

RAINBOWS AND REDEMPTION



ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE JOURNEY OF PREGNANCY AFTER LOSS

First Edition—April, 2012

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INTRODUCTION

Greetings in the name of our Lord! This is a project we believe God put on our hearts for mutual encouragement and edification. As a group of ten women from around the United States and Canada, we have all experienced Pregnancy After Loss [also known as PAL], and have been encouraged by others sharing both Scriptures and their PAL experiences with us. It has given us hope, pointed us to the Lord, and helped us feel less alone.

Our intention is to capture some of this Scriptural encouragement in an e-book—a weekly devotional for women experiencing Pregnancy After Loss.

Many people consider a living baby following a loss their “Rainbow Baby” because they acknowledge that the beauty of a rainbow does not negate the ravages of the storm. When a Rainbow Baby appears, it is a reminder that the storm happened and that the family is still dealing with its aftermath. It means that something beautiful and full of light has appeared in the midst of the darkness and clouds. Storm clouds may still hover but the rainbow provides a counterbalance of color and hope.

Taking it one step further, many of us desire to convey a little more of the depth that the journey of PAL holds. It is a picture of utter Redemption: death followed by life. Life that is only there because of the death that preceded it.

Our title, “Rainbows and Redemption: Encouragement on the Journey of Pregnancy After Loss,” is a reminder that not only are these pregnancies and babies beautiful comforts after ravaging storms, but they are tangible redemption.

As you navigate the coming weeks and months of your PAL journey, please allow these devotional entries to encourage you and comfort you—the Lord will never leave you nor forsake you—through the ups and downs, joys and anxieties. Allow us to share our PAL struggles and victories with you, as we seek to comfort you with the comfort that we ourselves have received from our Father on our own PAL journeys. You will find weekly devotionals here that you can meditate on from week to week (read in our compiled order, or look through the Table of Contents to find a passage or title subject that addresses your current needs and situation), as well as a section of Special Resources at the end for unique milestones and chapters of the PAL journey that may arise at various points during your pregnancy and beyond. May the Lord use our feeble words to strengthen you by His sovereign grace.

~Contributing Editors, Kristi & Melissa~

Contact us at **RainbowsAndRedemption@gmail.com**

Dedicated to our children:

Lydia, Naomi, Kyria, Jordan, and Caleb

&

Covenant, Gabriel, Glory, Promise, Peace, Mercy, Victory, Hosanna, and Asher

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Online Ministry for Infertility & Loss Support, and Beyond:
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FIRST TRIMESTER

Week Four
A Companion in the Wilderness

By Ramona

Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV)

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you.

Isaiah 4:14 (NIV)

For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.

The situation described here in Deuteronomy is that the Israelites had completed their 40 years in the wilderness and God had released them to take ownership of the Promised Land. Moses spoke those words to all of Israel, letting them know that he would not be going, that their new leader would be Joshua, and that God would be with them. The message was so important for them to understand as they began what seemed like an impossible feat that he said the same words again a few verses later, "...He will never leave you nor forsake you."

In the second verse here, Isaiah the prophet is describing God as the Helper of Israel and recounts the ways that God has taken care of His people. He tells the people that God is the One helping them overcome their enemies and problems; that God is with them to hold their hand through the trials.

Both of these verses confirm that God has promised to always be with His people. And now living under the New Testament covenant, when we accept God's salvation, He dwells in our hearts, as it says in 1 Corinthians 3:16 (NLT): "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" How much more should we know and expect God to always be with us now that He dwells in us!

Do we pray and sometimes find ourselves asking God to be with us as we go about our day, as we wait for blood test results, or go in for an ultrasound? Is that a wrong thing to pray? No, but I think what we often mean by that request is, "God, please manifest Your presence in my life today." We want to feel God with us, to feel His presence, and His comfort as we face a challenge or an unknown.

There are times in our lives when we can feel God walking alongside us. And there are times when it feels like God is far away. But God's Word says that He is there with us the whole time. Knowing God is with me always has helped me to get through some of the PAL challenges I've faced. God doesn't leave us when times are tough, when we have a bad day, or when we feel lost. For me, looking past my feelings and just acknowledging that I know God is with me helps me to focus more on Him and then I begin to feel that peace and comfort that I am seeking. So no matter how you're feeling this week, God's Word says that He is right there with you, holding you up every step of the way.

Father, I thank You for Your promise to never leave nor forsake me. I know that You are here with me today and always as I progress through this pregnancy one step at a time Please manifest Your presence in my life that I may feel the comfort that Your Spirit provides. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.



Week Five
Butterfly

By Lindsay

Amos 7: 5-6 (NIV)

Then I cried out, "Sovereign LORD, I beg You, stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!" So the LORD relented.

Like a tiny little butterfly does the first heartbeat begin at about 5 weeks. A sweet thing to see. But how bittersweet for those who know that—like a butterfly—this first heartbeat is so fragile. Each day of life is a miracle to be celebrated. For me, this meant beginning to make baby things with the hope that they would soon be used by my little one. It also meant the joy of sharing our news with some of our close friends and immediate family. Most of all, celebrating this life meant bringing my baby before the Lord in prayer, just as Amos did for the people of God.

Amos knew that the people could not survive without God's mercy and compassion. He was led to intercede for them so that ultimately God would be glorified. Through this pregnancy, God will be glorified as you turn to Him in prayer. The Lord knows He has placed this life in your womb. He has not done so in vain. He may not guarantee that your baby will be born on this side of heaven, but this child is yours today and forever in His Kingdom. Alleluia! What a treasure and responsibility.

Lord, please help me to know how to pray for this baby You have blessed me with. You have answered our prayers with conception. You create life out of dust and air. Lord, hold this baby in Your hand and give it a safe place in my womb. Amen.



Week Six

Peace

By Ramona

John 14:27 (NIV)

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

In this verse, Jesus is preparing His disciples for His upcoming crucifixion, resurrection, and return to heaven. After Jesus was crucified, everything they had left their homes for and believed in was gone. They feared for their own lives and denied even knowing Jesus. They were grieving and didn't fully understand that Jesus was going to be raised from the dead. And then when Jesus left them to return to heaven, they were in uncharted territory. The disciples had a lot to fear. How could they carry on this ministry without Jesus? What persecution would they face because of their faith?

Before I was PAL, I used to think that if I could just make it past the point of my previous losses, I would suddenly become free of worry and concern. How wrong I was! Finding myself in uncharted territory did not immediately alleviate my fears—in fact, in some ways it magnified them. I didn't know what to expect, what was normal, or what was a sign of trouble.

But just as the disciples were told not to be afraid, we also do not need to worry or be afraid because Jesus gives us peace. The words “do not let” in the verse mean that we do have some control over whether we are worried, afraid, or troubled by our circumstances. But holding on to God's peace and letting go of our earthly troubles is not easy! When those thoughts of worry come into your mind, do you focus on that, or do you focus on Jesus and the peace He gives us? It is so easy to get wrapped up thinking about all our concerns and worries that it starts to take over our minds.

Some things that have helped me to have that peace amidst the trials of life are to spend time reading the Bible. Read it out loud if that's what it takes to calm your mind and take your attention away from your fears. I also spend time in prayer thanking God for ways He has blessed me. And as difficult as it may be, avoid researching every possible negative outcome to your symptoms, and instead, focus on being informed and call your doctor with your concerns.

For most PAL women, letting go of fear and focusing on God is not a one time event. Something may trigger your fears, or your mind may wander back to those worries. In order to fully experience the peace that God has provided and wants us to have, we must continually give the worries back to Him and refocus on God. Peace is something everyone wants, and praise God it's something that He has freely given us through His Son! Just as He gave peace to His disciples that enabled them to carry on the message of Christ, that peace is available to us as we go through the trials of this life.

Father, I thank You for the peace you have given me and that Your peace is enough for any situation I might face in this world. I give all my worries about this pregnancy over to You. As I work on continually giving my fears over to You, I ask for Your guidance and gentle reminders to help me focus on living in the peace that can only come from You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.



Week Seven

Endurance

By Melissa

Hebrews 2:2 (ESV)

...who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross...

Isn't it interesting that people always use Jesus Christ as the example when they want to tell you to be joyful in all things? Someone may even say, "Jesus endured the cross with joy"—and I have to stop them short, because, I'm sorry but no, that's not what Scripture says. It says that He endured it for the joy that was set before Him. That doesn't mean He was currently enjoying the cross. It doesn't mean that His endurance and joy overlapped, actually. Christ asked the Father three times to take the cup away from Him, because it was not easy, it was not fun, it was not happy (and if suffering isn't easy for the Perfect Man, who could even begin to pretend to think that suffering could be even remotely so for any of us sinners?). It means that He endured because He knew that joy would be at the end of the tether. It wasn't yet a reality, but *it would be*. After endurance, when His cross had been fully endured, there would be joy.

What is endurance anyway?

What does it mean to *endure*?

—verb (used with object) 1. to hold out against; sustain without impairment or yielding; undergo. 2. to bear without resistance or with patience; tolerate. 3. to admit of; allow; bear.

—verb (used without object) 4. to continue to exist; last. 5. to support adverse force or influence of any kind; suffer without yielding; suffer patiently.

That is what Christ did.

It's what we are praying to do, too.

We pray that we will endure, and that God will bring joy after the enduring is complete. Once He has helped us to endure the cross that is set before us, we trust Him to bring joy.

We don't know what the remainder of our earthly years will hold. How much joy, how much happiness, how much fulfillment. But we are confident of *the joy set before us in Heaven*, just like Christ was. We are confident in the Resurrection. We are confident that our covenant children will be reunited with us, even as we are united with Christ by death and resurrection. There will be joy!!!

I don't know when.

I don't know how.

It isn't yet.

But one way or another, eventually, once we have endured our crosses ordained by the Father... *there will be great joy*.

Lord God, as we endure the difficult and uncertain days of PAL, please comfort our hearts with the knowledge that there will be joy at the end of the tether. Even when we can not see what that will look like or when it will be, please give us hope for the future and mold us more into the image of Christ. Amen.



Week Eight

Worry

By Ramona

Luke 12:22, 25-26 (NIV)

Then Jesus said to His disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.... Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"

The Bible has a lot to say about worry. In Philippians 4:6 (NIV), the Bible says "Do not be anxious about anything...." And in the verse above, Jesus teaches His disciples not to worry because it would not change anything or add to their life. He had just told the parable of the rich fool who saved up material possessions for himself out of greed for more. But Jesus takes it a step further, saying not only to avoid greed, but also not to worry about your life, food, body, or clothing.

In each of my pregnancies, I will honestly say that I have worried about things. Will my betas rise enough? Is this spotting okay or a sign of trouble? Is this cramping normal? But the worry did not change the outcome, nor did it give me any extra time with the babies that I lost. To worry means that we give way to anxiety or unease, allowing our mind to dwell on difficulty or troubles. Worrying is a completely human response to many things that PAL throws at us. We have all worried, and we will all continue to worry unless we can completely break the habit with God's help. But at some point, worrying can change from a natural response to the unknown into dwelling on things that we can't control and it takes our focus off Jesus, saps our energy, and robs us of our peace.

So how do we stop the pattern of worry from taking us to the place where we no longer have peace? The Bible also has some help for us there too. David writes, "I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears" Psalm 34:4 (NIV). One of the ways we can prevent worry from overtaking us is to seek the Lord first. Spend time reading your Bible, praying, or listening to hymns or worship music. If you can keep your mind focused on God, you will not be able to think about what might be worrying you.

The Bible also tells us to "Give all your worries and cares to God, for He cares about you" 1 Peter 5:7 (NLT). God loves us more than we can imagine and doesn't want us to be weighed down with our worries. He tells us that we can surrender our anxieties to Him so we don't need to carry that burden ourselves. The Bible contains the redemptive story of God's plan to restore to us a right relationship with Him through his Son. When I remember to focus on that through reading, prayer, or worship, it frees my mind from the worries, even if just for that time. Some people find that they need to spend much more dedicated time with God than they did while TTC in order to keep the worries at bay. Whatever it takes for you, do that! God will not be disappointed if we need to lean heavily on Him: in fact, I think He is happy when we do!

Father, I thank You that I can cast my worries onto You and that You will deliver me from my fears. Right now, I am worried about _____ and I give that over to You now. Thank You for carrying that worry for me. I ask that You continue to guide me towards You and Your word as the worries of life come up against me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.



Week Nine
A Single Hour

By Julie

Matthew 6:27, 34 (ESV)

And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?...Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

I sat in the waiting room at my RE's office awaiting an ultrasound. I'd spent many hours of my life there already, pretending to be absorbed in a book or my phone, and trying not to jump when my name was finally called. This particular wait was unique—my husband and I were hoping for the first glimpse of our baby conceived on our second IVF cycle. Our first cycle had resulted in a pregnancy that ended at barely 5 weeks, losing our precious twins we named Patience and Hope. Our hearts were still raw. We longed to hear that this time our baby was growing and had a strong heartbeat. It's hard to describe the anxiety of knowing that in a matter of minutes you'll be told whether your baby is alive or not.

