



I had the opportunity on Tuesday evening to give a talk at the senior retreat called, *The Graph of Life*. The talk is given on the first day of the retreat because it is reflective in nature. I walked them through the high and low points of my life before giving them time to graph their own lives.

I have given this talk before, but it has been many years. While I put the talk together for the benefit of the seniors, I discovered that it was a fruitful exercise for me as well. It was a great reminder of God's presence in my life.

The exercise involves plotting the major events of your life on a graph. The focus of the first day of the retreat is "Know Yourself." In order to know yourself, you must know where you've been. You must recognize the experiences, both good and bad, that you bring to the table. They have helped mold you into who you are.

In preparing the talk, I reflected on my 57 years. I got out old photo albums (remember photo albums?) and used them to help guide me through my life:

- The picture from 1960 with Grandma and Grandpa O'Brian. I was just a few months old and sat on Grandpa's lap, with twenty-one of my cousins surrounding us.
- The 1974 Bishop Chatard freshmen picture of Carol Lyons, who would eventually become my wife.
- The 1975 picture of my mom, who would die suddenly just months after the picture was taken.
- The 1983 picture of our wedding prompted memories of our first year together: Between May 21, 1983 and May 21, 1984, we got married, I graduated from college, I got a job, we bought a home, and we had a baby. (Our firstborn, Mary, was born on our first wedding anniversary.)
- Pictures from 1984, 1986, 1989, and 1991 of the birth of each of our children.
- Pictures from my ordination – one a post-ordination picture of me with my dad, who would pass away two years later.
- The most recent picture – a picture of our six grandchildren, all together for the first time.

For the final piece of this reflective exercise, I asked the seniors to consider what role God played in their life's journey. Did they feel like God was only with them in the good times and had abandoned them during the rough times? Did they feel like they had been alone all these years, just them against the world? Had they ever even considered what role God had played in their lives?

The goal of the talk was to get the kids thinking. I wanted them to understand that while their lives may be full of highs and lows, God's love for them is a constant. He wants to jump up and down with them in their triumphs and hold them in His arms to console them when they are troubled. In between the highs and lows, He just wants to walk alongside them.

If we don't feel God's presence in the challenging times, it is because we have shut Him out. If we take credit for all of the good in our lives, we are simply denying Him.

God *wants* to be included; we simply need to *allow* Him into our lives.