

**Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

**A Couple's Perspective on the Death of Children (Interview with Steve and Andrea Ostini)**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: GTY85

JOHN MacARTHUR: Well I have a special joy today on our broadcast, to introduce you to two very precious people who are a part of my life, part of our ministry and a part of our church, Steve and Andrea Ostini. They are members of Grace Community Church where I've pastored since 1969. Andrea was just telling me she's been in the church since she was three years old, and I think Steve's been in the church about 13 years, or so, from what you said.

They were married at Grace Community Church in 1994. Andrea is a graduate from The Master's College. Steve has touched your life, if you're a listener to this program. He is assistant producer for the Grace To You broadcast. He's a writer, helps us put together the various elements that go into our daily and weekend programs.

Steve, how long have you been with us?

STEVE OSTINI: Since November of '95.

JOHN: And you had a background in journalism and...

STEVE: Exactly and had been at Grace Church and just always drawn to the teaching, your teaching, and when the opportunity arose to...for this position at Grace To You, I just seized upon that and thankful for the opportunity to sort of grow into the position.

JOHN: Ah, that's wonderful. And, of course, I've known Andrea...Andrea, your folks were missionaries in Brazil, right?

ANDREA OSTINI: Yes, that's correct.

JOHN: And now, of course, Steve and Andrea are not only a wonderful part of our...of our church family but a wonderful part of our Grace To You family.

That's just the start. They have a really amazing story that I'm going to share with you today. And here's how it sort of begins. Tell us what happened in November of 1997.

STEVE: That was when we were rejoicing at the birth of our first child, a son, named Andrew...Andrew Stephen. And he was just a...it was a very normal pregnancy, seemed to be

uneventful. And it quickly became rather eventful with some complications and we learned that he had a...

JOHN: This was after he was born, you didn't know any complications till after...

STEVE: No, it was after...exactly...exactly there were problems very evident right when he...after he was born, particularly affecting his ability to breathe on his own. And quickly they came up with the diagnosis of a disease called Myotonic Dystrophy and it's a genetic disease that they back tracked and found that actually Andrea had it in a far less severe form.

JOHN: So it's some kind of a genetic thing and it just got passed on.

STEVE: Correct.

JOHN: Did you realize at that time, Andrea, how serious it was?

ANDREA: There wasn't much they could tell us about the disease because it's rare. So I didn't realize how serious it was. And it was not something you noticed or something they would check for when you're young.

JOHN: So you didn't know you had it until it showed up in Andrew.

STEVE: Exactly.

ANDREA: Right.

JOHN: How long did Andrew live?

STEVE: Just about exactly two months.

JOHN: I remember coming to the hospital at that time to visit you guys and I think...I think it was right at the time, it must have been toward the end of that time because you were pretty much aware of the fact that he was probably not going to survive.

STEVE: It was probably mid to end, at that time I think things were a little up in the air. He was still had a ventilator that he was on which was assisting his breathing and the real concern was, would he be able to be weaned off of that. And actually though right toward the end he was weaned off and really we were even told to start thinking about getting ready to have him hold. He would have been a special-needs child but it was looking like he would come out of the hospital.

JOHN: Wow. What kind of memories do you have of those two months, those...I mean, you have a lot of memories of hospital beds, apparatus, but, I mean, what are the special moments.

STEVE: I would even say that Andrea would have more memories than me just because of the amount of time she was able to spend there.

JOHN: Tell us, Andrea, what kind of memories do you have of little Andrew?

ANDREA: I would be at the hospital every day for eight hours. I would sit and watch him and read books to him and did things like that. The most important part was just him watching me and just looking up at me like he knew who I was.

JOHN: Did you get to touch him or hold him at all?

ANDREA: Actually I did get to hold him, even when he had the ventilator in. The nurse would help me and I'd get to hold him and, you know, just sit there with him and watch him fall asleep in my arms and things like that...

JOHN: The whole time realizing that his little life could be very short, but hoping it might by the goodness of God if that was His will be extended.

ANDREA: There was that hope that he might come home and he would be fine.