This scene played over again several times through that first trimester. I had ultrasounds at 6, 8, 10, and 12 weeks, and each time the temptation to indulge every anxious thought was the same. And the days in between weren't much easier. After a positive, encouraging appointment, I would be more at ease for a day or two before the anxiety would start to build again. This experience led me to seek the Lord and search His Word for the truths I could cling to in those moments. Matthew 6:25-34 is one of those passages that calms my heart, puts today's anxieties in the right perspective, and lifts my eyes from my present circumstances to the Lord who is sovereign over all.

This powerful section of Christ's Sermon on the Mount shows us our inadequacies, which leads us to see God's absolute adequacy for our every need and concern. In verse 27 (ESV), we read Christ's humbling rhetorical question, "And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" Or as other versions translate it, "...a single cubit to his height?" Anxiety itself is futile, accomplishing nothing. I can worry and fret myself to pieces but I could never add even a second to my baby's life, longer than the Lord has ordained. I can't will my child to grow even the tiniest bit longer by the force of my worry.

Verse 34 challenges us to surrender our anxiety about the future as well. So often I peer ahead and think of how many long weeks of pregnancy still loom ahead of me, and inwardly I sigh with weariness. I can't imagine how I'll have the mental and emotional energy to make it that far. The Lord tells me this too is futile and I can let it go. He holds the future. He has every one of my baby's days written in His book. I don't need to have the strength right now to make it to 40 weeks. His tender mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23), and He supplies enough grace and strength for *today*.

For those who have experienced pregnancy loss, the stark statistics about miscarriage are piercingly real and personal. We know all too well how easily things can go wrong in the early weeks of pregnancy. From a human perspective, if we're blessed with another pregnancy, we may say we have every reason to be anxious. But Scripture tells us God is concerned with how we respond to those anxious thoughts and feelings that will inevitably come. Will we cling to them in a vain attempt to determine the outcome of our pregnancies? By His grace, we can instead cast our anxieties on Him, knowing that He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7), and find the peace and rest He so longs to give us.

Sovereign Lord, I praise You for Your great mercy to me in Christ. You have numbered all my days and those of my precious child as well. I ask for Your help to lay aside my anxiety about this pregnancy and what the future holds. Give me Your grace, strength and peace—just enough for today. I long to walk through this season with a hope that points to You as the All-Sufficient One. Amen.



Week Ten
Nothing is Too Hard

By Melissa

Genesis 18:14 (ESV)

Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.

Psalm 46:1-3 (ESV)

*God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling.
Selah*

There it is. A simple, straightforward question. “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” And I sigh, thinking about it. *Of course* there is nothing too hard for the Lord. That should be obvious. Right? All He had to do was speak a word and worlds came into existence. He created everything there was to create in six little days. Just by speaking. So if *that* wasn’t too hard for the Lord, then no—there is nothing too hard for the Lord.

Yet I still doubt. Much to my own discouragement, I often find myself inwardly fighting my confidence in the strength of God. I give my body and its medical oddities too much credit. This body of mine that God Himself created—even with its medical oddities—and the baby inside that He also created. It’s almost as though I wonder if He *could* keep my baby alive.

Sarah doubted. And you see if I am honest, I doubt too. May God give me the strength to say with the faithful blind men that I too believe He is able to do this (Matthew 9:28), and may He take away my doubt.

The Psalmist comforts us with words about God’s strength. He is a refuge, He is strong, He is a help when we need it. Even if the entire earth crumbled or the mountains melted into oceans—He would be there to provide whatever we needed. Does that sound impossible? Well, it isn’t: because there is nothing too hard for the Lord.

My God never promised me living children. He did not promise me easy motherhood. But He *has* promised to be my Shepherd, my Watchman, my Protector, my Provider, my Strength, and my Help. Nothing is beyond His capability: not protecting my life, not keeping my baby alive, not working through my medical treatments, not giving me confidence in Himself. None of these things are difficult for Him. Things which are beyond my comprehension are resolved by His words. Giving a baby to a barren woman past the age of normal conception? It was easy for God. Being my refuge and strength when I am in the vulnerable situation of being pregnant after so many miscarriages? That is easy for Him too.

God of all Creation, You spoke worlds into being and You have created life in my womb. Neither of these things is too hard for You. It would be easy, Lord, for You to preserve my baby's life. Do not let me fret over this child, but instead allow me to trust in Your power to complete whatever Your will holds. Be my strength and my refuge today. Amen.



Week Eleven

Fear Not

By Julie

Isaiah 43:1-2 (ESV)

*But now thus says the LORD,
He who created you, O Jacob,
He who formed you, O Israel:
“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are Mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.”*

The Lord reveals Himself to us in this passage as our Creator, the One who formed us. What a wonderful meditation as we envision our tiny babies being knit together by Him in the secret place (Psalm 139:15). I was speechless each time I got to witness His creation on the ultrasound screen during those agonizing early weeks. My baby was so small and fragile, and even as I begged the Lord to allow *this* one to make it to our arms, I marveled at the perfection of what He was forming in my womb.

I find such comfort in the Lord’s command to “fear not.” There were many days early in my pregnancy when I struggled to overcome intense feelings of fear and dread. At times I could convince myself that my baby was gone. When I focused on my symptoms—or more often, the lack thereof—I would ride a roller coaster of emotions. Then the Lord’s soft voice would come, reminding me to “fear not.” This told me I had a choice. I could entrust my child to his Creator and rest in His sovereign control, or I could give way to fear, allowing the worst-case scenario to play over and over in my mind. I found that in this, as in every other area, the commands of the Lord are not burdensome, but freeing (1 John 5:3).

God bears with us in our frailty. In this passage He gives us one reason after another to choose trust over fear. The first takes us back to the glorious truth of our redemption. The fact that He has redeemed me should settle in my mind and heart forever just how loved and valued I am by Him. He has called me by name. I am His. And my precious unborn baby is His as well. So often I find my fears rooted in a belief that I have ownership of this little one. The truth is that our children belong to the Lord—they are His creation, His called ones, and He alone sustains their lives. They are only lent to us for a time (1 Samuel 1:27-28). In acknowledging these truths I find great peace.

Next we read a beautiful description of God’s presence with His people when they endure trials of any kind. His promise to be with us is a great and precious one. Making my way through the first trimester of pregnancy after loss, one day at a time (one *minute* at a time would be more accurate), often seemed like “passing through the waters.” Fears, doubts, anxieties and painful memories threatened to sweep over me like crashing waves. The

“other side” seemed an eternity away, like I’d never reach that safe shore of delivering my baby full-term and healthy. At those times God’s presence was like a rock. He didn’t promise an ideal outcome, but He promised the waves would not overwhelm me. I may “walk through the fire,” but He assured me I would not be consumed (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

A moment of conversation with the Lord is etched in my memory: He seemed to be asking me to simply take His hand and walk with Him through this glorious but frightening time of carrying new life again in my womb. He wouldn’t necessarily make it easier, but He would never leave me. I didn’t know what He had planned for this pregnancy, but I knew nothing would touch me or my child outside of His perfect and holy will. I could trust him, my Creator and Redeemer, and that would ultimately bring Him glory.

Dear Lord, thank You for calling me by name and redeeming me. Thank You for Your beautiful and precious creation—this baby You’ve mercifully allowed me to carry within me. Please help me to walk with You in faith and not give way to fear. I acknowledge that You are good, and all You do is good. My life and my baby’s life are in Your almighty hands. Amen.



Week Twelve
Make Me Content

By Ramona

Philippians 4:11-13 (NASB)

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means and I know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

In this passage, Paul is speaking about being content in various financial circumstances. In Paul's life, he went through many trials as he spread the gospel among the Gentiles, including being shipwrecked, imprisoned, and stoned. He certainly knew what it was like to live with humble means! And at other times, he was being blessed by the churches he was ministering to as they met his material needs. To say as he did that he has learned to be content no matter the circumstances is not something that comes easily for most of us.

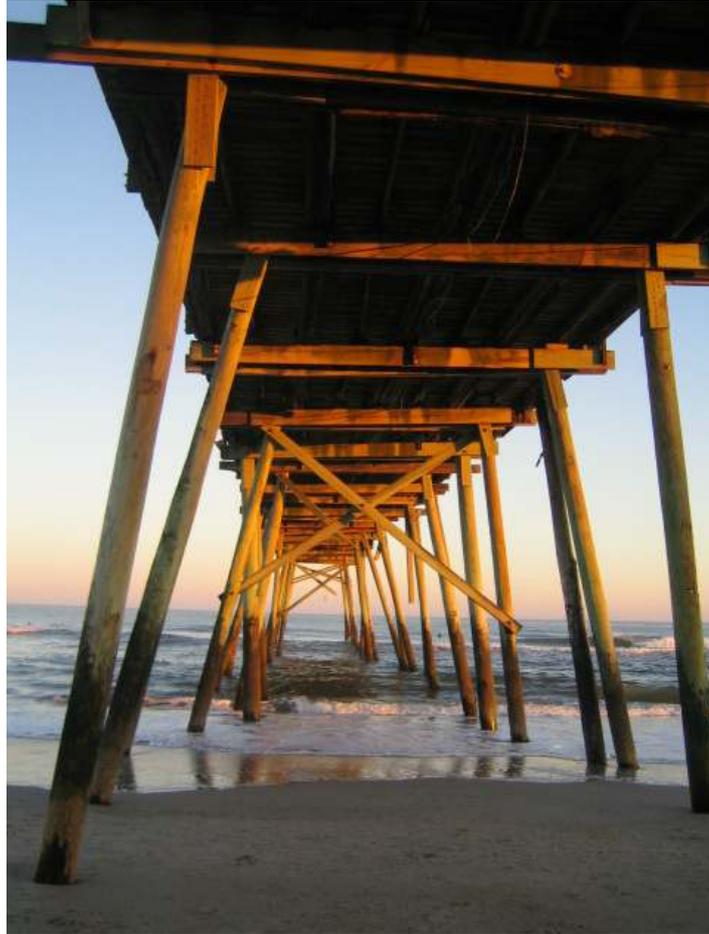
Discontentment seems to be such a common thing in all of society, including Christians. Advertisers want to foster a lack of contentment in their ads that we see on a daily basis. They want us to think that we will be happier if we have their product. Next, add in our human tendency to compare ourselves to others who have more, or have a seemingly better life and we can always find a reason to be discontent with our situation in life.

And for us who are pregnant after loss(es), we may still deal with feelings of discontentment, even though we are so thankful to be pregnant, and even if things are going beautifully for us. Sometimes we still find ourselves wishing things were easier, better, or different. What kinds of things are keeping you from being content now? Is it uncertain test results, a troublesome diagnosis, or being dissatisfied with how long it took to conceive this pregnancy? Is it comparing your situation to others who seem to have such an easy time getting and staying pregnant? Maybe it's your feelings towards someone who is taking their pregnancy for granted. No matter the reason, we can still apply Paul's lesson here and work towards being content with our situation and what God has given us.

So what was Paul's secret for being content? Notice that Paul didn't say that God gave him contentment, or that it was just a natural quality he possessed. He said he *learned* to be content. Paul also said that he does all things through Christ who gives him strength. He didn't do anything or learn contentment on his own strength, discipline, or will power. Being content goes against our human nature and it is something we need to practice in our lives with God's help. To be content means that we are satisfied. Satisfied with what God has blessed us with, and satisfied despite what we don't have. We need to practice leaning on God's strength through everything, not just the harder times.

Father, I thank You that You give me the strength to deal with all situations in life and to learn how to be content. I lay down my discontentment and give it over to You, Lord. You

are the One that satisfies me, not my circumstances or material possessions. I ask for Your help and wisdom in learning to be content in all circumstances, just as You helped Paul to learn that lesson. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.



Week Thirteen
Warriors with God

By Kerri

Hebrews 4:12 (NIV)

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and the attitudes of the heart.

When we think of great battles, what comes to mind? World wars? The battle of Jericho that Joshua fought? Or maybe even the great battle of Armageddon that is yet to come? Yes, these are all great battles, we agree. However, we didn't fight in these campaigns. We may not even consider ourselves to be warriors. But we are, and we fight battles of our own every day—the greatest of which can be in our own minds!

I recently had the opportunity to fight a battle. I found myself in the doctor's office with some pregnancy complications. It was a perfect opportunity for the Enemy to try to deceive me with negative thoughts and hurtful lies. To be sure, I put the contents of these devotions to the test. I wrangled with doubt, wrestled with fear and tried my best to sling back the fiery arrows of God's truth. I left there feeling like I had been through a mental combat! You may or may not experience any complications in this pregnancy, but the Enemy will try to tempt you with negative thoughts and lies. This is when you must become a warrior. Do not let the Enemy build a stronghold in your mind.

