

simpleGRACE

June 2018

Your daily dose of hope

CHRISTINE CAINE

**"GOD ALWAYS KEEPS
HIS PROMISES"**

 **30 DAILY PRAYERS
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RENEWED IN BLISS**

SPIRITUAL CURES

- ❖ Loneliness
- ❖ Anger
- ❖ Worry
- ❖ Grief
- ❖ Fear

**REAL-LIFE
MIRACLES
HAPPEN
EVERY DAY**

**"JESUS
NEVER STOPS
LOVING YOU"**

**SARA EVANS
OPENS UP
ABOUT HOW GOD
TRANSFORMED
HARDSHIP INTO
HAPPINESS**



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"God creates the ashes"



After her son killed his wife, his two children and then himself, Joanne Smith struggled with excruciating grief. But just when she couldn't bear the agony any longer, God revealed a beautiful purpose in the pain

Four people were confirmed dead. That's all the officer had told Joanne Smith and her husband, Larry, as they stood outside their son's house on Father's Day in 2015. Blinded by the flashing lights of police cars and ambulances and overcome by terror, all Joanne could do was pray. *Jesus, please let them be okay. Jesus, help me, help us!*

Desperate for answers, Joanne and Larry, shaking with shock, had been escorted to the police station and waited in a small, cold office. Joanne's heart had dropped when a detective



beauty from

came in, his eyes solemn. “I’m so sorry for your loss,” he said, confirming again what she couldn’t accept: that her son, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren were dead. “This will be very hard to hear,” the detective continued, “but it was a murder...”

Through the fog of grief, all Joanne made out was the word *murder*. “Why would someone do this?” she cried, begging the detective to find the person who killed her family. “You misunderstood me, ma’am,” he replied. “It was a murder-*suicide*...your son shot his wife and children, then took his own life.” Joanne’s world tilted on its axis...and she felt her heart completely shatter.

UNFATHOMABLE LOSS

The Friday evening before that fateful Father’s Day, Joanne’s 29-year-old son, Russell, brought his 7-year-old daughter, Tylee, and 2-year-old son, Blake, over to visit. “Russell was his usual good-spirited self, telling us all about the baseball



Loving memories Joanne (second from right) celebrating granddaughter Tylee’s (front) kindergarten graduation in May of 2015. Joanne’s family, from left: daughter-in-law Shawna, son Russell, daughter Rhonda, grandson Blake and husband Larry

trip he and Larry had just come back from,” Joanne recalls. The kids had played happily, their giggles filling the air. Everyone had been joyful, relaxed and... *normal*. Only one thing had raised a tiny red flag for Joanne: Russell wasn’t wearing his wedding band. “He never took off his ring,” Joanne explains. ➤

➤ “That was the only thing odd I noticed, but didn’t think much of it.”

That Sunday, when Russell, his wife, Shawna, and the kids hadn’t shown up to Joanne’s house for their Father’s Day get-together and weren’t answering calls, she became concerned. At 9:30 PM, Joanne had called Shawna’s brother, Steven, and asked him to go check on the family. With Joanne on the phone, Steven walked into the house. “I’ll never forget the horror in his voice,” she recalls. “He screamed, ‘Oh my God, Tylee! There’s blood all over her!’” Panicked, Steven called 9-1-1 while Joanne and Larry raced to the scene...where their worst nightmares had come true.

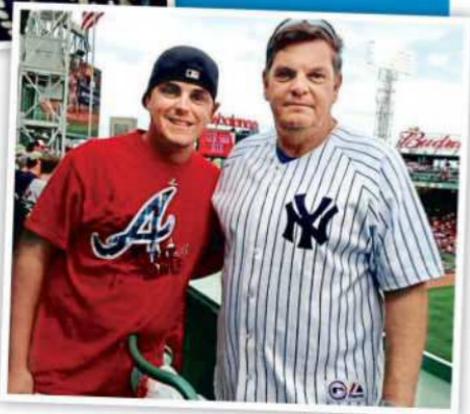
FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE

In the months that followed, Joanne was consumed by bone-deep grief and one horrible question: *Why?* “I replayed every last memory, conversation and visit I had with my son, looking for signs I may have missed,” Joanne says softly. Slowly, she realized she may never find answers, and



Gone too soon

“I miss them every day,” Joanne says of her grandchildren, Tylee and Blake. Below: Russell and dad Larry enjoy a game only days before the shooting



she began to drown in anger, sorrow and despair. “Time became my enemy because it took me farther away from the last time I saw Russell, Shawna and the kids,” Joanne shares. “I was told time heals all, but I hated hearing that! A broken bone heals. A cut heals. But I thought a heart that had been smashed into tiny pieces like mine could never heal.”

During the darkest depths of her sorrow, Joanne had a conversation with a dear friend that changed everything. “She asked if I was angry with God,”

says Joanne. “I looked at her in disbelief and said, ‘Oh no, I ran to Him! I’m still running to Him!’” Joanne said that as she stood outside Russell’s home that night, Jesus was there holding her. “Jesus knew at any moment I was going to fall into His arms—there was nowhere else I could go,” she recalls. “That conversation lifted me up because I was reminded that Jesus was holding me and I felt Him say, *I will never let you go. I’ve got you!*”

A SIGN FROM ABOVE

As Joanne placed her broken heart in Jesus’ hands, she marvelled at the small miracles that helped her heal, one step at a time. One morning, while having coffee on her porch, a vivid memory ran through Joanne’s mind. “My heart was aching for my family and suddenly, I remembered how Russell loved hummingbirds and would always point them out to Tylee,” she says. “Just then, I heard buzzing next to my ear.” Assuming it was a bee, Joanne slowly turned her head. “Next to my shoulder was a beautiful hummingbird,” she says in awe. “It swooped down, then flew off as I smiled. I felt like it was God telling me, *I’ve got them...they’re okay.*”

SHARING HIS MESSAGE

A year after Joanne lost her family, she was asked to speak about her grief at her church women’s retreat, and it became one of God’s biggest blessings. “I was shocked when 300 women showed up,” Joanne smiles. “Speaking about Jesus’ healing love with other grieving families gave me new purpose.”

Today, three years after the tragedy, Joanne continues to inspire others on her blog HopeAndHealingMinistries.org. “I have learned that though we may not understand why horrible things happen, we can still trust that Jesus will give us the peace and strength to carry on through the grief,” says Joanne. “We just **have to fall into His arms.**” 

Healing hearts

“We move forward every day, knowing Jesus will always give us hope and healing,” says Joanne (with Larry in 2018)