JOHN: Sure.

Did you feel prepared for dealing with his death?

STEVE: I would overall say yes and only because there was a peace that we had, a peace that we experienced, the peace that passes all understanding and for that you just have to credit that to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives, the fact that we have been saved by grace, we've been given a mind to understand the Bible as what it is, it's God's Word, and is the foundation on which we can lean and build our lives even in the midst of trials...

JOHN: Yeah, and face every issue with a biblical viewpoint. So at the time that he died, you understood that God loved you and that this was in the plan of God and this fit His sovereign purpose and this was His will. And that's part of the foundation, isn't it?

ANDREA: Yes.

STEVE: Yes, it was, of course a sad time, perhaps even more so for Andrea, just the loss...I felt the loss deeply, I can only really imagine as a mother losing that little one that she was able to spend

even so much more time with than me.

JOHN: Yes, as well as carrying that little one in her womb, all the anticipation and the reality of that. The natural question that must have immediately come to your mind was...do we have another baby? What was going on in your mind when you were thinking those kinds of things?

ANDREA: I think with ourselves and the Lord and individually, the Lord was looking on each of our hearts to bring us to the point where if it was His will that He would bring another baby into our lives.

STEVE: We really sort of put the whole conversation on ice for a good amount of time. And it was...it was neat...there was one particular point where we talked about the subject again and then realized that individually the Lord had been preparing us if it would be His will, we would be open to having another biological child.

JOHN: Of course Andrea was not well through all of this either. And so you had to give some time for her to recover and concentrate on her...

STEVE: Exactly.

JOHN: You had thoughts of adoption, I'm sure, as an option.

STEVE: We did and figured we would if not pursue that right then, probably would be an option down the line.

JOHN: By the year 2000, much prayer, much discussion and counsel, you decided...Well, maybe the Lord wants us to have another baby, so we'll seek for that. And in November of the year 2000 what did you find out?

ANDREA: We found out that the baby was on the way.

JOHN: And this pregnancy, was it any different than the first one, Andrea?

ANDREA: Yes, I think it was. In the very beginning it wasn't so different, but as the months went on there were some complications and it came to the point where I had to have a lengthy stay in the hospital.

JOHN: So you had to stay for not just weeks, but maybe months in the hospital?

ANDREA: About two months.

JOHN: Two months in the hospital, just to make sure that they had control and observation . . . So that...you knew that when you were pregnant that the possibility was that the same genetic thing could come up again in this next little one?

ANDREA: Yeah, it was a 50-50 chance.

STEVE: Or there about, our understanding was it was not a hundred percent.

JOHN: It was time to give birth, tell us about that, Andrea.

ANDREA: Well, as I was going into the operating room I started bleeding and when the...and I was out of it, obviously, because I was on medication and things like that...

JOHN: So you were going in, you were sort of out of it and they were prepared to do a C-section and the little life that came out of your womb was a little girl.

ANDREA: Yes it was, we had found out before.

JOHN: So you knew?

ANDREA: Yes, it was going to be a little girl.

JOHN: So you were pink this time...with all

ALL: That way...yes...

JOHN: All the things that you were collecting. Tell us about Carly.

ANDREA: She was early, about 33 weeks...and there were problems from the very beginning . . . the breathing...

JOHN: Did you see the same kind of symptoms in her so that?

ANDREA: I don't think so much because she didn't live that long. But the doctor said she was having some trouble breathing and so that kind of gave you some inkling that there was a problem.

STEVE: And for what it's worth, I was actually in there for the operation and actually from my advantage, I could tell they were working on her right away and just with the glimpse that I got that definitely it was going through my mind it looked similar. There's some physical characteristics that were similar to our son. So I think I was maybe a little more braced for it than she was. Number one, I wasn't medicated and...

JOHN: That did help...to be dealing with it objectively.

STEVE: Right.

JOHN: How soon after her birth did you know that she wasn't going to survive?

ANDREA: Again I was out of it, I was unconscious for most of the time that Carly was actually alive.

STEVE: We sort of...

