

For Broadcast: 5th August 2018

GOING HOME

Interview

Jonathan: There was one time, I was coming out of Mozambique. We were in this little plane, four of us, and got caught in a thunderstorm, and the pilot said, "Sorry guys, we're not going to make it. We're going to go down." I got out the video camera, and looked down to the lens and said good-bye to my family. Oh, man, that makes you think about living and dying.

Richard: This is Messages of Hope, and you're with Richard and Celia. Death is not a topic that we talk about over a barbecue. Most of us don't talk about death until it's on our doorstep. Today, we're talking with Jonathan Krause about why we don't need to be afraid to have those conversations.

Celia: About 18 months ago, my father was dying, and the family was gathered around, but I found it really difficult to talk about what was happening. Jonathan, you've written about your mom's passing away. Did you find it difficult to talk about at the time.

Jonathan: It's interesting. When my mom was dying of cancer, it was like she knew what was going to happen and wanted to talk about it. So, in her lounge room, she had a favourite chair that she would want to sit in and have people come to her and talk about life and talk about her dying. My dad, he was only focusing on helping Mom live, and he wanted her to exercise and he wanted to cook good food for her, and all of those kind of things, but when I went to visit Mom, she'd sit me down and say, "Okay, let's talk about the funeral. Let's talk about dying. Let's talk about what comes next." That seemed to be what she needed, and for me as her son, once I felt good about it, it felt kind of comforting to talk about it in the open, and not tuck it away.

Richard: What were some of the things that she mentioned?

Jonathan: Well, she talked about the funeral. She picked out a whole lot of hymns before she'd even knew she was dying, but now that she knew she was dying, she said, "Now they're all too sad. I want to do happy songs, because I'm going to a good place, and I want to celebrate my life. So, everybody's got to wear bright colours. Don't let them in if they're in black or grey or anything. When they carry out my coffin, I want people to applaud, and clap, and be excited." When she talked about it like that, it gave us ... It took a burden off, I think, that we could celebrate her life rather than grieve her death.

Celia: Yeah.

Richard: So, how did it make you feel when she spoke about death?

Jonathan: It's confronting when it's your mom and she's talking about the end of her life and you know you're not going to have her any more. But, because I'm a Christian, I could sort of

feel that joy, too, knowing she's going to a better place. Because when you're a Christian, it's like you're going home, and going home is a good thing. You know you're going to be welcomed and loved and cared for and all that sort of stuff, so that's kind of how it made me feel.

Celia: You were fortunate to have had that conversation with your mom. But what about when we don't have that time, when it's sudden?

Jonathan: I don't think there's any easy answers to anything, and I think the way anybody deals with grief is the right way for them. I feel like we shouldn't waste our time, now. We should tell the people who we love every day that we love them. We should ring up our parent who's living interstate every second day, even if they don't put their hearing aid in and are grumpy and don't hear half of what you say. Tell them that you love them and make the most of those times.

Celia: So, it's kind of like the no regrets.

Jonathan: Yeah, exactly, the no regrets.

Richard: I may have even been brought up saying, you know, you're only a heartbeat away, no matter who we are and whatever circumstance we are in, so it's almost like the seize the day, seize the moment. Talking about death is scary for many people, but it makes sense to talk about these things before they happen. But is it ever too early? Should we be having these conversations with our kids?

Jonathan: I remember when my daughter was about seven, she asked to go to the cemetery and she wanted to explore it. She chose ... It was dusk. It was a thunderstorm. It was the most spooky time you could possibly go, but she was fascinated, and it wasn't a fear of death, it was just wanting to know about it.

Celia: Curiosity.

Jonathan: And maybe we layer on this you should be scared of death, it's a horrible kind of thing, that kids don't naturally have. So, maybe it's about talking young, and I reckon, go to funerals, even if it's a distant relative or a friend of a friend. Go to a funeral so you can be there to support the person who's lost something. It's part of life.

Celia: Yeah, it's hard, isn't it. That's one of the things that I fear the most when talking about death is now that I have children, that fear... sometimes it cripples me.

Richard: I agree. I can't go there. Like if I think of or I see a child die or even a sad movie about a child dying in any way, shape or form, I'm a mess. I can't even go anywhere near ... My emotions won't let me or my conscience won't let me go with actually wrestling with a conversation about death with my kids. Because, it's too hard. It's like it'll break me.