Any warrior going to combat prepares with weapons and armor, and so it is with us. Ephesians Chapter 6 tells us, in order to prepare for battle, we should "Put on the full armor of God" so that we can take on the devil's schemes. We stand firm "with the belt of truth buckled around [our] waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with [our] feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which [we] can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

Behold our best defense against the enemy in the battlefield of our mind. When those harmful thoughts bombard us, we fight to replace them with helpful thoughts. When the Enemy slings lies in our direction, we deflect them with the truth of scripture. It is not easy. If it were, it would not be called a battle. But God's word and truth is "alive and active and sharper than any double-edged sword." Here is our confidence to be great warriors. We will be able to speak the truth even if our voice trembles!

So take up your sword, great warriors. Take up your sword and fight! Do not be held captive by the Enemy. Put on the full armor of God. Exercise discipline of your thoughts and self-control of your emotions. Remember the truths our Father so graciously gives us. These are our best defenses against the Enemy that would see us destroyed. Boldly tell him on which side you are fighting and take a stand so he does not get a chance to build a stronghold in your mind!

Father, when our thoughts turn negative and we are bombarded with lies, help us take up the sharp sword of Your perfect truth and fight like courageous warriors. Thank You for being on our side so that the victory is always ours! Shield us with Your full armor during this pregnancy and always. In Christ we pray, Amen.



SECOND TRIMESTER

Week Fourteen

His Nearness

By Julie

Psalm 73:23-28 (ESV)

Nevertheless, I am continually with You;

You hold my right hand.

You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward You will receive me to glory.

Whom have I in heaven but You?

And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides You.

My flesh and my heart may fail,

but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

For behold, those who are far from You shall perish;

You put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to You.

But for me it is good to be near God;

I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all Your works.

This joyful yet challenging journey of Pregnancy After Loss has required my soul to find anchors in the Person and Word of God. Few passages point me to His faithfulness as this one does. I see in these lines how He has been with me, carried me, guided and strengthened me through seasons of grief following the losses of our precious little ones. Recalling what He has done in the past is one of the surest sources of peace as I face what lies ahead.

The well-meant counsel of others, such as, “just trust that everything will turn out fine this time,” rings hollow, especially because I know the reality that there are no guarantees. The Lord has given us many glorious promises, but a healthy full-term baby at the end of every pregnancy is not one of them.

I know that He has the right to do as He chooses with His creation. I can't put my trust in the outcome that I so hope and pray for, but I can trust *Him* completely.

Matthew Henry comments on verse 23:

“Though God has chastened me, He has not cast me off; notwithstanding all the crosses of my life, *I have been continually with Thee*; I have had Thy presence with me...Though God has sometimes written bitter things against me, yet He has still *holden me by my right hand*, both to keep me, that I should not desert Him or fly off from Him, and to prevent my sinking and fainting under my burdens, or losing my way in the wildernesses through which I have walked.”¹

Yes, through the “wilderness” of losing our children God's presence has been constant. He guided us with His counsel as we navigated the waters of intense grief. And His promise to “afterward...receive me to glory” is so rich with meaning when I anticipate meeting our little ones who have gone before us.

No matter how many valleys we must endure in this life, our future is secure in God. One day “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4, ESV).

I long for the Psalmist’s statement in verse 25 to be true of me as well. Is there truly “nothing on earth that I desire besides” my Lord? Here I’m asked to lay down that which I treasure most, to see how it pales in comparison to my true Treasure, Christ Himself. I know my weakness—“my flesh and my heart may fail”—but God promises to be my strength and sufficiency, my “portion forever.” If I’m to experience peace through life’s storms, He must have first place in my heart, above my loved ones, above the precious life I carry in my womb.

When I was reeling from the news of our third loss, our precious baby Providence, the words of a Christian friend (who herself has six babies in heaven) were so comforting. Drawing from verse 28 of this passage, she wrote, “May His nearness be your good.” And it truly was. I remember being in awe of how He surrounded and cared for us through that excruciating grief. In the uncertainty of pregnancy following loss, even having passed all our “loss milestones,” I still need an answer to the question, “What if my worst fears come true?” And I know, because He carried me through that devastation before, that He would do so again. He would be nearer to me than the air I breathe. “I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.”

Dear Lord, I praise You for Your faithfulness and Your constant presence through both sorrow and joy. Thank You for the hope of eternity I have because of what Christ has done for me. Please help me to surrender my desires for this baby’s life to You and trust in Your perfect plan and Your faithful ways. May I treasure You above all. Make my life a testimony to Your unending goodness and grace. Amen.

1 Henry, M. (1706). *Psalms*. In *Matthew Henry commentary on the whole Bible (complete)*. Retrieved from <http://www.studylight.org/com/mhc-com/view.cgi?book=ps&chapter=073>



Week Fifteen
Numbers

By Kristi

Psalm 90:12-17 (NIV)
A prayer of Moses the man of God.

*Teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*

*Relent, LORD! How long will it be?
Have compassion on your servants.
Satisfy us in the morning with Your unfailing love,
that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.
Make us glad for as many days as You have afflicted us,
for as many years as we have seen trouble.
May Your deeds be shown to Your servants,
Your splendor to their children.*

*May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us;
establish the work of our hands for us—
yes, establish the work of our hands.*

So much of pregnancy is about numbers. If we are trying to conceive, we count what cycle day we are on, and how many days past ovulation. We count our HCG level and how many weeks along we are. We count down to our due date. At OB appointments, we have weight measurements, and fundus height measurements. At ultrasound appointments, we get estimates of our baby's age and size, and head-to-rump measurements.

With all those numbers, and with all of the unknowns that accompany Pregnancy After Loss, it can be so easy to lose the joy and wonder of pregnancy. I've had a really hard time with that this pregnancy. I'm ever so *thankful* for this life growing within me—to sense life instead of death in my womb is such an amazing answer to prayer! But joy has been elusive. I've held it at arm's length, afraid to embrace it lest it be ripped from my arms again in a devastating moment in a doctor's office.

But then I read Psalm 90, one of the oldest Psalms in Scripture. In it, Moses lamented about the brevity of life and asked God to teach them to number their days so that they could have a heart of wisdom. What follows that, though, is a prayer that reflects how well this man knew God and His heart of compassion. He says,

*Satisfy us in the morning with Your unfailing love,
that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.
Make us glad for as many days as You have afflicted us,
for as many years as we have seen trouble.*

*May Your deeds be shown to Your servants,
Your splendor to their children.*

*May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us;
establish the work of our hands for us—
yes, establish the work of our hands.*

God is a God of compassion and a giver of joy. I, too, can ask God to make me glad in this pregnancy, for as many days as I have mourned my previous losses, for as many times as I have grieved or worried myself to death over my baby's health. And what is the source of this supernatural joy? We read it in verse 14—God's unfailing love. *God loves us.* I don't know the reason why, in His love, He has allowed us to experience pain and loss in the past. I never will, this side of heaven.

But now, this time, this season in our lives, is a time of life. It's a time of gladness and joy as we experience in the light the love that we have known and leaned on in the dark. We may find such joy foreign to us, after so much grief. We may even find it to cause us guilt, as we feel we are betraying the children we will meet in heaven. But God wants to satisfy us with His love, and to hear our songs of joy and gladness, a gladness that we will share one day with our children.

Father, thank You for Your unfailing love. Fill my heart with joy and gladness as I number each day of this pregnancy and rejoice in the life You have allowed to grow in my womb. May Your favor rest upon my husband and me as we wait for this little one to arrive. Amen.



Week Sixteen

Courage

By Tahirah

2 Timothy 1:7 (ESV)

For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

Many times we hear that we are “over the hump” once we hit the second trimester. The chances of something going awry with the pregnancy are supposed to now be greatly reduced. But *we* know better than to take comfort in statistics. We have gone through loss before and know how real it is and are no longer innocent to complications in pregnancy. While we are now too shrewd to take comfort in man’s statistics, we must take comfort from God’s word. We are told in Philippians 4:6-7 (ESV), “do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” That is a truth we must embrace, especially during our times of trial. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power (2 Timothy 1:7), and we must live by that spirit. Revelation 21:8 warns us of the consequences for the faithless: we must believe God’s Word over our own fear. While we are not promised a healthy uncomplicated pregnancy, the Philippians passage does tell us that if we take it to the Lord *with* thanksgiving we will be granted the incomprehensible peace of God.

God’s Word is our greatest resource during our lives and specifically during our pregnancies. He holds all life in His hands. We do well when we come to Him with the knowledge of this truth. King David, the man after God’s own heart, knew this: he cried out to the Lord in Psalm 119:25 (ESV), “My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to Your word!” By the Word, all things were made, and without the Word was not any thing made that was made. In Him (the Word) was life, says John 1:1-4. We too have the opportunity to cry out to the Lord for life as David did, for the life of our babies. We know that the Word is life and we know that God’s Word is truth (John 17:17). We can ask God to sustain our children according to His Word, because His Word is truth and His Word is Life. Calling out to God daily with this reminder of His power helped me to get through the pregnancy with my daughter with more of a spirit of faith than the spirit of fear that sought after me.

I urge every woman who has been blessed with life inside her to spend time thanking the Giver of life everyday for that life and asking Him to sustain that life by His Word because His Word is truth and His Word is life. Recollect to God that you know He is the Giver of all life and audibly tell Him that you are putting your trust for the life of this baby in Him. When lies start creeping into your mind, push them out with the truth of God’s Word. Recall these passages and know that you *must* believe them over Satan’s lies. Satan is the father of all lies (John 8:44). He was also a murderer from the beginning and has nothing to do with the truth. Do not be murdered by fear and the lies he tells: live by the truth that is God. Know that whatever the outcome of our pregnancies, there is life in God and if we have that life in us, one day we *will* hold all of our precious children.

Thank You, God, for Your promise of heaven. Thank You for giving us Your Word, for preparing mansions in heaven for us, and for hearing our prayers. Give us courage for today and hope for the future. Amen.



Week Seventeen
A Tree Planted By Water

By Julie

Jeremiah 17:7-8 (ESV)

*Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD.
He is like a tree planted by water,
that sends out its roots by the stream,
and does not fear when heat comes,
for its leaves remain green,
and is not anxious in the year of drought,
for it does not cease to bear fruit.*

What encouragement to trust our sovereign Lord in all circumstances. The blessings described so beautifully in this passage draw me deeper into a trusting relationship with Him as I continue to walk through Pregnancy After Loss. The second trimester has its own unique challenges when it comes to trusting God. I personally have not experienced a loss at this stage, but I know many who have, and daily I consider the reality of how small and fragile my baby still is. There are new worries about his growth and movement patterns. I need to prepare in practical ways for his arrival, but I still find myself guarding my heart.

This passage tells me I will be blessed by putting my trust in the Lord. There is much temptation to trust in other people or things. When I face a particular anxiety, do I first “poll” my friends and family, asking for their experiences or advice in order to find reassurance? Or do I take my concern to the Lord in prayer? Do I primarily trust my doctors, pregnancy books, websites or statistics to make me feel better about my baby’s “chances” of avoiding various health problems or complications? Do I spend more time on Google or on my knees interceding for my child?

In order to trust the Lord more fully I need to *know* Him better. I need time alone with Him, in His Word and in prayer, to see with ever-increasing wonder and awe just how worthy He is of my complete confidence and trust. He is sovereign (Job 42:2), unchanging (Malachi 3:6), all-powerful (1 Chronicles 29:12), wise (Jeremiah 10:12), loving (Psalm 13:5), faithful (2 Thessalonians 3:3), good (Psalm 34:8) and merciful (Psalm 103:8). The more I focus on who He is, the easier it is to entrust myself and my pregnancy to His care. Knowing Him as the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of life gives me the assurance that nothing can happen to my child outside of His will and control. I love the words of this hymn, penned in 1676 by Samuel Rodigast:

“Whate’er my God ordains is right.
Here shall my stand be taken.
Though sorrow, need, or death be mine,
Yet am I not forsaken.
My Father’s care is round me there.

He holds me that I shall not fall,
And so to Him I leave it all.”

Verse 8 goes on to paint a stunning word-picture of the life that is rooted in trust in God. A key word that comes to mind is *stability*. When that tree sends down its roots toward the water, it finds sustenance to help it withstand the most threatening elements. A heat wave is no reason to fear, as there is plenty of moisture that keeps the leaves green. Even an entire year of drought creates no anxiety, and the tree continues to yield fruit when many others have gone brown and dead.

God’s desire and plan for us is that we have this same kind of stability. Even through something as terrifying as Pregnancy After Loss, He is able to give us a deep, settled peace based on His own trustworthy character. Fears and doubts will come and go. But we find in Him a source of strength and sustenance unlike any other. Our lives can be characterized by good fruit rather than floundering and fretting. Drinking deeply from the well of His grace, we will have everything we need to see this journey through to the end.

Loving Father, thank You for revealing yourself to me. Thank You for ordaining both sweetness and sorrow, pleasure and pain in my life for Your glory and my good. Thank You for Your faithfulness and care that surrounds me. As I meditate on who You are, I ask for grace to trust You through the remainder of my pregnancy. I long to be deeply rooted in You and able to withstand the moments of fear and anxiety that so often threaten my peace. Help me to choose today to trust in You alone. Amen.