JOHN: So she actually lived for ....

ANDREA: Twenty-two hours...

STEVE: It was less than a day.

JOHN: Less than a day.

STEVE: Things progressed pretty rapidly. She was born on the evening one night and by the next afternoon things were definitely serious and I did get to spend some time with her and just enjoy her for what little time we had, but it progressed very quickly right after that.

JOHN: So now you've lost two little ones.

STEVE: Yes.

JOHN: And you're trusting the Lord because you know the Lord is sovereign, you know you belong to Him, you know He loves you, you know He's too wise to make mistakes, too loving to be unkind.

STEVE: Yes.

JOHN: You know this fits in His purpose, but the pain is still there, the loss is still there, the emptiness is there, the...the hope is unrealized. You don't have a family and yet you...you look at this with a positive attitude because you know something beyond the fact that God is in control. You know where those little lives are. Is that not true?

ANDREA: That's correct.

STEVE: That's our confidence.

JOHN: What do you believe about the place that a little child goes when they die?

STEVE: We both share the belief that an infant whether it dies because of disease or even abortion, or within that undeterminable amount of time of the the...before they reach the age of accountability, they would go directly into the presence of the Lord to be eternally with Him in heaven. And I suppose like most people who would come to that view, maybe the most commonly preferred to section of Scripture would be in 2 Samuel 12 where the child born to David with Bathsheba dies and the...I'll probably misquote the verse, where he acknowledges that the child cannot return to me, but he can go to him.

JOHN: Right. Yeah, that's...just to press that a little bit. As Christian parents you really run to that kind of passage when you've lost a child. I mean, this isn't something that's an arm's length issue, this is so close to your heart that you're...you're...the depth of this pain, the reality of this loss, the permanence of this loss, the reality of eternity, the eternality of a soul, if you will, forces a Christian parent to really come to grips with that issue.

STEVE: The trials drive you closer to it.

JOHN: Right, but you've got to have straight answers. You're basically a student of the Bible, you're basically not a person who can be comforted by somebody's sympathy. You need to know the truth. Is that not so?

ANDREA: That's very true...

JOHN: Where is my baby? Right?

STEVE: Exactly.

JOHN: Where is our little one? Where is Andrew? Where has Carly gone? That is the compelling question. And I remember being in a panel of pastors in a big conference one time and somebody asked the question, "What happens to babies that die?" And they went through the panel and the first four pastors didn't know. And I thought to myself, you know, how can you...how can you get that far along in your pastorate without being forced to come up with some answer because every one of us who are pastors face the loss of children. I mean, it happens virtually every week of my life in my church, somebody in our church, or somebody close to our church loses a loved one, or is in the process of losing a loved one, sometimes through illness, disease, miscarriage, whatever.

STEVE: Scriptures like that...like the passage from 2 Samuel and others where we see Christ's tenderness toward children...

JOHN: Right.

STEVE: Those passages become all the more precious to you when you go through something like this.

JOHN: Sure. And you do. You run to the truth. It isn't enough, as I said, to just be sympathetically comforted, it isn't enough for somebody to say, "Well, you know, I think we can be sure that they're in heaven." You want something more than somebody's assurance. You want God's Word on this situation.

STEVE: That's right. That's exactly right.

JOHN: That's why it's so important, you know, people sometimes wonder whether doctrine is practical. I mean, doctrine is everything.

ANDREA: Yes.

JOHN: Because doctrine is just another word for truth, right? It's just another word for truth. Truth is everything when the child dies. The question is, give me the truth about this condition and where is my child?

Why don't you talk a little bit about what impact the loss of these two precious little ones had on you as a couple.

STEVE: I think we both discovered, thankfully, particularly after Andrew, but then even with the second pregnancy with Carly, we found that we had even been drawn closer together as a couple. We had always been close. God had providentially brought us together in marriage, we believe that. We were both experiencing the same loss. We were in this together. We're married for life. And it opens you up and if there's any part of you that you're maybe holding back, going through something like that just drops all the barriers, all the pretense and it really just meshed us even closer together. Would you agree?

