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## Practicing Courage with All Your Soul

by Scott Stoner

*We may not ever understand why we suffer or be able to control the forces that cause our suffering, but we can have a lot to say about what the suffering does to us, and what sort of people we become because of it.*

—Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*

The *Soul* quadrant of the Living Compass model for well-being includes *Spirituality* and *Rest & Play*. In this reflection I will focus on what it means to have the courage to be vulnerable as it relates to our spiritual lives.

Few things feel more like being lost in the wildness than the grief that we experience after the death of a loved one. As a priest and a pastoral counselor, I know that grief is not just an emotional wilderness, but that often it is also a time of disruption to a person's spiritual well-being. In the initial experience of grief it is not uncommon for people to feel angry at God, and to feel that their faith is being tested.

As we read in Sunday's reflection, it is important to not get stuck in the wilderness. Perhaps this is why Psalm 23 is so comforting to those who are grieving. It says, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil." Note the emphasis on movement. It acknowledges that the valley of grief is real and it is deep, but it describes it as something that is walked *through*, not a place to stay.

The profound spiritual questions that get raised in the early experiences of grief can feel like we are experiencing a breakdown in our faith. With time, spiritual guidance, and the support of a spiritual community, many who are grieving actually end experiencing a breakthrough in their faith life. A new place opens up to them in which they develop a deeper, more intimate faith in God, one that embraces and sustains them in their time of vulnerability.

**Making It Personal:** Have you ever had your faith tested in the midst of grief and loss? Are you experiencing this right now? Looking back, can you remember a time when your faith grew as a result of spending time in the wilderness of grief?