Week Eighteen

Milestones

By Kristi

Psalm 139:16 (NIV)

*Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in Your book
before one of them came to be.*

From the minute I found out I was pregnant with this baby, I have been counting the days. Not days to delivery—the idea of reaching the magic number of 280 days and still delivering a live, breathing baby seemed too overwhelming for my heart. I counted the days until my next milestone. Once I reached it, I felt like I could breathe again, at least for a little while, and then I would start counting again. Since I had experienced one chemical pregnancy, my first milestone was very early—just four weeks and a hopeful HCG count. My next milestone was a heartbeat check at six weeks, and then the next was timed with my second loss, at eight weeks. After that came thirteen weeks, the end of my first trimester, and then eighteen weeks—the age of my daughter Naomi when she went to be with Jesus. Now that I have reached that one, others loom—twenty weeks (when a loss becomes a stillbirth rather than a miscarriage), twenty-four weeks (“Viability Day”), twenty-six weeks (the end of my second trimester), and thirty-seven weeks (when I will be considered “full term”).

Counting down days to milestones seems to be normal in PAL—at least, every PAL woman I know has done it! There is something about setting what seem to be reachable goals that makes them more possible in our minds. Ironically, it gives me a sense of control over a situation that, for the most part, is completely out of my control.

When I read Psalm 139, that is what I am reminded of—how completely out of my hands this pregnancy really is. David writes in verse 16 that “all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” This day that I am worried about was seen and ordained by God while I was in my mother’s womb. Each of these milestones that I am counting down to for this baby—each of those days has already been ordained by God, the One who formed my baby in my womb.

And this day—18 weeks, 3 days—when I remember saying good-bye to my daughter Naomi, that day, too, was known to God at the moment her spirit came into being. He allowed her to live, knowing that her purpose in His kingdom would be fulfilled in a brief span of time. Why did He not have a purpose for her that required more days? Why is *this* baby’s purpose one that apparently (please, Lord!) will require a normal birth and lifespan?

So, so many “whys” that I will never have the answers to. But in the spans between my milestones when my heart cries out for some reassurance that everything will be okay, I realize that while I will never have an answer to my “why” questions, I can know the answer to another question—who? Who is it that is in control, if I am not? The answer, of

course, is God, the Creator and Sustainer of life. The next verses in Psalm 139 read, “How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you.” God is aware of our babies, He is thinking of them, and knows the days that lay ahead of them. When we are between ultrasound appointments and long for a window into our wombs, God is already there watching them. As precious as our babies are to us, they are even more precious to God—and so are we, their mothers. When you feel out of control in your pregnancy, realize that *you are*—and praise God for that! For our babies are in infinitely more capable and loving hands than ours, whatever the outcome.

Father, the milestones of this pregnancy seem so many and seem so far away. Help me survive the wait between each one by resting on You, and trusting in Your timing and Your purpose for this life I carry in my womb. Amen.



Week Nineteen
You of Little Faith

By Julia

Matthew 14:24-31 (NKJV)

But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Pregnancy After Loss is a roller coaster ride like no other. One moment you're ecstatic because of a good lab result or a comment from the doctor; the next, your mind is reeling with the thought of any of a thousand things going wrong.

A nurse calls to tell you your HCG doubled, filling you with joy for several moments... then you wonder, should it have more than doubled?

You're thrilled to experience some reassuring queasiness, then panic when it's gone as quickly as it appeared.

You hear of someone who has just experienced a loss, and your first thought, instead of feeling compassion and sympathy as you normally would, is to panic: "What if I'm going to lose this baby, too?"

Our irrational minds—perhaps succumbing to the Enemy's convincing lies—can even make us feel certain that we'll lose our baby at the same gestation, and in the same way, as we lost a previous baby.

Many of us who are pregnant after loss find reassurance in more lab tests, more ultrasounds, more check-up appointments. The trouble is, their reassurance is fleeting at best.

With my seventh pregnancy (after six miscarriages), I knew I would want as many ultrasounds as my RE, OB, and perinatologist would allow. I believed this was the way to keep me from panicking throughout the pregnancy. Surely it would set my mind perfectly at ease to know I was never more than 2-4 weeks from an ultrasound! And yet, as each ultrasound appointment approached, that old, familiar panic would set in. The night before and the morning of each appointment, I couldn't sleep... my heart would pound... I tearfully kept playing out in my head the tragic outcome I was certain awaited me.

Before my 12-week ultrasound, all those feelings were in overdrive. I felt 100% sure that we would not see a living baby on the ultrasound screen and that the doctor would have to break the terrible news I'd heard so many other times. Nearly every ultrasound I'd had in the past ended with the words, "I'm sorry, I'm not seeing a heartbeat." I couldn't even imagine an ultrasound going any differently.

The afternoon before the appointment, I had tried for thirty minutes to find the baby's heartbeat with my home Doppler... to no avail. I didn't pick up even a hint of the baby's heartbeat... only mine.

I was overcome by feelings of being *sure* something is wrong... either that the baby had a fatal chromosomal problem (as all our others had), or that the baby's heart had already stopped. I tried to pray through these feelings... not very successfully.

Then I thought of Peter walking on water and how it was when he took his eyes off of Christ that he began sinking.

I realized that when we take our eyes off Christ and focus on the things of man (statistics, diagnostics, lab results), that's when we begin sinking. Those are the times it's all the more important to fix our gaze upon Christ.

I spent most of that morning praying that I would keep my gaze on Christ, no matter what happened that afternoon. I began to sing praise songs at the top of my lungs, and was amazed to realize my fears were dissipating. God granted me a peace that I would be okay no matter what happened at the ultrasound appointment.

The appointment did bring tears... tears of joy and thankfulness for God's exceeding mercies. In a very real way, I felt the hand of Christ catching me and saying, "O you of little faith; why did you doubt?"

Lord God, please remove from my mind any excessive dwelling on what we may find today and allow me to keep my eyes fixed upon You. If my eyes start to fall to the turbulent waters below, please remind me that You are the One I must focus on.

I pray that You protect this precious baby, and knit him or her in the womb according to the masterful design You created. Please let there be no physiological or other problems with this baby, but let it grow healthy and strong to full term. Please grant me, this child's mother, a peace that surpasses all understanding. Please erase my anxieties about the baby and about any upcoming tests or procedures. Please remind me that YOU are the Author of Life, and our trust is to be placed in You alone, not in man. Thank You for planting this precious miracle inside me, and please allow the experience of pregnancy to draw me even closer to You, even in fearful times such as this. In Christ's name, Amen.

Week Twenty
Slowing Down

By Heather

Psalm 46:10 (NIV)

Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.

I knew it would be like this: I knew the moment when we found out whether our sweet baby was a boy or a girl would be game changer.

I have definitely struggled with this pregnancy, mentally more than anything else. Typing that outright sounds kind of terrible. Let me explain.

I wanted to be pregnant.
I still want to be pregnant.
I am overjoyed to be pregnant.

However, coming from the world of infertility and loss has been more difficult than I ever imagined.

I don't immediately identify with my other pregnant friends. I am joyful, but my joy comes from the Lord, not from the fact that I am pregnant. I am also thankful—same reasoning. You cannot just erase almost four years from your life like they never happened. God has grown and stretched me in ways I could have *never* imagined. I can look back and see times where God was molding me to look more like his Son. Painful times, but so very productive.

So yes, I have struggled to come to terms with many things during this pregnancy. It doesn't mean I am ungrateful at all, but in my humanness, my mind wanders. Even halfway through this pregnancy.

*Why now, God? Why this timing?
I love this baby, but I loved my first
baby too. I wouldn't be carrying this*



baby if my first one wasn't sitting with You today.

Perhaps you can understand why this pregnancy has been such a mind battle for me. There are a lot of things that add to that battle as the pregnancy progresses; milestones that I did or did not reach with my first baby. The biggest one so far? Gender.

Which brings us back to the game changer. We found out our little one is indeed female, to which I was supremely surprised and my husband was ridiculously overjoyed! After our initial elation, reality set in. More than reality: *pressure*.

I don't like pressure. But there it was like a big black rain cloud hovering over our parade. No one had to put it there, it just appeared on its own. Pressure to name. Pressure to tell the name. Pressure to decorate the nursery. Pressure to register for all things pink. Pressure, pressure, pressure.

We have decided not to give in to pressure. This may be the only full-term (God willing) pregnancy we ever get to experience. In an effort to fully realize the blessing we have been given, there are things we must do in order to protect our hearts and minds. A few of these things will make other people mad, but I don't feel like I have to defend our decisions to anyone. We don't plan on announcing our baby's name until birth. I don't plan on registering for a million and one things, nor do I plan to register any time soon.

Right now I am happy to just sit and enjoy the kicks that I know I'll miss feeling soon. I am even okay with going maternity shopping... mostly because I love shopping and it is getting to be a necessity! I've started a tiny bit of nursery dreaming, too. I am just not sold on the over-hyped commercialization of pregnancy.

I think most women want pregnancy to go fast so they can get straight to mothering. I'm just not of that same mindset. And that isn't stemming from me having a superawesomeIcouldbepregnantfortherestofmylife pregnancy—it's just the realization that it is so easy to take gifts from God for granted. Even gifts we have spent years ~~wanting~~ begging for. It's already halfway over, give or take. We have just a few more months to enjoy this part of the journey, to exalt God and be still before Him in the midst of *this*.

Father, as we anticipate so many more changes and big events in the coming months, please equip me to be still and know you today. Please strengthen us in the face of pressure and give us peace as we follow what Your great plans are for our family. You are our joy; You make us overwhelmingly thankful. Allow us to rest in Your care and to exalt You for You are worthy. Amen.

Week Twenty-One
Freedom from Fear

By Kristi

John 8:32 (NIV)

Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

The PAL journey is a long one. Nine months feels like forever. The time between doctors' appointments can stretch on and on. There have been many times this past year that I have wondered, how can I possibly survive one more day without *knowing* that everything will be okay?

Jesus' words about truth encourage me at those times. When I am enslaved by my fears of what *could* or *might* happen, freedom comes from knowing the truth. And what truths do I need to meditate on to free myself from my fears?

Truth about pregnancy and loss. It is easy in PAL to fixate on all of the stories I've ever heard, including my own, where a pregnancy ended in loss. It's easy to tell myself that I've been on the losing side of statistics more than once, so why would this pregnancy be any different? But while those thoughts are normal and understandable, it's good to remind myself that—barring unknown health issues—many women *are* able to carry to term after one or more losses. In the earliest days of this pregnancy, when my HCG numbers were not doubling “the way they're supposed to,” understanding the range of acceptable doubling times helped me get control over the fear that threatened to drown me as I waited for the next blood test.

Truth about my health situation. I have been blessed in this pregnancy to have a wonderful obstetrician who knew my background and made time to address my concerns and answer my questions, no matter how irrational some of them may have seemed to him. One thing I have especially appreciated is his forthright approach in addressing some of my health problems, in telling me whether or not they were a concern in this pregnancy. He gave me the information I needed to balance my fears with knowledge about what I needed to do—or not to do—to have a healthy pregnancy.

Truth about God's love and power. Remember those statistics that I've been on the losing side of? One of the most reassuring reminders I received from a friend in this pregnancy is that God is bigger than statistics. He holds all authority, all power, and while He does not guarantee us healthy pregnancies or babies, *He is able*, no matter what the statistics show. Plus, He loves us—in the same way and with the same love with which He has loved Jesus (John 17:23). We can rest in the knowledge that nothing will touch us in this life—in our pregnancies—that has not been filtered by both the power *and* the love of God.

Truth about my future. In Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV), the Lord states, “For I know the plans I have for you... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” We often see the words on graduation cards, but they were originally given to the

Israelites when they were facing seventy years of exile—to remind them that regardless of their circumstances, God was still with them and would lead them into a hope and a future. In my moments of fear in my PAL journey, God has reminded me of this, too—not a promise of a trouble-free pregnancy, but that He would be with me every step of the journey, whatever the outcome.

None of these truths guarantee me that my baby will live. But in the long run, that reassurance is not what I really need. What I really need to free me from my fears is the reassurance that God is with me, and is able to keep me not *from* trouble, but *through* it. And the place we need to go for that reassurance is His Word, day by day on this journey through PAL.

Father, it is so easy to be enslaved by my fears. Help me to know the truth—especially Your Truth—and to have the freedom that brings. Amen.



Week Twenty-Two
He Will Not Leave Us Alone

By Kerri

Joshua 1:9 (NIV)

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

Anyone who raises animals for a living can tell you how they are all different. To any other person they may all look the same, but to the owner they are all unique. One may be a good mother, one a little timid, and one may be a trouble maker. In the same way, God knows all of us. Jesus says in John 10:27 (NIV), “My sheep listen to My voice; I know them.” Imagine! Not only does He know us as part of His flock, but God individually knows us even better than we know ourselves! He knows if we are prone to moodiness in the morning or if we have a nervous laugh. He knows the deepest desires, secrets, and even sins of our heart.