ANDREA: Surely yes I would With my disease I...there's a lot of things I don't do for lack of energy and God saw fit to bring us together for my lack of energy. He makes it evenly, matches it up, he makes it up with his.

JOHN: Yeah, I understand what you're saying. You in the sorrow...in the mutual comfort that is demanded, you become sympathetic toward each other and those sympathies extend beyond just the momentary experience, it embraces all of life. And, of course, I don't know if you knew she had this disease before all this happened, and how wonderful that you have a loving husband who is willing to

offer his strength to support your weaknesses. Isn't that what marriage is really all about anyway?

ANDREA: I'm very thankful for him.

JOHN: Yeah. Where did you go for support? Where did you go for comfort?

STEVE: The church, fellow believers. We...whether it was the people in the Bible study group we're a part of, or other folks that we know from church, certainly all the family that I have here at Grace To You, you as our pastor and your wife Patricia, really we just had support from all sorts of different directions. I remember getting to meet for the first time some of our international folks, they were here for meetings and letting us know, you know in South Africa we've been praying for you. Talk about just all the humbling effect of that and realizing...boy. And how often am I not faithful enough to pray for others as I should. That was certainly a good...a good result of all that. Certainly knocked my prayer life up some notches.

JOHN: Well, when you're all alone at a time like that, what are the questions you ask? I kind of preempted, maybe, your answer, but when you're alone and you're thinking about those little ones that are gone, what kind of questions do you ask?

STEVE: Maybe some of the usual things, what they look like?

ANDREA: What they're doing? You know, obviously they're praising the Lord.

JOHN: So you're past the point of where they are

ANDREA: Yes.

STEVE: Exactly.

JOHN: You know they're with the Lord. And that's what we...that's what we show in this new book, Safe in the Arms of God, very important. That book really came out of that pastor's conference when those men didn't have an answer. I said, there has to be an answer in Scripture. Went to the Word of God, dug it out and I preached a series and then came the book, Safe in the Arms of God, which basically the bottom line of the book is, "They're in heaven." And the Bible, I think, is pretty clear on that. So now you're asking, now that they're in heaven, what are they like in heaven?

STEVE: Exactly.

JOHN: What do they look like? What are they doing?

JOHN: What kind of practical things did people say or do that meant the most to you?

ANDREA: I think a lot of it was the prayers. I mean, people we didn't even know were praying for us. And they just held us up in prayer a lot. I mean, you don't know how many people are praying for you, but you feel it.

JOHN: Sure, you see the hand of God in response to that. Ah...ah...maybe this is not a fair question, but what kind of things were not helpful?

STEVE: I don't know that we would have too many good examples of that. Just what seemed to be most helpful was just knowing that people were praying. And I can think of a couple of incidences where even they had maybe even a little booklet or something that was helpful to them because they had gone through this themselves. And that was...that was meaningful. Any more than that might have, at the time, seemed like too much, but that was just right.

JOHN: Yeah, it's sort of like Job's friends, you know. When he first suffered all his loss and they just sat there for seven days and didn't say anything. And that was comforting. They were there for support and for prayer. And then when they started to talk, everything disintegrated.

STEVE: Exactly.

JOHN: I understand that. So, you do have a strong hope that some day you're going to see Andrew again? Carly?

ANDREA: Yes.

STEVE: Looking forward to it, yes.

JOHN: And they'll be in their perfected state. When you think about that, Steve, in the early church there are some documents that indicate they used to have a celebration when a baby died because one had passed through the world without ever knowing the effects of sin. I think if there's anything a parent would want for his child, the thing you would most want was the minimal effect of sin on your child. You...you essentially got that.

STEVE: Right, and that's a blessing and that's one of those sort of objective truths that help salve the hurt. As we've already said, the wound is there, the hurt is there, that's all part of this temporal world. And, of course, this whole...both these experiences made our focus more heavenward and yes, it would have been absolute tragedy if...I think of families that...where the parents are believers and they're presenting the gospel to their children, they're exposing them to Scripture, doing what you would consider all the right things and not seeing fruit in the lives of their children, or even out and out

rebellion, just the heartbreak that would be there. And I can't imagine that and yet thankful that...

