



**A GRIEF UNVEILED:  
ONE FATHER'S JOURNEY  
THROUGH THE DEATH OF A CHILD**

An Excerpt  
by Gregory Floyd

*“The Eucharist is like a laser  
that cuts through the veil  
that separates us from those we love. “*

I have also learned that the theology of hope and the psychology of grief are two different things. They are autonomous realities. Each needs to be given its proper place. Hope is an expectation that needs and desires will be fulfilled. Its object is not in the present, but the future. The theology of hope assures us that we will see Johnny again, that he is happy beyond description, and that he is watching over us and praying for us. (Johnny is Floyd's six-year-old son who was killed in his front yard by the driver of an out-of-control car).

The problem is that often people think the theological reasons for hope displace the psychological reasons for grief; they do not. When a child dies, one grieves. One experiences heaviness, pressure, desolation, loneliness, sadness, disruption in patterns of eating, sleeping, and relating. One is exhausted emotionally and physically. This does not mean one has no hope; it simply means one has an abundance of grief.

I learned that I must honor grief by giving it its time. Grieving takes time, and nothing speeds up the process, not even hope. Why? Because they are two different realities. I

cannot press on the horn to make the car go faster: The horn and the accelerator involve two essentially different realities, however united they are in the body of the car. The same is true of grief and hope.

We experienced the presence of God along every step of the journey of grief. But he was with us in the pain, not lifting us out of the pain. He was walking the tortuous route with us, not paving a straight path. He waited with us when we had to pause, not pushing us to a premature resolution of a problem that has no quick fix. More than lifting our grief, I believe that God invited us to offer it to him. He wanted us to be actively involved in our healing. He knew we could not give him more than a bit of time because we did not want to. The healing happened very slowly. We remember, we accepted, we allowed ourselves to feel it all, and we laid it at the foot of the cross when the grace came to do that.

Gradually, and almost imperceptibly, the joyful thoughts of Johnny became more prominent than the sorrowful ones. When I think of Johnny now, I do not see a dead child on my front lawn. I see radiant beauty. I see life, joy, and love. And while I wait for our family to be reunited, I wait with him in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is like a laser that cuts through the veil that separates us from those we love. Call it veil time, call it death. It still separates, and that separation is painful. But in receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord, I am one with those who have gone on before me. The more faithfully and reverently I receive the Eucharist, the more real heaven becomes. The veil gets thinner, until one day it shall disappear.

While I await that day, I move back and forth in time, in memory and hope. For so many months after Johnny's death, Maureen and I kept having flashbacks. But I am also experiencing "flash forwards"

Our experiences are like a tiny window opening for just a moment onto reality. And what is reality? This is what I began to pray:

*"You are perfectly trustworthy and you know what you are doing. You are sovereign and all-loving in Johnny's death and its impact on us. You are using it to draw us more deeply to yourself. We are being drawn. You are the Lord of the void as well as the fullness; Lord of the desolation as well as the consolation. (Your) children are marked, but they love you. They hurt, but they believe in you. They have moments of grief, but they trust in you. You hold us in your hands. You have held us in your hands the whole way through. We are held and we are carried. Is it possible that your attention could be so personal and so particular?"*  
*These windows open just long enough for me to whisper in the dark, "I trust you."*

*“Yes, you are in charge. You gave us enough faith that we were not devastated by our loss. You knew the pain would be good for us. You knew we would be better for our brief time with him, and, what’s more, you knew he would be better for his brief time with us. Your will was that he was here and your will is that he is there. And your will is that we live with a void—sometimes a gentle ache like a child’s momentary cry in the middle of the night, sometime a yawning chasm that nothing seems to fill.*

*“Yes, you heal the brokenhearted. But not in the way people think. You heal us to the point of recognizing that we will never be whole until we are home with you. It makes the images you give us for life so much more real—a battle, a journey, a narrow road. Through it all, your love carries us and works it to the good.*

...Love anything and your heart will break, as C.S. Lewis has said. We gave our heart to this boy as completely as we could and he took off with it. I realize that sometimes the reason I feel so strange is that part of my heart is not here any more. I gave it to Johnny and he took it with him...

Suffering has opened our eyes to the many sufferings of those around us and given us the understanding and desire to help them. It has given us access to God in a way we never thought possible.

And so I live with the loss. I do not deny it. It is there, sometimes felt and sometimes unfelt, sometimes raging and sometimes still. I am alive not in spite of this loss, but with this loss. I can laugh, sing, dance, with a hole in my heart. I can even praise. This is the grace of healing. It does not diminish Johnny in any way. On the contrary, he is honored when the rest of us go after God and the life we have been given with every bit as much joy and abandon as he did, knowing that nothing can separate the love we share, not even death. It is only upward from here, my sunshine boy, until I see your smiling face.

[The above is an excerpt from *“A Grief Unveiled: One Father’s Journey through the Death of a Child”* by Gregory Floyd (Paraclete Press, 1999), who has been a frequent lecturer at conferences and Catholic churches on the subject of grief, recovery, and faith. This book is a favorite of Emmaus Ministry parents and has appeared on our *Bibliography of Books Recommended for Grieving Parents* by Emmaus Ministry Grieving Parents for many years.

In this book, Floyd reveals with painstaking candor his journey through the sorrow of losing a child—dealing not only with his own broken heart, but also with the struggle to reconstruct his role as husband, father, and protector. Both mothers and fathers have found it to be very helpful, especially with his focus on his spiritual journey as a Catholic. In 2013, Gregory Floyd published a new book, *“A Grief Unveiled: Fifteen Years After.”*]