God knows us so well and still cherishes us as one of His precious flock. We are not left alone to wander the in the wilderness of doubt, fear, or grief. No, He finds us when we are lost, and gently shepherds us back to the folds of His grace. He promises here in Joshua that “the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go,” and in Matthew 28, “I am with you to the very end of the age.” He is not sitting on His throne up in heaven giving commands and making promises. He is here guiding us through our hardships and joys, and He knows exactly what we need at any given time because He knows us. God’s message is clear: He will not leave us alone.

Enduring infertility, losing a precious child, or moving through Pregnancy After Loss can leave us with an overwhelming feeling of helplessness. We feel powerless because there is simply nothing we can do but surrender to God’s plan for us. We are like small children holding our parent’s hand while trying to cross a busy street from between parked cars. We see just what is in front of us and don’t understand why we can’t cross now. However, we cannot see the dangers from which He protects us. He sees the bigger view when we cannot. In the Lord’s Prayer, we pray “Thy will be done,” but in our hearts we really mean “so long as it doesn’t cause me any more grief or pain, God. I don’t think I can go through that again.” But we can and should ask His will be done for us because every good and perfect gift comes from the Lord.

Here in Joshua He gives us a command to be strong and courageous. This message is so important that it is repeated three times in the first 12 verses of Joshua! We can be strong and courageous because we are not alone. We have our Good Shepherd guiding us through this journey and any other we face. He knows us, He loves us, and His plan—whatever it may be—is perfect just for us. So let us obey with a heart of joy.

Heavenly Father, we don’t know what the future will bring, but we know You hold it because You promise not to leave us alone. Reveal Yourself to us so we may know You better even as You know us more than we imagine. Help us to accept Your will with a

*heart full of trust so we too can be strong and courageous. In Your Son's name we pray,
Amen.*



Week Twenty-Three
The Comfort of Others

By Kristi

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

“Is this your first?”—is there any question harder to answer when you are PAL? Even if you have living children in your home, and can answer “no” without going into your medical history, our hearts often long to respond in a way that honors our children in heaven. Or is it best to answer more generally and avoid a conversation that could become awkward for one or both of you?

My answer has varied depending on where I am, who I am talking with, and how much conversation I am in the mood for. But more and more often, I have responded, “Actually, this is our fifth. We have a daughter at home and three children we’ll meet in heaven.”

At first, I gave this answer to meet my heart-desire to recognize my children in heaven and keep their memories alive. But the more I did, the more I found how often other women would nod with a knowing look in their eyes and find the freedom to share their own experiences of loss and—sometimes—subsequent pregnancies. Even if we began the conversation as complete strangers and spoke for just a few minutes, we found in that brief connection the comfort of knowing we were not alone on this path.

That is what Paul is referring to in this passage—the incredible power of a life touched by suffering to be a conduit of God’s comfort to others. In this difficult PAL journey, the most encouraging resource I have found—outside of God’s Word—has been in friendships with other women who have also journeyed through Pregnancy After Loss. Some of these friendships have been developed on-line: in my case, through the ministry of Hannah’s Prayer Ministries (see resource at the end of this document). I’ve also been able to be part of a local monthly PAL support group that, in God’s timing, grew out of a Loss support group I had been in. Several of us who had been through loss ended up being pregnant at the same time, and rather than have our pregnancies cause additional pain to new members of the group, we decided to meet on our own. Hearing each other’s stories and praying for one another through our fears and anxieties has been an enormous comfort over the months.

I’ve also found comfort in the stories of older women in my church who lost babies twenty or thirty years ago, and went on to have other children. I’ve been impressed by the fact that although we are in different generations, the feelings and reactions—especially of experiencing subsequent pregnancies—have been the same. Hearing how they faced their fears, and how God met them in their anxieties, has boosted my faith as well.

A grief counselor I went to after one of my losses often says that when you lose a baby, you find out you are a member of a club you never would have chosen to belong to. The same is true when you walk the path of PAL, but when you find other members of that club and share your stories with each other, you will find additional strength and comfort for the rest of the journey.

Father, experiencing pregnancy after loss is lonesome. I don't feel the way other pregnant women seem to feel, and sometimes I wonder if I am going crazy! Thank You for the comfort You have given me on this journey so far. Please help me connect with other women who are on this road, or have walked it in the past, so we can comfort each other with the comfort we have received from You. Amen.



Week Twenty-Four

V-Day

By Heather

Psalm 139:13-14 (NIV)

For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

V-Day. No, not Valentine's Day. Viability day.

Friday marked my 24th week of pregnancy, which means that our baby has a really good (i.e. about 70%) chance of surviving outside the womb, should she be born early. Anyone in pregnancy land will tell you that this is a big deal day, but coming from Pregnancy After Loss... let's just say it's huge.

I definitely do not want to meet this girl any earlier than necessary, but today I praise God that my chance to mother her on earth has risen exponentially. My chance to watch my husband hold her and spoil her has greatly increased.

I know every breath I take is a sweet gift from God, but I have never been more aware of that fact than I am today.

So blessed.

I'm still overwhelmed by starting a registry and decorating the nursery. As much as I want to meet this little life that has taken up residence in my body, I don't want pregnancy to end.

God has been so good to us—we literally have nothing to complain about. Through this pregnancy God is teaching me patience with myself. He is teaching me so much more about being thankful. Mostly He is teaching me complete and total dependence on Him. *God, You are good—through the calm and through the storm.*

I constantly ask God, *what do You expect from us? Are we fulfilling Your plan for our lives today?* I know my salvation isn't based on works—that isn't what I'm getting at. What I want is for my life to reflect Jesus in every single thing I do, and I am not even close to that.

I am railing against becoming complacent. I don't ever want to be satisfied in my own life to the point where I forget about others. I see that becoming very easy for me. I am not a selfless person by nature. I tend to be very inward and "me me me" oriented: it's my flesh. These thoughts are probably more on my mind now that I am preparing to enter into another season of life. It's one that I have wanted for a very long time, but it also scares me.

Motherhood. I am over the moon excited to be a mom. I am also crazy terrified. I am not scared of the sleeplessness, the amount of time and energy devoted to this little girl, the lack of one-on-one with my husband, or any of the other things that come with that territory. No, I may not be *prepared* for all of it, but I am *ready*.

What I am scared of is losing myself in a world of diapers and playdates and being just *okay* with that. I don't want to be *okay* with not serving others. I don't want to be *fine* with pulling back from people. As He has sustained me all the way through V-Day now, I need the Lord to continue giving me the strength to do all things for Him and by Him. Thankfulness, nerves, fears, joys, new territories, lots of anticipations—all of it. May He use all of these things to increase my Christlikeness.

Lord, I pray that You would give me balance both now and in the coming season. I pray that You would give me the strength to serve both my husband and my daughter, but also the desire to continue to grow Your Kingdom. Stretch me, use me, mold me to be more like Christ—no matter the season I am in. Amen.



Week Twenty-Five

Oh Boy

By Kristi

Matthew 7:9-11 (NIV)

Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!

“Boy!”

The word jumped out at me from the piece of paper. I was more than halfway through my pregnancy, and we had finally decided to open the gender results of our twenty-week ultrasound. I had been trying to prepare myself for either answer, but now that it was there in black and white, I struggled to compose myself and my mixed emotions.

We had gone through three losses between our only living child, our four-year-old daughter, and this pregnancy. Our first loss had been at 18 weeks, a girl who we named Naomi. If she had lived our daughters would have been eighteen months apart. Our next two losses were too early to know the gender. We think of them as a girl and a boy and named them accordingly, but we don't *know*.

Naomi, though, we *knew*. And when we lost her, I felt like I lost not only the unique and irreplaceable daughter that she was, but I also lost the experience of raising two girls together—of giving our first daughter a sister, something I had never had. Even of using another girl's name that I've been holding in my heart for nearly three years. And now, as I stared at the paper, I realized how much I had longed for that, to have another little girl to pour my mother-love into. But it wouldn't be, at least not this time. And given that this could be our last pregnancy, maybe I never would again.

No sooner had that thought crossed my mind than guilt followed closely behind. How dare I be disappointed, when all I had said I wanted was a baby, a healthy baby? *We don't care if it's a boy or a girl, as long as it's alive*, I had told myself early on. When so many other women were longing for a first child, what right did I have to gripe about getting a boy this time? And what kind of mother was I to wish my child would be something that he wasn't? Or to selfishly long for a girl instead of being excited to see my husband get to bond with a son?

For the next several months, I struggled with this—never mind, I'm still struggling a mere five weeks from giving birth! I began to realize that I needed time to grieve my loss of Naomi all over again, and my loss of the double-daughter experience that I may never have. I also needed time to, once again, accept that God's “Plan A” is different than my own—and that His plan is always good. For whatever reason, that plan does not include a close-in-age sister for our daughter.

But it does include a little brother for her, a son for us. A boy we can raise to manhood, to the glory of God. And as I've adjusted to the idea, and talked with other mothers of boys, I've gotten a little more excited about this new experience, one I might never have had if this baby had been a girl.

There are many potential disappointments we can face in our PAL experiences. Finding out the gender is one. So is having a different birth experience than we wanted. Or finding out that pregnancy is not a pleasant experience physically. Or anything else that interferes with the "perfect" experience we have longed for. The key to dealing with those disappointments is to bring them, in raw honesty, to our Father in heaven. Hand Him the gift we've been given, tell Him how we feel, and then trust Him to bring us to a point of both acceptance and trust again. As Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, our Father is *good*, and His gifts are, too. It may take a while to grasp that, but if we place our trust in His goodness, He will bring us to that point of understanding and peace.

Father, there are things in this pregnancy that have been a real disappointment. I feel guilty for even voicing them to You, but You know them anyway. Help me to trust that You are good, and that You are in control. My baby is a gift from You—and You give only good gifts. Thank You for this child, and help me learn from these months leading up to his or her birth. Amen.



Week Twenty-Six
Where Is My Hope?

By Alex

Psalm 147:10-11 (NIV)

*His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse,
nor His delight in the legs of the warrior;
the LORD delights in those who fear Him,
who put their hope in His unfailing love.*

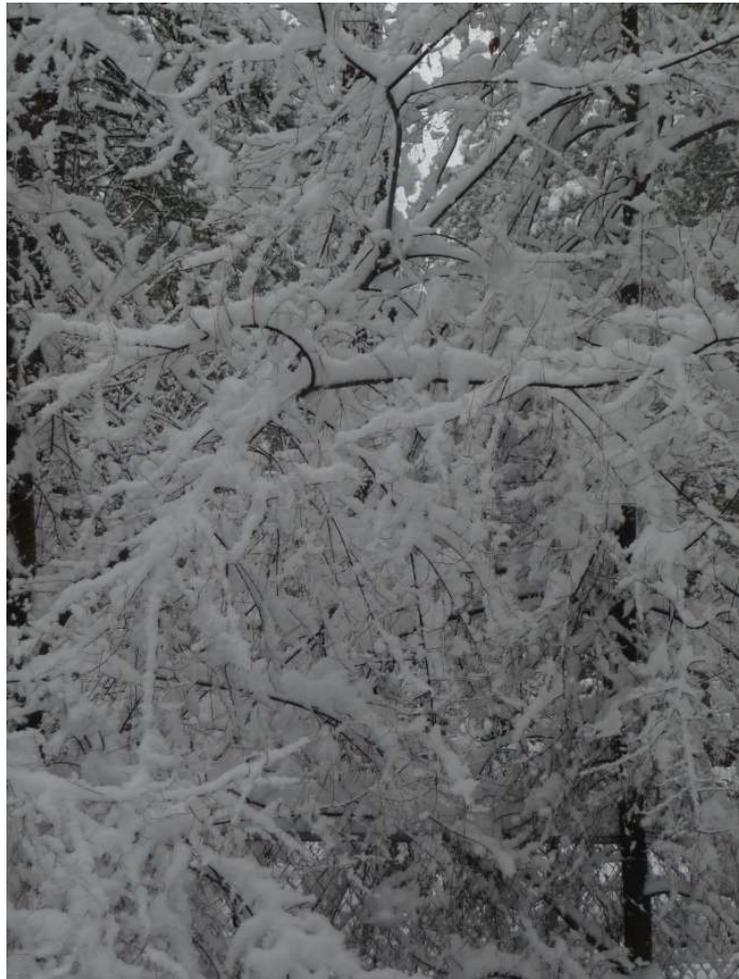
Whenever my friends or family members asked how I was feeling about my pregnancy, I would always respond with joy. I would tell them how excited I was to be pregnant after waiting so long, how much I was looking forward to meeting my daughter, how delighted and blessed I felt to be finally carrying a child. I would even speak happily about preparing for her arrival, purchasing baby items, and organizing her nursery. In each conversation, I would put on a happy face: a strong face full of hope. And I *was* happy—deeply and overwhelmingly happy. I was grateful beyond words for a healthy pregnancy. But beneath that layer of happiness, that layer of gratitude and joy, I had an even stronger layer of fear—a fear that I often hid away from friends and family members. A fear I often cleverly disguised with words of faith.