Celia: But you look at it differently?

Jonathan: I've kind of had to. My son used to ride motorbikes, and I got that phone call at one o'clock in the morning that every parent dreads, "This is the hospital. Your son's been in an accident." And you went down there. He survived. He should have been killed. He rode into a car at 80 kilometers an hour, and just went over the top. But that forced you to confront what would happen if he really did die?

Celia: If he didn't make it.

Jonathan: I don't know if it actually happened, how I would cope. I would like to be able to celebrate the blessing that my child has given me in the life that they've had, and focus on that rather than on the things I've missed out on or lost. I hope that's the way I would approach it. Then I'd start crying, because it's so hard to deal with, but ...

Celia: That is really hard, but from what you've been sharing, changing our perspective on death, while it's challenging, can also be really empowering.

Jonathan: Sometimes I feel like we think life is the most precious thing, and I'm not convinced that it is. I think love is more precious than life. So, if you believe that, then love can go beyond. I feel like more and more that's what I'm coming to.

Richard: What do you mean by that?

Jonathan: Well, if the person you love passes away, your love still exists for them and the love you shared with them still exists. The breathing part of life is finished, but the love hasn't finished. That's bigger and stronger and it goes on. And I guess that goes right back to thinking about God is love and it's all-encompassing and it's all big. That's the bit to hold onto.

Celia: Jonathan, you've seen a lot of death in your personal life and in your work. Has it made you think about your own death in a particular way?

Jonathan: I have total confidence that I'm going to go a place where I'm with Jesus and I meet my mom. At the same time, I think about the people I leave behind, my kids, and the grief and what they have to deal with. I think we have a real responsibility to talk to our families about our dying and our life and bring it out into the open. I think that can give them comfort if we're not scared of what comes next.

Celia: Why do you think we don't talk about it. What is it about ... Why do we skirt around the edges?

Jonathan: It's because it's so final, maybe, and because no one's got proof of what happens next. It's a hard question. I find it good to talk about it, because I'm not scared of it and it brings it out in the open, and I want my kids not to be scared of it.

Richard: What's led you to this point? To have this assurance, this strength about talking about death? What's given you the confidence to approach death in this way?

Jonathan: In my normal, everyday work, I work in developing countries with people who face death all the time, either through conflict or through poverty or malnutrition, so I've seen death up close a lot. What I've learned is you have sadness at the person that you've lost, but you can have confidence, if you have a Christian faith, that there's another life, and life is more than just the 80 years we have on this earth, or the 30 years. It goes way beyond that, and glimpsing that eternity, I guess, is what gives me hope and confidence and excitement, even, that life is bigger than what we can see and touch.

Richard: So, how did you glimpse eternity?

Celia: What does that mean?

- Jonathan: I feel like it comes back to love. Love is enduring and it's huge. When you have kids, they think if you have another child, is there going enough love to go around, but love just keeps expanding and growing. I see God's love like that, just keeps expanding and growing and all-encompassing, and then that filters into life as well. It's like life isn't constrained by birth and death and the things that happen to you, that love is eternal and goes beyond, and so your life goes beyond as well.
- Celia: When your mom was dying, and you were talking about her death, she gave you a great image that seemed to take away the fear.
- Jonathan: Yeah, when I sat down and talked to Mom about her passing away, she said to me that, "Look, death is a doorway and you walk through it to another place, and that's something to be excited about." She seemed to know what was going on, because just before she passed away, Dad said the Lord's Prayer with her, and maybe Psalm 23, then Mom said, "It's time to say good-bye." And it was like she knew. Then Dad went home, and that's when she passed away. It was like, "I've had this life, now it's time to go through the door into the next life, and don't hold me back from that, because I'm going to a good place."
- Celia: She seemed pretty accepting and, almost well, very ready, didn't she, your mom?
- Jonathan: Yeah. She never struck me as scared of dying. It was like, "It's what happens, and I know where I'm going, so I don't have to be scared about it." I guess as a Christian, that's all I want to share with people. There's more to life than this life, and it's a greater love than you can even imagine and it's there for you. If you have that, then you can have the confidence of where you're going, which means in your life now, you can live it to the full.

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