JOHN: It is a severe mercy. In the end it is the mercy of all mercies that that little child went from birth to glory with no stops between. I mean, that is a mercy, severe from your viewpoint but a mercy nonetheless.

And as to why the Lord chooses to do this in some people's lives. Have you thought about, you know, what this has done in your life? I mean, what are the benefits of this? This loss? This experience?

STEVE: Well certainly I think we just touched on some of the...some of the practical out workings, more of a heaven focus, personal ...to each other And as a little side note, when Andrew was in the hospital, I think I remember telling you this when you and Patricia visited us, providentially some of my work here at Grace To You, I was working on some of the creative work on your series from James 1, benefitting from life's trials, and that was just...just a wonderful providential measure of grace for me just to be able to go through a passage that I was familiar with, I had heard teaching on before, but, boy, are you just like a sponge wanting to soak that up.

JOHN: All of a sudden it's a direct hit, isn't it?

STEVE: Exactly. So understanding...

JOHN: Isn't that how the Lord works? You're going through the severest trial of your life while you're editing material from benefitting from life's trials?

STEVE: It certainly was the case for me and one of the things I really remember and in understanding, yes endurance does come from trials and God does not make mistakes and uses trials in His children's lives.

JOHN: Have you had opportunity to share these trials with others who had a similar loss?

STEVE: We have. There are families, just at our own church, babies die and families are hurting and there are some we...again, maybe just doing what we...what would have been helpful to us, whether it was just attending the memorial service, just letting them know we're praying.

JOHN: And making sure they have the biblical foundation.

ANDREA: Right.

JOHN: To know the truth about that little one.

STEVE: Exactly. Encouraging them.

JOHN: Just in kind of wrapping up our conversation a little bit. Steve, you've sort of been defeated from the human viewpoint in trying to have a family. What are the plans for the future?

STEVE: We are right now in the midst of the adoption process. We still have a little bit more paper work and requirements to take care of. We're actively pursuing that. And when we sit back and realize...Boy, it's been a long time since we were first thinking of starting our family and where we are now, and some ups and downs. I think emotionally for both of us, there's sort of a frustration there, but we are excited about...I'm excited just for Andrea to have the opportunity to mother a little child.

JOHN: She's got a lot of pent-up mothering in her.

ANDREA: Yes.

STEVE: And right now working as a preschool teacher and has worked with children so much, it would just be the natural use of those energies.

JOHN: Well, she's a charming gal and I know she'll charm the little one, that's for sure. So the process takes how long to go through an adoption? Or is that a little bit dependent on what's available or...?

STEVE: Once we have all our requirements done, we're probably bracing for about a year, perhaps it could go quicker, but possibly soon.

JOHN: It takes longer to adopt one than it does to get pregnant and bring one to birth, right?

STEVE: Yes.

JOHN: That's a lot of paper work.

ANDREA: But we also know in this situation that God has that certain child, even though it may not be conceived yet, that it's going to be for us and He had that child picked out for us.

JOHN: Andrea, you're back to your theology again. Isn't that where we anchor everything in life? We anchor everything in what we know to be true about God and in our relationship to Him.

Well, this is a wonderful opportunity for folks to hear your testimony. And by the way, if they read the book, you've written the whole story out, absolutely magnificently done. You're a writer, you're a journalist, so it's a great story and I've included every word of it in the book. So along with the stories of many others, there are many other couples in our church that I've gone through this with, and all of

these riveting compelling stories sort of woven through the fabric of what the Bible has to say make for, I think, a moving, moving book. The title again, Safe in the Arms of God. We encourage you to make sure that you read this book and have it on hand to give to folks who go through this very difficult time.

Well, you're dear folks. Thank you, Steve and Andrea, for being with us and we're going to be praying that it won't take too long for the little one the Lord has for you to arrive.

STEVE & ANDREA: Thank you.

JOHN: You're welcome.

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