If I was honest, I would admit that every time the doctor placed a heartbeat monitor on my belly a wave of panic would wash over me. Every hour that went by without her kicking inside of me sent me into a flurry of fear. Even during my sister's college graduation ceremony, I was so consumed with worry about my baby after not feeling her move for hours that I left my family in the middle of the celebration to go drink orange juice until I finally felt her squiggle. I was embarrassed by that fear, and as a result, I didn't want to admit it to anyone. I just wanted to focus my attention and energy on being stronger, on having more faith.

After each of these events, each of these moments or hours of fear, when everything finally turned out "okay," I would chastise myself. Why wasn't I stronger? Why didn't I have more confidence that the Lord would carry me, no matter what He ordained? Why was I unable to rest, unable to trust, unable to fully focus on the joy of my pregnancy? And the even harder question—why was my sense of peace dependent upon our child being 'okay'?

And then, in the Lord's mercy, He led me to Psalm 147:10-11. And through those words of David, I realized that I didn't have to be strong on my own. And even more, God *did not delight* in my strength, or rather, my vain attempts to try to muster up enough strength. By continuing to *try* to be stronger, I was actually blocking my ability to accept the Lord's perfect strength. And by putting on a happy face and pretending to not be fearful, I wasn't allowing myself to accept the faith that only He can provide. God didn't need or want me to be strong on my own. He only needed me to admit that I was weak, and to put my hope in a strength and love that would never fail.

Heavenly Father, You promise that when we are weak, You are strong. Lord, help me to admit my weakness and lay my worries and fears at Your feet. Help me to call upon Your strength and love that will never fade, knowing with full assurance of faith that You will carry me through the end of this pregnancy. Amen.



THIRD TRIMESTER

Week Twenty-Seven
Living The Dichotomy

By Melissa

2 Corinthians 6:10 (NKJV)

As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.

During my years of incredible sorrow and grief over the deaths of my babies as recurrent miscarriage ravaged our home, I learned that I needed to constantly continue seeking courage to drink the cup the Lord had given me and continued to give me, no matter what it held. Through many varied situations, He has continued to be my strength, both in giving me courage to drink from His draughts and to give me courage to ask for that courage. I praise Him for His sustenance and provision! New mercies and sweet graces are continually surprising me, in the many and varied forms He shows them.

Today I continue to walk the path He has prepared for me. The path that still stems from the past and disappears into the future that I can not see. He continues to be my only strength to put one foot in front of the other. Even now, yet as before, we can only do what He leads us to do at any given time. The past still influences, characterizes, and molds us; that part of the path may seem left behind to those who continue to watch me walk forward... but it isn't.

The road is, in fact, more like a river: the waters from before mingle with the current that urges me forward now into pools of even newer waters that I can not yet see. But the droplets all mingle together into one flowing river. You can not tell where yesterday ended and today began, and I can not predict where tomorrow falls in the river.

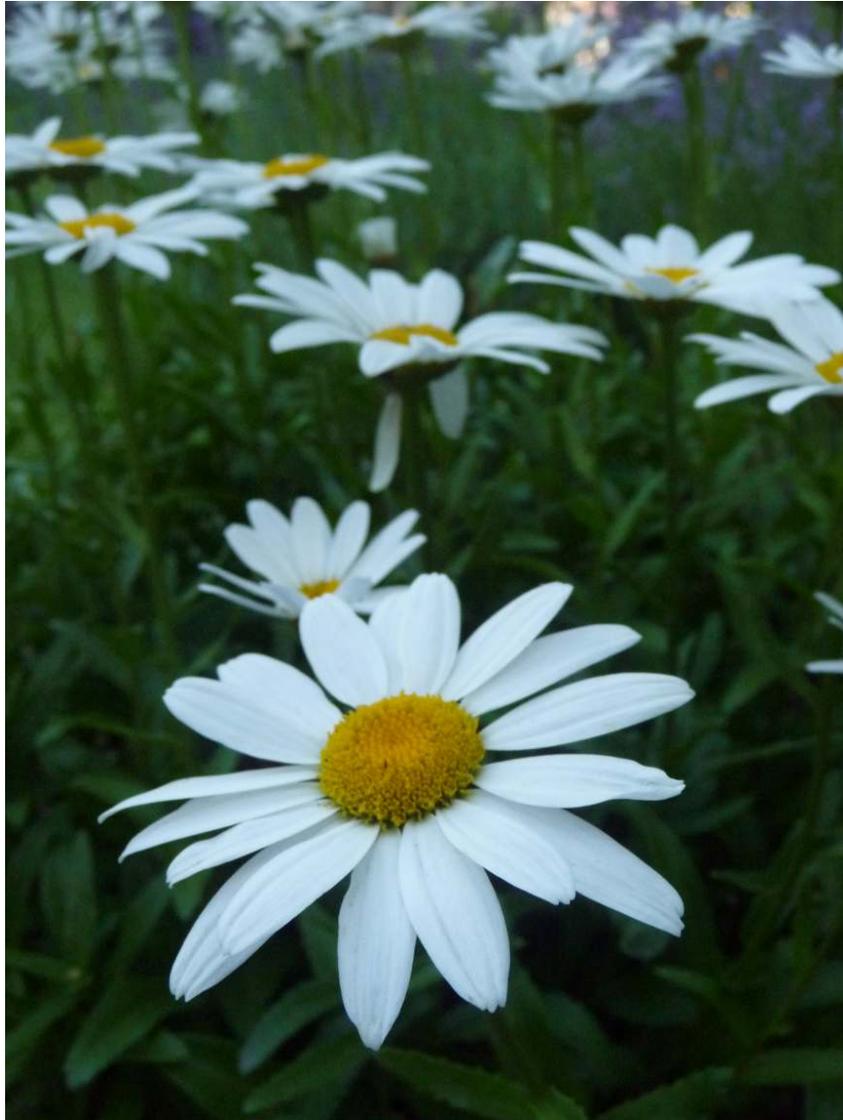
So I am yet sorrowful because the past is still fresh and raw, still mingling with today, still influencing and affecting and molding me... yet I am rejoicing, because of the beauties that past sorrows have grown—those flowers that bloom only in the shadows—and because of present beauties that lighten our load and give us hope for what tomorrow may hold. Nevertheless, I know that they do not hold any guarantees for tomorrow but they bring such sweet rejoicing as I flow along with the river's current wherever the Lord directs it.

My heart is overflowing with such joy and rejoicing—again I say, we rejoice!! But the past is not forgotten. It is not distant. I have to work very hard every day to hold my thoughts captive and have courage over my fears. I continue to need strength to endure medical treatments and bravely face ultrasounds & appointments. I still pass due dates, loss anniversaries, see marker babies, grieve with others, hope with others, and walk the line of living the dichotomy of sorrow & joy, grief & hope, death & life.

In *Streams In The Desert*, Mrs. Charles E. Cowman eloquently describes the complicated simplicity of sorrow mingling with joy: “*Before [Christ] all my sorrow is melting away into deathless love and gladness, and I give myself to Him forever... [S]orrow with Him must be sweeter than any joy that I have known.*”

As I continue to grieve the losses of babies that have gone to heaven before I would have chosen, I am learning to rejoice unabashedly over the life that He now grows within my womb. Without his siblings' deaths, he would not have been created. This brings me incredible sorrow mingled with incredible joy.

Sovereign Creator of all things, if anyone knew the dichotomy of mingling sorrow with joy, it was You. Please impart Your grace to me as I too now walk this mingled road. Lessen my sorrows as You enlarge my joy. Help me not to forget Your past faithfulness so that I am focused on the faithfulness I know You will supply yet again. Sorrow with You has been sweet in its own way; O Lord, make rejoicing with You all the sweeter. For the sake of Your Kingdom and by Your mercy. Amen.



Week Twenty-Eight
All I Can Do Is Pray

By Alex

Isaiah 38:1-4, 18-20 (NIV)

In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover." Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, "Remember, LORD, how I have walked before You faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in Your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: "Go and tell Hezekiah, 'This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life..."

[excerpt from Hezekiah's prayer]...

*For the grave cannot praise You,
death cannot sing Your praise;
those who go down to the pit
cannot hope for Your faithfulness.*

*The living, the living—they praise You,
as I am doing today;
parents tell their children
about Your faithfulness.*

*The LORD will save me,
and we will sing with stringed instruments
all the days of our lives
in the temple of the LORD.*

"All you can do is pray." So many times during my pregnancy when I spoke about my fears, that's how others would respond. I knew they meant well and I knew that they were right; I needed to surrender my fear and anxiety, and place my requests before God, as Paul wrote in Philippians 4:6. And each day, I did—I asked the Lord to protect my daughter and bring her safely into my arms. But even as my lips formed those words, something in my heart struggled.

I kept remembering the moment I found out that my first child was not growing the way he should have. I remember crying out to the Lord, spending hours, and then days, on my knees and in bed in prayer for him. Did I not pray for healing? Did I not beg the Lord to spare him, believing with full assurance that God had the power to save? Did I not pray with enough confidence? Did I not have enough faith?

These murmurings, these fears crept into my prayers even as I asked the Lord to preserve the life of my second child. Deep down, I feared that since my prayers had not moved the hand of God during my first pregnancy, why would they change anything now? Even as I prayed for the desire of my heart, the good gift of a living child, I found myself

hesitating. Perhaps, I reasoned, I should pray less for my child's health, and more for my heart to submit to God's will, whatever that will be?

Through my confusion, I continued to pray. And as I continued to pray, day after day, night after night, something began to happen. I found that the more I prayed for my daughter to be healthy and whole, the more that desire started to loosen its grasp on my heart. The more I asked for God to preserve her life, the more I started to feel less desperate and less fearful. In time, my prayers became less about moving God's hands, and more about understanding who God was.

But then I encountered Hezekiah—Hezekiah's sickness and Hezekiah's prayer and Hezekiah's healing. When reading through the book of Isaiah, I saw with fresh eyes Isaiah's prophesy to the 14th King of Judah. Isaiah told Hezekiah he would die; that the Lord had said he would die. And yet, Hezekiah prayed and the Lord heard and healed him. Isaiah 38:4 says that the Lord saw Hezekiah's tears and heard his prayers and added fifteen years to his life. So there it was. The Lord heard and the Lord healed.

I read that passage in Isaiah over and over again, seeing King Hezekiah weeping bitterly at the feet of the Lord, calling upon Him to save, saying, "The grave cannot praise You, death cannot sing Your praise... The living, the living—they praise You."

And I knew that even though I didn't fully understand how prayer moved or did not move God's sovereign will, I knew I had to pray for life, for God would—and did—see my tears and hear my prayers.

Heavenly Father, I don't know the outcome of this pregnancy. I don't know what joy or what sorrow may lie ahead. But even as I walk in that uncertainty, I hear the words of Hezekiah, and pray for life. I weep at Your feet, and I ask You for life—a healthy child in our arms. Isaiah reminds us that the grave cannot praise You; death cannot sing Your praise. But the living, God, the living can praise You. They can tell the next generation of Your faithfulness and abundant mercy. And today, Lord, I pray that You will grant us life and together, for the next generation, we will praise Your name. Amen.



Week Twenty-Nine
Cry Aloud and Tell Everyone

By Melissa

Psalm 77:1-4 and 78:4, 6-7 (ESV)

*I cry aloud to God,
aloud to God, and He will hear me.
In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord;
in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;
my soul refuses to be comforted.
When I remember God, I moan;
when I meditate, my spirit faints.
Selah
You hold my eyelids open;
I am so troubled that I cannot speak...*

*We will not hide them from their children,
but tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the LORD, and His might,
and the wonders that He has done.
...that the next generation might know them,
the children yet unborn,
and arise and tell them to their children,
so that they should set their hope in God
and not forget the works of God,
but keep His commandments.*

These words of Asaph are often on my heart as I seek to live out my days before the Lord's face in righteousness. Through days of utter grief and days of tenuous joy, it is my desire to call on the Lord in all things, and to treasure up His glorious deeds so that I can rely on Him at all times and proclaim His faithfulness to all people.

So much of Psalm 77 reminds me of my days of loss, of grief, of bereavement. But it also reminds me of this PAL journey; the moments of moaning and fainting as I worry and fear. I know God hears my voice and bottles my tears. I know He is near to me. Yet I am weary, my heart and soul refuse to be comforted, and I have often been so desperately troubled that I very literally cannot speak. How real these verses are to me because so much of it has been reality for me as I wait for this baby to grow to term in my womb.

Then we read on and we come to Psalm 78, and my heart is encouraged. Asaph's words again dig into my soul with their truth and palpability, because again they ring true as I continue on this PAL journey. Indeed I will not hide the glorious deeds of the Lord, His might, and His wonders! I will proclaim to everyone I know, and to future generations, how faithful God has been—through my losses and also through new life—through the gift of modern medicine and the interventions that it provides. It is our deepest desire to see God glorified through our family's life; through our response to whatever God brings

to us. We want our story to prove His gloriousness and be a testimony of His sovereignty. We desire for everyone who hears our story to set their hope in God, to remember His works, to keep His commandments.

