

**The Next Step**

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Son Ethan went from rolling to walking. He never crawled. The minute he was able to walk, he never stopped. "Slow down! Wait for me! Watch out for the cars!" I said many words of warning. Sometimes he listened. Sometimes he gave me a look that translates, "Oh, Mom. I'm still going to run on ahead, but aren't you cute thinking that I might slow down?"

We're used to taking many first steps in our lives. The first time we go to school. Our first friend. Our first date. Our first job. Our first love. Our first child. So many firsts that turn into seconds and thirds and more. But we always remember the firsts. What about the firsts after we experience a loss? The first time we celebrate a holiday without someone we love. The first time we go somewhere without them. Or the first time we see other parents with their children on the playground, missing the sounds of our own child's laughter. Maybe there are firsts we'll never get to experience. Our child growing up, getting married and having our grandchildren. Or we finally retire but our parents are gone and we can spend no more time with them, even though we'd love to. During the initial loss, we're in shock. It's hard to think. To move. To know what to do. We're unable to think past where we are at this moment. A step of any kind seems impossible.

There's an old cartoon of someone unknowingly walking on soft cement. Walking along they slow down until they're stuck because the cement has hardened. It's funny in a cartoon, but not so funny in real life. We can get stuck in our loss, our grief, our mourning. It's a journey that has no time frame. No linear movement. It's like my mom once said to me. "You never stop missing the person you love. You just to live without them a little bit more every day."

So we just kept taking steps. Sometimes they're such tiny steps that we're the only ones who know that we've actually moved. Sometimes we have to take a step of faith and then the path appears. And once in a rare while, God illuminates our path with neon lights. When will we know we have taken enough steps? We'll never take enough steps here on earth until we reach Heaven. Then our new journey begins. But in the meantime, we need to be kind to ourselves and to others. As we call on the promises of the Bible, the Lord gives us courage and strength to step forward in faith.

"... God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you' (Hebrews 13:5b).

As we take a step from where we are right now, remember, the Lord himself will not relax his hold on us, or give up on us. He goes with us every step of the way. And if we ask him, he will direct our path.