

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Story by Nicole Passar Gebhardt

Heidi Coffee: A Powerful Witness of Forgiveness and Grace in Loss.

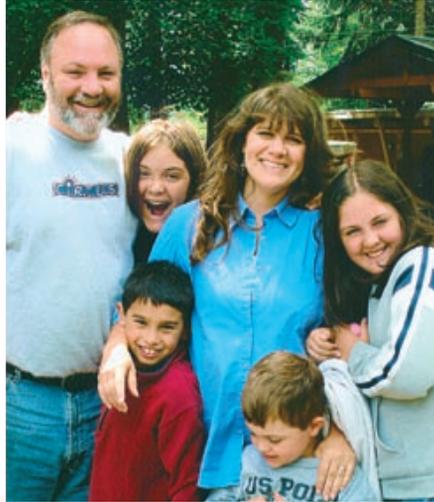
When beloved husband and children's minister Gavin Coffee, 43, of Seattle, WA, was killed in a car accident, his wife Heidi—left with four children and one on the way—showed such mercy and grace to the young man whose truck caused the accident that all of Seattle took notice.

Gavin, Heidi's husband of 14 years, was killed in August when he swerved to dodge a piece of debris falling from a pickup truck and another car crashed into him. The Coffees' pastor, John Aydelott of City Calvary Chapel, had been on the cell phone with Gavin during the crash. John called Heidi, and the two went searching for Gavin—finally coming upon the crash scene. A state trooper told them that the unsecured load had caused a chain reaction car crash, instantly killing the driver.

That load had fallen from the truck of a 21-year-old Christian man. The young man attends Calvary Fellowship Seattle, where the Coffees had served before helping plant City Calvary Chapel. Heidi invited the remorseful young man to the memorial service, held at CF Seattle. She asked the court not to impose jail time but to assign community service instead.

"Heidi was so remarkable through this whole ordeal. She didn't hold any bitterness toward this young man," shared Brett Williams, longtime family friend and worship pastor at CF Seattle. "She brought so much grace and love into this really awful situation that it was a tremendous witness to the city. It was on the top news stations for several nights."

So many people were touched by the story that Heidi opened his memorial service to the public. More than 1,500 people gathered—with local media broadcasting to the rest of the community—to hear about Gavin's life and his heart for Jesus Christ. "His memorial was like a celebration," Pastor John recalled. "Gavin was heavily involved in children's ministry, and at his memorial you could see the generations he had touched." One powerful segment



The Coffee family earlier this year

"I wouldn't change anything. I don't have any regrets."

featured a grainy recording of a song he wrote inspired by his life verse, 2 Timothy 4:7–8. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (NIV).

Brett added, "People saw forgiveness, grace, restoration, and mercy. The Gospel is so powerful when people see it lived out—especially under such circumstances."

Heidi said she is not resentful about her loss. She thanks God for the time they had. Looking back, she sees how the Lord prepared her for this time: building her independence, allowing sweet moments with her husband and children. She recalled how the six of them often went camping, spending hours enjoying time as a family.

With a baby due in December, Heidi's face lit up when she remembered the games, laughter, and family bonding. "I wouldn't change anything," Heidi said. "I don't have

any regrets. We expressed how much we loved each other. We lived life to the fullest that we could."

Of the Coffee children—Laurisa, Natalia, Spencer, and Torin—Pastor John said: "Their hearts are broken, but they never question God's goodness. They miss their father, but they keep looking to the Lord."

Heidi describes her husband as being the leader that God intended a man to be—being people-minded, giving great advice, and willing to do anything for his family. "He was such a good example to us," she said. "Gavin had this great saying: 'Holding a grudge is like taking poison yourself and waiting for someone else to die.'"

Pastor John, with whom Gavin planted City Calvary Chapel, recalled: "While I was named the pastor, Gavin was just as crucial to the ministry here. I looked to him for advice," John added, "He was loud and fun and had incredible wisdom. I'm going to miss him so much."

Knowing Gavin is in heaven with Jesus, Heidi continues to serve the Lord. She still ministers to junior high students, a work in which she partnered with Gavin. "I cannot let myself dwell on the fact that my husband is gone," she said in November. Speaking of the peace "which surpasses all understanding" in Philippians 4:7, she said, "The Lord gives me joy and peace even though I am broken."

God has sent comfort. "Every day, I receive something: a letter or a call from people all over the world—even from non-Christians—telling me how this situation helped someone to think differently."

Heidi prays her story will help others respond to God's love and grace. "I want others to know the fullness, joy, and abundant life they can have in Christ." ✨

City Calvary Chapel
www.gavincoffee.com
206-709-9416