

How Lucky I Am

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hen we cut ourselves, we bleed, it scabs over, heals, and may leave a scar—a permanent reminder of the cut. Although the scar remains, we get over it. However, if we have an arm or leg amputated, we may learn to adjust, but we never get over it. That is the way death is. When we lose a loved one, we may learn to cope and adjust, but we never totally get over it. There will always be painful reminders. The death of a loved one leaves holes in our life that can never be totally filled. If you've lost a loved one, you know what I mean. A future without him/her may seem empty and bleak.

One of the things that confronts all of us, whether we like it or not, is that we must all eventually die. That is a given fact, albeit not a very popular one to discuss. Thank God that Christ died to take away our fear of death (Hebrews 2:14,15). What a beautiful thought.

Years ago my wife and I saw the movie "The Other Side Of The Mountain." It was based on the true story of an Olympic skier, Jill Kenmont. While practicing for the Olympics, the tip of her ski hooked a slalom pole and sent her sliding over the edge of a cliff. In the fall her neck was broken and she was left paralyzed from the neck down. Her fiancee, another Olympic skier, ended their engagement because he didn't want to be married to an invalid the rest of his life. As you can imagine, she went into a deep depression and would gladly have committed suicide had she had the ability to do so. She was too helpless to even do that.

Then, an old friend of hers, a daredevil sort of a guy who liked living on the edge, refused to let her continue to sulk and feel sorry for herself. Against her will, he took her out of the hospital, and rolled her wheelchair out into the middle of a busy intersection with cars buzzing past and he talked to her. In her embarrassment and the danger of the situation she "moved a position." Her attitude changed. To make a long story short, she decided to make something of her life. She quit feeling sorry for herself, began attending a university equipped to handle the physically disabled, and she eventually earned a degree in elementary education. In the process, she also fell in love with this man who had helped her get out of the depression. They were engaged to be married. Then the unthinkable happened; he was killed in a plane crash.

The movie ends with her, as a teacher, being wheeled along in her wheelchair by some Native American Indian children at a school on an Indian reservation, as that was one of the few places who would hire a handicapped teacher. One of the children asked her if she had ever been in love. She said, "Yes," and explained to them that her fiancee had been killed. Then she said, "How lucky I am to have loved someone so much that saying goodbye hurts so [excuse the swear word] damn much." That is the irony of life. The more we love, the deeper the pain of saying goodbye.

As a chaplain, one of the saddest funerals I ever performed was for a man who had been abusive to his family. When he died there were no tears. In fact, some of his kids seemed relieved and glad that he was gone. On the other hand, I have witnessed couples who have deeply loved one another for over 60 years and at the funeral I see the survivors' unimaginable pain. I have witnessed a mother sobbing uncontrollably as they closed the casket for the last time over her two-year-old son. I have seen many tears, some bitter, some hope-filled.

In this life we have the choice to love and risk being hurt, or of not loving and not being hurt.

One of the things which makes me yearn the most for Heaven, is that there won't be any goodbyes, for we will have all eternity to know and love one another. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis, "As believers we never really say 'goodbye,' just 'See you later.'" That hope alone, the hope of reunion in Heaven, gives me the desire to keep pressing on.

If you have lost a loved one, yes—it hurts. Will you ever totally get over it? No, not really, but you will probably learn to adjust. But consider this: would you rather this person had never entered your life? No, for how lucky you were to have loved someone so much that saying goodbye hurts so damn much. [Forgive me for the use of the word damn, but in one sense death is part of the curse and damn fits the feelings associated with it quite well.]

In Heaven, the curse of death, the damnation of it all, will be broken and gone forever. And imagine the joy of reunion,

never having to say goodbye ever again. That day is coming.— Maybe sooner than we think.

“Lord, you know the deep losses I’ve known in this life, especially the loss of friends and family I have loved. Bring healing and comfort to my wounded heart. Remind me daily of the hope of Heaven and the eternal joy set before me, where I will forever be with those who have known and loved you.”

