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The God of Second Chances

Would I live out the lessons I learned through Jerry's illness and death, or wait for another loss to reset my priorities?

Carol Nicolet Loewen | posted April 5, 2011

My first marriage ended with the unexpected death of my husband, Jerry. After his death, I didn't even think about remarriage. I wasn't afraid of being alone. After all, I didn't say "I do" to Jerry until I was 36 years old, when I was well established in my career as a human resources manager.

Delighted as I was to share life with Jerry, my inner drive often found me focused on work more than on quality time with him. Oh, I honored and adored him. But had I known earlier that Jerry would die prematurely, surely I would have made different choices earlier in our marriage.

After Jerry was diagnosed with a terminal illness, I took those second chances. I reset my priorities, cut back on work hours, and "loved on" Jerry. I regularly took time off work to participate in transplant support group meetings with this man I loved.

Often, we sat together quietly on our couch at home, and while I massaged his feet, Jerry leaned back, relaxed, and talked about his hopes and fears in this new challenge.

Then arms around each other, tears flowed as we listened to the melodic harmonies and uplifting words of a favorite male quartet as they sang about hope and faith and peace.

"When peace, like a river, attendedeth my way,

"When sorrows like sea billows roll;

"Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,

"It is well, it is well, with my soul."

Life Isn't Over Yet

I worried less about having a clean house. I delegated more work assignments. I stopped responding to e-mails 'til the wee hours. I cared less about what others thought (my boss, colleagues, friends) and focused on ensuring Jerry knew how much I respected and loved him. I thanked him more—for loving me well, for wise decisions he made, and for making me laugh.

Once I told him I couldn't stand the thought of one of us being without the other, so I asked the Lord to take us home together.

"You're not driving any more," was his instant response.

Once he was hospitalized, I spent most of every day with Jerry for the next five months—holding his hand, talking, praying, and just being there. I'm grateful that I began taking my second chances before my sweetheart passed away in my arms.

After Jerry died, God spoke to me through Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you ... plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." God had given us 20 wonderful years together and I knew his plan for me wasn't finished yet. As I struggled to redefine myself as a newly single woman, I mentally kept God's promise before me.

Resetting My Priorities

Two years after Jerry's death, I met Don. We became easy friends, then one evening, he placed his hand on my shoulder and said, "Is there a chance for a relationship between us down the road?"

His vibrant blue eyes searched mine.

I was momentarily taken aback. Was I willing to get married again? Was it possible that God had placed Don in my life for a second chance at love and intimate companionship?

I decided to take the risk and see where it would lead me.

That "chance for a relationship" Don asked about grew. And over time, he and I became sweethearts. Then four years after Jerry's passing, Don became my husband.

Once again, God was giving me a second chance: Would I live out the lessons I learned through Jerry's illness and death, or wait for another loss to reset my priorities?

I chose to reset my priorities. I care more now about my commitment to Don than my house or work, and I try to make choices accordingly.

Making Choices

Second chances aren't limited to the widowed or divorced. We all have second chances daily, with spouses, children, parents, and extended family—and yes, even bosses and colleagues.

Lamentations 3:22-23 states that, "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (NIV).

Each morning is an opportunity to assess what I'd like to do differently or better from yesterday. Every day, I can confess where I fell short and start new, with another chance—because of God's faithfulness.

Will I sit on the couch responding to Facebook in the evening, or will I put aside my laptop and cuddle with my hubby while we watch TV together? Will I think about my list of to-dos or put on my walking shoes and take Don's hand while we walk and discuss our day?

Will I take a few moments to relax into the goose bumps I feel, letting Don know his touch is welcome when he sneaks up behind me and plants sweet kisses on my neck? Or will I pull away from his caress to finish whatever *important* chore I'm in the midst of doing?

Will I consistently look for ways to affirm my husband, letting him know how much I love him and appreciate all he does for me and for others? And will I speak the truth in love when I suggest an idea or plan, or even a change?

No Regrets

Lee Iacocca once said, "No matter what you've done for yourself or for humanity, if you can't look back on having given love and attention to your own family, what have you really accomplished?"

I can make Don's life more difficult by repeatedly complaining about the little challenges in our life—or I can make it easier by praying for him and supporting him in making wise decisions.

When we come to the Father before falling into a deep and renewing sleep, Don and I commit our day, our cares, and our families to God. Speaking to God together has deepened our love as we each hear the other's heart. I listen to Don's burdens and understand more clearly what he needs from me. And he does the same with me.

One bright Friday morning, Don was heading to Hospice to visit a terminally ill friend.

"Do you want me to go along?" I asked.

"It's up to you, honey," Don responded.

My inclination was to stay home, curled up on a couch with my laptop or a good book until Don returned home. I could set all that aside and spend time with my husband and our friend. I sensed that Don wanted me with him. I had a second chance—and a choice.

I chose to spend that time with Don.

My God is historically a God of second chances. Rahab was given a second chance at life because she hid the Israelite spies. To the woman caught in adultery Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11, NIV). King David, doubting Thomas, the apostle Paul, all are examples of individuals to whom God gave a second chance.

I can wait for a tragedy to realign my priorities again, or I can consider now what I might regret if my mate were suddenly taken from me. Will I lament spending time with him, despite what *didn't* get done? No. God has planned this time for Don and me to share. I will ask the God of second chances to remind me to look into Don's vibrant blue eyes often and long.

I don't want to look back at the end of our lives and wish I'd made different choices. I thank God for second chances. I will choose to live in such a way that, as much as possible, leads to no regrets.

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