

Love in the wake of violence

Wilma Derksen

Life was brought down to its simplest form when our daughter went missing and was found murdered.

I had only one verse that saw me through the first year: “There are three things that remain—faith, hope and love—and the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13, TLB).

Whenever I was asked to talk about my faith and share my stories, I always referred to this verse. When you are on your knees and there is nothing left, there are three things we need: faith in God; hope that everything would work out—here or in the afterlife; and love.



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Love was the hardest.

I could not believe how much our world had changed overnight. We were suddenly facing real demons and mental health issues. The biggest demon was definitely fear.

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Fear isn't easily recognized. Often, I have asked my clients if they are afraid.

Inevitably they shake their heads. But if I ask them if they might have PTSD or anger management problems, they much more readily admit to those. Yet all of it is fear driven. A psychologist once told me that it is really all about fear—fear underlines everything.

In addition, research shows that the average person will feel some degree of fear and frustration ten to fourteen times a day.

So all of life, in its simplest form, is about love and fear.

But before I continue, I do want to say that not all fear is dysfunctional. Fear can be an empowering emotion in normal circumstances. However, in the extreme, it will incapacitate and disorient victims of serious crime. This massive new fear can cause panic attacks, which is fear gone wild. It is fear of fear.

I could not believe the fear-based issues that we were faced with.

In my desperation to understand this new world of issues, I joined a support group of parents of murdered children—people of like experience. There I could watch the issues play themselves out. I started to organize all the symptoms of trauma that I was seeing in the group of like experience, which I have listed in many ways, talked about, and written down.

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In this article, I thought I might explore them again, but this time with the lens of fear.

First of all, violence causes us to lose our ability to put words to what has happened to us. Our inside voice, which we often call our narrator, is confused—our story is fragmented. The underlying fear is that my narrator is now telling me a story of failure. It no longer holds hope. Failure is frightening. I am told that the word that can incite a prison revolt is “loser.”

I had to let go of my grief, move on, smile, and learn to laugh again. However, since the grieving process is one of vulnerability, pain, and sadness, it is common for the victim who is already feeling unsafe to want to avoid this process. We are afraid to separate ourselves from our loved one.

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The criminal violation of society's moral code and social contract call into question the order and control of the entire universe and the creator of that universe. Losing faith in God creates a new fear of death and the afterlife.

Stigmatization resulting from the tendency of society to blame the victim can also cause the victim to question his or her identity, status, and worth. I had to let go of the old me and make peace with my new identity, allowing some doors to shut while walking through the new doors and opportunities opening to me. There is tremendous loss of social equity in becoming a victim—the fear of losing status resulting in social anxiety.

When there is no immediate justice, there is a fear of lawlessness. The whole world can turn hostile. Criminals are dangerous. The first instinct is to identify the primary cause of the harm and blame it. Who is it?

Yet placing responsibility for a murder has huge ramifications—as we discovered in our ten-year trial process. Then there is the fear of taking responsibility for one’s actions. There is fear of misplaced blame and guilt and the consequences of that. We expect the guilty to repay for the loss. How does that happen in murder?

There is a fear of the unknown that conflicts with an obsession to know the truth.



There is the fear of vulnerability and helplessness. How do I protect my other children? How do I protect the vulnerable in our society? This fear can feel like righteous anger when it is expressed—except that any rage that parades as goodness can be a force of destruction like no other.

There is also the fear of vulnerability and helplessness. How do I protect my other children? How do I protect the vulnerable in our society? This fear can feel like righteous anger when it is expressed—except that any rage that parades as goodness can be a force of destruction like no other.

Ultimately all crime is about broken societal relationships. The more violent the crime, the more difficult it is to reestablish a relationship of trust. There is always a fear of the enemy, any person who presents him or herself as a bully.

There is a suspicion of authority—especially when it is flawed. So, when an organization offers to oversee and control

a violent act, there is tremendous fear that they might not be able to handle it. We view systems with suspicion.

Eventually I had to let go of the hope of all reconciliation, which leaves with me with an unresolved conflict. Conflict creates stress and tension, to have no hope of recovery creates a new set of fears. I will never feel safe again. Yet, fear creates a prison with invisible bars.

For me, there was also the fear that we would never have closure. I had chosen a daring, vulnerable position. I had chosen love. I was never sure, especially in the early stages, if love really could overcome evil.

Actually, I don’t remember any one critical moment when I made an astounding choice to forgive or to love.

Often it was only a shift of the eyes: I will not focus on *that*; I will let *that* go and focus on something positive, something loving, and some-

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thing that feels like God. It was in the tiny decisions to be creative rather than ruminate. It was that switch in the brain.

Now in hindsight I believe more than ever the simple theological premise: "We need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly; his perfect love for us eliminates all dread of what he might do to us. If we are afraid, it is for fear of what he might do to us and shows that we are not fully convinced that he really loves us" (1 John 4:18, TLB). Or as I remember it: "Perfect love casts out fear."

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About the author

Wilma Derksen is best known for her work in victimization due to the murder of her daughter, but her real passion has always been to be known as an author. Ever since she penned her first sentence in public school she has been a closet writer with a novel in her bottom drawer. It was this writing passion that helped her find expression for her grief. She is a graduate of Creative Communication from Red River Community College, worked as a Western Regional Editor for ten years, authored six books regarding trauma and murder, and published two historical novels. Now as a Certified Executive Coach, she is using her coaching opportunities to help others find the story within themselves. She is developing a curriculum for "Writing your life story" and creating self-publishing support through Amity Publishers. She is also presently a pastor at Maplecrest Church in Winnipeg.