Whether we are given life or death, joy or sorrow, may we continue to have the eyes of Christ to see the Father's gifts. May my husband and I encourage one another with God's glorious deeds especially when we lie awake with eyelids open, too troubled for words. May I speak to the baby in my womb, proclaiming to this child who is yet unborn, of the Lord's might and wonders. May he be born knowing that he belongs to God, that God is faithful, that His mercies endure forever, that Jehovah is his hope, that the works of the Lord are for his growth, and that he is called to keep the commandments of God forever.

Father of all mercies, thank You for hearing my cries even when my heart refuses to be comforted. Thank You for being there when I seek You and for giving me the strength to do it, even when I am too troubled for words. Please continue Your deeds, wonders, and mighty acts through our family. Please use us to bless Your name now and throughout all generations. Please reveal Yourself even now to this unborn baby in my womb, set his hope on You, remind him of Your works, and enable him through Christ to keep Your commandments. Even when we are worried and anxious, be faithful to us and surprise us by Your power. Oh Father we love You and thank You for Your strength which has allowed us to endure thus far. Amen.



Week Thirty
Comfort, Confidence, and Courage

By Kerri

2 Timothy 1:7 (NIV)

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

Timothy was a beloved friend and fellow worker of the apostle Paul. While Paul was imprisoned under the emperor Nero for what would be the final time, he longed to see his dear brother again. However, even more important to Paul was encouraging him to continue with the important work of preaching the Gospel. This had to be a disconcerting situation for Timothy, hearing of Paul's imprisonment again. He was likely afraid of the outcome for Paul. Perhaps he was afraid of something happening to himself as well. Perhaps he might be incarcerated or put to death for preaching Christ crucified!

Surely Timothy found comfort and confidence in Paul's letter to him, just as we can. In this verse, Paul rightly gives credit to the Lord as the giver of spirit. He tells us that God does not give a spirit of fear, a spirit that lacks confidence or is afraid of the unknown. God graciously provides us with the spirit of power, or of courage and resolution to encounter difficulties and dangers. He gives us the spirit of love, an understanding of God's compassion that He uses to set us above earthly fears. And He provides a spirit of self-discipline, the ability to rise up and do what is right in the face of our own fearful feelings. Timothy didn't have this spirit himself, and neither do we. However, in our broken nature, we can rejoice in these gifts God bestows upon us!

As you quickly approach the birth of this child, perhaps fear creeps up in you. Maybe you've heard stories of other women's losses that are at this same stage or even later, and fear that may happen to you. Or maybe you think "I've made it this far, how will I deal with it if something happens now?" In the spirit of self-discipline, your best response to any of those thoughts is "I will not fear; I will live boldly through Christ." It may not take your fears away, but it will remind you of the spirit God gives you. It will remind you that God wants you to live boldly in the good things He has planned for you. It will remind you of the courage that He puts in you to navigate this pregnancy and all life's trials without fear. God did not deliver us from the trial of losing a precious child. But He does refine us through the fire of grief and pain and we come out the other side with a stronger, deeper faith—a spirit of love and power.

Remember the Old Testament story in Daniel chapter 3 of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who had to go through the fiery furnace. They had to endure the furnace being turned up even hotter than usual. But in that hot fire there appeared a fourth Man, Jesus, giving them strength. And when all three came out, they were unbound and unharmed. They didn't even smell like smoke! Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not have a spirit of timidity. They faced the fire boldly with the spirit God had given them. Praise be to God that we can do the same!

Dearest Jesus, we know that You do not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of courage. Remind us of the confidence, love, and power that come from You alone as we near the birth of our child. Help us live boldly through the rest of this pregnancy and into delivery. In Your precious name we pray, Amen.



Week Thirty-One
Firm, Trusting, and Steady

By Melissa

Psalm 112:7-8 (ESV)

*[The righteous] is not afraid of bad news;
his heart is firm, trusting in the LORD.
His heart is steady; he will not be afraid...*

I try to focus on this passage as the days go by and as my anxiety remains. I keep telling myself that if I make it to [insert next big milestone here: e.g. ten weeks, second trimester, feeling kicks, finding out gender, reaching viability, thirty weeks, full term, being in labor...], I will give myself license to feel like a normal pregnant woman: you know, actually feel hopeful and have some semblance of excitement. That's my prayer. But as each big milestone comes and passes, I find that I still don't feel like a normal pregnant woman. Where is the boundless hope? Where is the unlimited excitement?

This psalm talks about the righteous man—a man who is made righteous (Romans 5:19) by Christ's own blood—being unafraid. I *do* feel afraid, though, and this makes me question my heart. My heart does *not* feel firm or steady. How can I say that I am trusting in the Lord when I waver so?

I am afraid of bad news because of my history of recurrent pregnancy loss. My heart is not firm because I am thinking on my past. I do trust in the Lord but obviously not enough or these fears would not invade so many of my thoughts each day. My heart is not steady because I too often rely on my own strength. I am, in fact, not only afraid but *terrified*. How quickly moments of peace and rest can turn into endless calamity and turmoil. I know this all too well, and I wait for the other shoe to drop, even as I place my hands upon my round belly and feel the hiccups of the little baby who lives under my skin.

How is it that the psalmist can say that the righteous man is unafraid, firm, trusting, and steady? If I have been made righteous, cleansed by the blood of Christ, why do I not find it easier to say these things of myself?

This portion of Psalm 112 is talking about the character of a Christian. It also goes into some depth about the blessedness of the righteous and the misery of the wicked. It is my duty as God's child, but also my joy, that I can come to Him with my fears and throw them at His feet. Thus, I have an outlet for my fears. I must focus on being firm and steady in the Lord, and from my foundational trust in Him, I can slowly learn when and how to allow myself to grow in excitement over this new baby and attachment to him. I must work to take my thoughts captive (2 Corinthians 10:5) in obedience to the Lord, for I should fear nobody and nothing but God.

As I daily—even hourly—fight the temptation to fear, God proves His faithfulness to me over and over. Not just because He continues to keep my baby alive in my womb and to give me confirmation of this through toes in my ribs and hiccups between my hips, but

because He does not leave me when I am afraid. He does not give up on me when I have moments of untrusting weakness. He binds my wounds and heals my broken heart instead of leaving me in the muck where He finds me. *This* is where my trust must lie, and my heart must be firm and steady on *that* point. From there, all I need to do is throw myself at His feet and rely on Him for whatever lies ahead. I must be confident that He will continue His faithfulness, and not be afraid of the future, for I know He will never leave me nor forsake me (Hebrews 13:5).

God in heaven, please remind me that You alone are my hope and my confidence. Please do protect my baby's life and keep bad news far from us: but should tragedy strike us again, O God, keep me firm in You and Your statutes. Make me steady through Christ so that no matter what Your sovereign hand has ordained, my heart will be firmly grounded in You and Your Word. For the sake of Your Son, Amen.



Week Thirty-Two
My Season of Joy

By Alex

Ecclesiastes 7:13-14 (NIV)

Consider what God has done:

Who can straighten

what He has made crooked?

When times are good, be happy;

but when times are bad, consider this:

God has made the one

as well as the other.

Therefore, no one can discover

anything about their future.

I was walking along the beach in the Outer Banks of North Carolina one week after Hurricane Irene. The sky was clear, and the ocean, finally, was fairly tame, but all around me, the coast and beach had been completely torn apart by the storm.

Large branches, some the size of thin tree trunks, had washed up all over the sand, uprooted and snapped off from neighboring islands along the coast. Mounds of gnarled brown seaweed sat in heaps across the shoreline, so much so that you had to step around and over them every few feet. And half moons of dark, sharp black shells were scattered across the remaining cream colored sand. Even the dunes had cracked off in places, and the sea oats hung wet and limp, bending over themselves. Although it was low tide, the beach seemed short, and the water looked thick and dark grey.

It was the beginning of Labor Day weekend early in the morning, and there were only a few other people walking along the water. I remember thinking how disappointed vacationing families would be to see the beach so changed. They weren't even allowed to swim, since the rip currents hadn't fully subsided and I ventured a guess that because of that, many wouldn't even come.

But as the day drew on, I watched family after family arrive at the beach, with chairs, and blankets, and umbrellas in tow. Small children had sand pails and shovels in hand, and as they set up their spots in between the branches and seaweed, I was surprised by what happened. One by one, the children gathered up the branches, swept up the shells into piles, and began to construct beautiful teepees and fortresses from the rubble. They decorated their sculptures with sea oats, made paths out of broken shells, moats out of sea grass. They didn't even seem bothered by not being able to swim. They didn't stop for a second to consider what the beach *could* have looked like. They simply took it as it was.

I could see in their eyes that they had been waiting for this day, this vacation, and they were going to love every minute of it even though the experience was not what they had planned. Their reaction gave me pause that morning, as I thought about my pregnancy, my joy, and how it was often clouded by loss. Too often, because I had a child in heaven,

I felt myself tempering my joy. I caught myself imagining what being pregnant would be had I not lost a child; how much more carefree I would feel, how much more blissful. And yet, I was pregnant. This was my season of joy. This was a pregnancy I had waited years for, and that morning, I felt the writer of Ecclesiastes challenging, even admonishing me, “when times are good, be happy.” God had mercifully filled my womb, so I needed to fully embrace that joy, even in the tension.

For God ordains both joy and sorrow; He creates the beach and allows the storm. So like the children on the beach that morning, I needed to look around at the landscape of my life, the driftwood and the shells, the sea grass and the sand, and declare it beautiful for what it was.

Heavenly Father, I confess that I have allowed my season of grief to wash into this season of joy. At times, I have focused too much on what I have lost, and what heartache I've weathered, and as a result, I've missed the beauty that You created in this changed landscape of my heart. Help me to fully embrace the beautiful life of the child You've given me and to fully enter into this season of rejoicing. Help me to not miss another moment of this pregnancy, Father, knowing that only You know what tomorrow holds. Amen.



Week Thirty-Three
Cast My Anxieties

By Melissa

1 Peter 5:6-7 (ESV)

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.

I need to pray daily for strength to do what Peter was exhorting here. But how do I humble myself under God's hand? And what will His exalting be like? These are questions that I pray for wisdom to understand, for strength to look beyond what I can see. It is the Lord's hand that holds me, holds my baby, holds the Book of Life. I must humbly acknowledge this in my thoughts, attitudes, and actions. I am to humble myself *so that* He may exalt me in His perfect timing. And Peter tells us that one primary way we can do this is by casting our anxieties on God, which is a constant acknowledgment of our inability to accomplish anything outside of His enabling.

Particularly during Pregnancy After Loss, anxieties about my baby's life are constant and overwhelming. It's an incredibly big thing in our life and there are big anxieties associated with such a big thing. But they are not too big for Christ. I am called to cast my anxieties on Him, no matter their size or weight. And *why* am I called to cast my anxieties on Him? Because He cares for me! *HE cares for ME!* How incredible is that! While my anxieties are not too big for Him, they also are not too small. He cares about the little details that press upon my heart. Christ is not one to roll His eyes and tell me to get over it: His method is to enfold me in His mercy and carry the weight for me.

I am anxious about how things will fall into place and come together during the final weeks of pregnancy. I am low on energy and high on nerves. Fewer things get crossed off the list each day than I want. But each day, God shows me things He is accomplishing and reminds me that He is faithful. No matter what gets done, no matter what is left undone: He is faithful and will provide for our needs.

It is remarkably easy to be anxious over my baby's life. I can hear his heartbeat on the Doppler and I can feel him wiggling all around—but my heart is still anxious. I don't have an open window into my womb to check on him, and sometimes I *don't* feel him moving. And my anxiety grows. When I was lying awake one night, not feeling any movement, I laid there crying and asking God to give me the comfort of kicks or wiggles. I still fight fear daily that my sweet baby will die, even so close to delivering. When I rolled over and laid on my stomach, the baby started wiggling, and my tears of anxiety changed to tears of thankfulness as I finally fell back asleep. It is so hard to hold my children with open hands, no matter their age. But these children are HIS—ultimately they do not belong to me at all. I pray for bigger faith and trust as He cares for these, *His children*, in whatever ways His providence has ordained as best.

The life of the Christian is one of daily giving up our anxieties to God and hourly placing ourselves at His feet. As I continue to grow in my knowledge of Him and His character

through my PAL journey, I want to grow in my faith and ability to cast all my anxieties at His feet and lay all my burdens on His shoulders.

Father in Heaven, as my anxieties roll over me and threaten to overwhelm my heart, please enable me to come before You with a humble heart and offer these anxious thoughts and worries to You. Please comfort me with the knowledge that You care for me and my baby. My anxieties are big and heavy: carry them for me. By the power of Your Holy Spirit and in the name of Christ Your Son, Amen.



Week Thirty-Four
Christ's Sufficiency

By Alex

Psalm 78:4-7 (NIV)

*... We will tell the next generation
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,
His power, and the wonders He has done.
He decreed statutes for Jacob
and established the law in Israel,
which He commanded our ancestors
to teach their children,
so the next generation would know them,
even the children yet to be born,
and they in turn would tell their children.
Then they would put their trust in God
and would not forget His deeds
but would keep His commands.*

I was 34 weeks pregnant, standing in the laundry room, a hamper of small pink clothes next to me. I planned to wash them, take them off their little hangers, throw away the tags. But I kept hesitating. I kept worrying—worrying that she would come too early, that she wouldn't be healthy, that she would face complications during birth. But most of all, I was afraid that God had given her to me for 34 weeks, just to take her back. And I couldn't fathom the thought of coming home to a perfectly organized closet filled with beautiful pink clothes that would never be worn.

