

The After Series: How Mindfulness Helped Me Through My Miscarriage

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We spend so much of our waking lives avoiding death—in more ways than one. When it comes to talking about the inevitable, it isn't always easy. So the Orange Dot is aiming to shine a light on these stories, in hopes that it may help others. The After Series features essays from people around the world who've experienced loss and want to share what comes after.

I have not experienced great loss in my life. I've often thought of loss with fear and trepidation, hoping that somehow acknowledging others' losses might prevent them from happening to me. I've feared death, cancer and sickness, knowing I have no real control over these things, but holding that fear out at arm's length anyway, willing it to never reach me.

And while I haven't even journeyed into some of my deepest, darkest fears, there have been precisely two dark spots in my life over the past year, two blemishes in the unmarred current of my life, the undisturbed surface I hoped no rock would reach. But rocks did reach me, and I have discovered that somehow, with hardship also comes happiness.

That lesson was forced upon me, unwillingly, twice this past year. The first time was when my youngest daughter was hospitalized during a family vacation to South Carolina—a vacation my husband was firmly against since traveling 16 hours in a car with four young children was not his idea of a good time. But I had insisted, determined to carve out a little adventure in our lives, to be the free-spirited Instagram family I admired from my bedroom on my phone.

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During that trip, our youngest daughter first started coughing, broke into a fever, then became listless. After many panicked phone calls and doctor's visits near our vacation rental, she was hospitalized with bilateral pneumonia. Then every last thing that could go wrong felt like it did. Our car broke down twice, every hotel in the area was booked, I was rear-ended on my way to the hospital, the ambulance somehow refused to transport my daughter without a car seat, and the sole family member in the area was in the midst of a medical situation herself. The entire incident was a mess and yet, through it all, I never appreciated the simple things in life more: sleep, a good meal, my children's laughter, and feeling sunshine on my skin.

My husband shudders when we talk about that trip, but now that my daughter has recovered, I look back on the good I found when my daily comforts, distractions, routines, and screens were stripped from me: when I was forced to rely on the kindness of others, when I had nothing but time, when even the most simple of moments brought me joy because everything else was just so very hard.

But a second rock hit my pond when I learned that I had lost my pregnancy—the baby I had hoped and dreamed and planned for, the baby my other children had already named. Once again, I learned that mindfulness in the midst of loss is sometimes all we need to remember that there is hope. No matter how much I tried to numb my pain and distract my mind, there are just some things you can't run away from. And that week, as I unplugged and let deadlines go and rested my body in a way that I hadn't in over a decade, I experienced a contentment I had never known, an awareness to what I needed and the simplicity of the good things in life.

I'm almost embarrassed to admit the pace my life has taken on over the past few years: the constant need to work, the never-ending feeling that I can't let my guard down or I risk being buried under a mountain of children and housework and papers and appointments and sticky, always sticky crumbs.

But my loss forced me to come to a long, shuddering standstill. The miscarriage dragged on for four weeks. Four weeks of bleeding and testing and blood draws and just when I thought it was over, there was a surprise rise in my hCG levels indicated the pregnancy (despite being unviable) had started growing again somewhere outside of my uterus, leading to a trip to the hospital and even more waiting. And despite my almost desperate need for closure, I listened to the wisdom of my body for the first time in years. I rested. I took an actual nap. I did a puzzle with my 8-year-old. I accepted help when it was offered. I relinquished control. I did absolutely nothing but stare out the window and watch the clouds, seeing over and over the clouded face of a baby on an ultrasound screen reflected back at me from the sky.

Since then, there have been moments of blessed distraction, of course. Being mindful does not have to mean stewing in my own dark thoughts with endless reprieve. But even the joy of laughing at Jim Gaffigan on TV with my husband or sitting around a fire with dear friends, have been healing moments of being *here*.

I won't ever say that I am grateful that I have gone through these experiences, a mere brush on the surface of the great hurts that exist in our lives, but I will say that I am grateful for the chance to always be learning in this life. I am grateful for the reminder that pain is not something to fear, that love and loss are intermingled like the jumbled vines of our vegetables. I am grateful that even if it took me being forced to stop, I have found so much support, like an undercurrent of love running through this world I never even knew existed. I am grateful, quite simply, just to have the chance to be.