treat unbelieving loved ones. The brother explained that Jesus knew what was to happen before He was crucified. He knew Judas would soon betray Him; yet, at the Last Supper, Jesus put Judas in the place of honor at the table. Jesus loved Judas to the end. Jesus' example of love is one we are left to ponder.

Continue in Hope and Prayer

Although sorrow over an unbelieving child never really goes away, and we still grieve the spiritual death of our son's undying soul and the possibility of eternal separation, God has lifted the heavy clouds of doubt and despair that once enveloped us and has allowed the sun to shine again. He has once again given joy over personal faith. Today we are thankful that we have a good relationship with our son and his family. We live in hope that someday God would grant them the grace to believe.

One believing pastor told us a story: An old man in a hospital had requested a believing minister to visit him. When the believing pastor reached the old man's room, the man simply said, "You don't need to preach to me. I am the child of a believing home. I have never forgotten what my parents taught me. I want to have my sins forgiven." The brother freely forgave him his sins. The story gives me the strength to live in hope that God would someday give our son grace to believe again, even if we, his weak parents, are no longer alive to see that day. That is our fervent prayer.

A Mother

Discussion Questions:

1. How can we, and how should we, reach out to the one who has lost faith?
2. How can we help to support the family of one who has lost living faith?
3. How should we handle questions, sometimes gossip, surrounding the life of the lost one?