Part of me wanted to stuff them all away in a bag—tags, gift receipts and all—and hide them away until I knew for sure that she was okay, that she would be fine, that she would wear each and every last beautiful outfit. I reasoned that somehow, if I waited long enough, I would be able to see that the Lord wouldn't take her from me; and that in time, I would be able to walk not by faith, but by sight, declaring to the next generation that she was fine and she was mine to keep, resting assured that I would have the privilege of parenting her for as long as I would be on earth.

But slowly, after many evenings standing at the washing machine, I realized that if I were waiting for a day when I knew she would be fine, a day when I could trust in God's result versus His character, that I would be waiting for a long, long time. For He had not promised that He wouldn't take her from me, and in reality, she wasn't ever truly *mine* to begin with. She was on loan, from our merciful Father, and I needed to re-release her back to Him. I needed to stop waiting for the day when I *knew* she would be safe and instead, place my trust in the safety and all-sufficiency of a Father who would never leave me, even if He did allow me to come home to a closet full of beautiful clothing that would never be worn.

I needed to trust in His character, knowing that He led and comforted me each step of the journey to this day—and that He would continue to walk alongside me even if the path took another turn away from the desire of my heart. And in this moment, instead of fearing for what the future held, I needed to pause and celebrate the day, the praiseworthy deeds, that He had already given me.

Heavenly Father, I lay the life of this child at Your feet; for this child is, and will always be, Yours. I confess that I have failed to trust You, and that I have let fear, not faith, steer my heart and my actions. Lord, replace that fear with the knowledge that Your love is sufficient, more than sufficient, no matter what path lies ahead. Help me to hold loosely to this unbelievable gift of life. And should the day come when I hold a living child in my arms, may I never stop telling the next generation of Your great mercy. Amen.



Week Thirty-Five
Abnormal and Wonderful

By Melissa

Psalm 139:13-14 (ESV)

*For You formed my inward parts;
You knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are Your works;
my soul knows it very well.*

Today I bought baby things. It was surreal to be walking through a baby store without bawling. It was still bittersweet (I don't think that will ever go away until I'm dead and in heaven!), but it was better. I did tear up, but I hardly cried. What a red-letter day!! I'm continuing to be so humbled and thankful for the life that inhabits my womb. It's just beyond words. The Lord's faithfulness astounds me. His mercies leave me breathless. *His works are wonderful.*

Emotionally speaking, this journey is far from normal. I have learned to embrace the woman/mother God has made me, and not regret the fact that I can not be "a normal pregnant woman," either medically or emotionally. I don't want to resent the person God made me from the journey He has given me or from the words He used to create me in the first place. *He formed my inward parts!* So I am learning to be thankful that I am different. Thankful for medications and other medical intervention. Thankful for my somewhat-unique perspective on pregnancy. Thankful for my struggles. Thankful for my worries. Thankful that He has molded me into someone who simply can not take life (or babies or pregnancy or medicine or whatever) for granted. Thankful that He has given me a history that I can use for His glory as we proclaim God's faithfulness through sorrows as well as joys.

This pregnancy continues to be humbling. It continues to be scary. But because I know the weightier sides of it, I also know how much more glorious the lighter sides are. Because I know the deep darkness, I see the light even more brightly. I know deeper griefs but I truly believe I am also able—therefore—to know deeper joys. I consider that a privilege, even though it has been a hard-earned badge. *My soul knows His wonderful works very well.*

I do not talk as frequently as many women do about pregnancy and baby things, but I am going to endeavor to do it a little more often now that we are nearing the end of this baby's time in my womb. My fears for this baby's life are still here and my heart does not always rest confidently in God's good plan. I still need to daily seek to trust His character more than His works. But just as He knit me wonderfully within my own mother, He is knitting this baby wonderfully within my womb. I want to praise Him, for *my baby is fearfully and wonderfully made.* No matter how many days I get to hold him in my womb, no matter how many days I get to hold him in my arms—it is my deep desire to praise God for the wonderful work He has done in creating this little boy.

Almighty and Holy God, the works You do in secret, knitting together people in Your image, are beyond my comprehension. Remind me that I am fearfully and wonderfully made, and give me thankfulness for the unique things You created in me and for me. Deepen my joy and accept my praise, for the likewise marvelous works I know You have done within my womb. Every aspect of this baby's body and soul are the direct result of Your fearfully and wonderfully creative hands. Teach my soul to acknowledge this and praise You with thankfulness. Amen.



Week Thirty-Six
In Heaven I Imagine

By Lindsay

Isaiah 44:3-4 (NIV)

*For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring,
and My blessing on your descendants.
They will spring up like grass in a meadow,
like poplar trees by flowing streams.*

How accurate to see a woman pregnant again after loss as a thirsty land in need of water. How thirsty for God's touch we become. Dry, depressed, full of despair; we long to hear from Him that this time everything will be okay. Although I wish I could say that this verse promises that you will see this baby on this side of Heaven, I know that isn't what Isaiah intended. But the Lord does remind us here that He is the Author and Creator of life, "This is what the LORD says—He who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you: Do not be afraid..." (v. 2)

I imagine that in Heaven there is a playground where angels watch our children play. The grass grows long in the meadow and swings hang from the strong poplar trees. There are fountains and crystal slides, flowers and laughter.

I couldn't ask for a better gift for my children than to have the Spirit of the Almighty God poured out upon them and His blessing on their lives. And that is what I can say I believe for both our children yet to be born and born into Heaven, that He is willing to pour out His Spirit and blessing upon them. A gift better than life itself.

Lord, I am so thirsty and in need of Your waters. Your Spirit alone quenches and fulfills me. I ask that you would pour Your blessing on this baby I can feel growing inside of me. I ask that You would hold close to you those that I cannot touch any longer. Thank You for Your goodness. Amen.



Week Thirty-Seven
Glory in Compassion

By Kerri

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 (NIV)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

My son weighed 4 pounds 7 ounces the day he was born into heaven. A year later, when my living child passed that milestone in gestation, I was bombarded with such an array of emotion—joy, grief, sorrow, relief, anxiety, hope. How was it that I could feel joy and sorrow in the same moment? Shouldn't one take precedence over the other? How could I explain to others that, while filled with hope for this living child, I still grieved the son I lost? How, even with a different pregnancy, grief has no time limit, no milestone that makes it “magically” disappear? For several people around me, a “new” pregnancy meant the time for comfort was over. It was time to “trust in the Lord” and time to “think positive.” All well-meaning yet hollow clichés announced by those uncomfortable with the subject of loss. Their words offered no comfort.

In fact, the only real comfort for anything we face comes from the Great Comforter Himself, Jesus Christ. He knows what it is like to live our experiences and feel our emotions. Not only because He is true God, but because He is true Man. He came down from heaven, lived our human life, felt joy, sorrow, hope, grief, and with each human emotion, He rejoiced in the Lord our Father. How much more can Christ comfort us because He has already been here? There is nothing that we can feel, even in the craziest mix of emotions, which would take Him by surprise.

Now, since we have also been there, we are called to offer comfort to others. Experiencing a loss at any stage, then trusting in the Lord through a subsequent pregnancy gives us a unique perspective in our faith journey. Experiencing the loss of a child that seemingly goes against the natural order of things can make us more sensitive to the trials and grief of others. We are poised to offer the comfort of God's Word to those who have suffered as we have. Not as outsiders with well-meant catchphrases, but with the true promises of God—the same promises that brought us comfort in the midst of our grief.

Our opportunities to share the gospel reach even further. Living through each milestone of this pregnancy and trusting in the Lord to be our Provider and Comforter into delivery and beyond blesses us with the opportunity outwardly show our faith. Sharing our hope in Christ, surrendering our anxiety to Him, and trusting confidently in His promises lets our light shine and gives true comfort to those around us. Colossians 3:17 (NIV) reads, “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” When we have compassion on those going through trials, we give glory to the Lord and thank Him for His blessings.

Dearest Jesus, our Great Provider and Comforter, thank You for each milestone we pass in this pregnancy. Continue to give us the abundant comfort of Your Word, and present us with the opportunity to share this comfort with others so we can let Your light shine. In Your gracious name we pray, Amen.



Week Thirty-Eight

Fear and Faith

By Lindsay

Isaiah 29:22-23 (NIV)

No longer will Jacob be ashamed;

no longer will their faces grow pale.

When they see among them their children,

the work of my hands,

they will keep my name holy;

they will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob,

and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.

Pregnancy After Loss is a struggle with hope. On the one hand we've been through this before and know it could happen again. On the other, God is calling us to put faith in him and we have the hope of a life growing inside of us. But what is fear and what is faith? Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is looking forward to the future despite the knowledge that everything might not be the way we want. Conversely, fear is refusing to live in the joy of the moment while we await the birth of our children. Fear is looking behind and staying there.

It is hard not to be reminded of past loss. The trauma has become a part of life and each tremble has more meaning for us than anyone who has not walked this road could ever know. Some of us are blessed to have others walking beside us who know firsthand the pain and fear that are a part of each day and can be an example of a life of faith without fear. I had the opportunity to talk to the woman who was a mentor to me in my youth. She would call to pray for me. She knew what it was to fear during a pregnancy after a loss; and what it was to have faith. After my second miscarriage I was so afraid to trust God again. I had only known women who had suffered one loss. I thought I was alone. But God knew there were others. As I opened up and shared about my pain I found out one of my friends from university had walked this road too. Although now across the country, she cried with me and related to all of the feelings I was going through.

Fear can keep us from being prepared for the joy that God has in store for us. Faith can heal the pain of the past.

Lord, You have sustained me. You will sustain me. In faith, hope and love I surrender it all again to You, Lord. I pray Your hand will be on this pregnancy and that You would be my strength and peace. Please let this be the child that I can have and hold. Amen.

Week Thirty-Nine
Resting and Quiet

By Melissa

Isaiah 30:15, 18, 20 (ESV)

*For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel,
“In returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.”*

*Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you,
and therefore He exalts Himself to show mercy to you.
For the LORD is a God of justice;
blessed are all those who wait for Him.*

*And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your
Teacher will not hide Himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher.*

In Isaiah 30 we read about the people of Israel and the consequences of their sin in turning from God. We read about His plans for their restoration. We see God’s incredible kindness and mercy to those who are utterly undeserving. And in this we can see ourselves as well, because we are likewise utterly undeserving. While I do not believe that seven of my children have died as a direct punishment for any particular sins we have committed, I openly acknowledge that death is a result of sin having entered the world through Adam in Eden—so in that sense, my babies have died because of sin. Christ and redemption are the only hope I can cling to! It is in this context that I find great comfort specifically in verses 15, 18, and 20 of Isaiah 30.

In returning and rest we shall be saved. What might this look like for me right now? I must return to God and rest peacefully in Him. I must run from my fears and put off my spirit of anxiety. There must be a reformation of my heart and submission of my soul to accomplish this.

My strength shall be in quietness and in trust. Again, how can I hope to see this in my situation of PAL? The words of Matthew Henry in his commentary on this passage could not be more applicable:

“...we must keep our spirits calm and sedate by a continual dependence upon God, and His power and goodness; we must retire into ourselves with a holy quietness, suppressing all turbulent and tumultuous passions, and keeping the peace in our own minds. And we must rely upon God with a holy confidence that He can do what He will and will do what is best for His people. And this will be our strength; it will inspire us with such a holy fortitude as will carry us with ease and courage through all the difficulties we may meet with.”¹

A continual dependence upon God... suppressing turbulence... inspiring holy fortitude to give us courage. Yes, that is precisely what I need to pray for as I endure the daily journey of sanctification through this pregnancy.

The Lord waits to be gracious. What is He waiting for? Why would He delay His grace? The word “therefore” implies that it is because of what came before. He waits for us to return to Him and rest in Him. May we return and rest, and may He answer us with His grace! *He exalts Himself to show mercy to me.* Yes, that is my prayer: that He would show mercy but also that He would be exalted. May I seek to exalt Him even as I await His mercies.

In verse 20, I see my past but I acknowledge that I also see my future. My past has indeed held adversity and affliction. And indeed I have seen the faithfulness of God as my eyes have been given new sight to see His teaching from new perspectives. But I also recognize that my future will hold new adversities and affliction of which I do not yet know. It is my comfort and my solace to know that God will yet again prove Himself faithful as He has in the past, and that He will not hide Himself from me but His acts and mercies will be visible again. I don't pretend to know what that will look like, but I am convinced that if I pursue His strength through returning, resting, and quieting myself through confident trust in God, when troubles do arise again—whether related to PAL or not—He will be present and teaching and faithful yet again.

God in heaven, You are indeed faithful. Thank you for exalting Yourself even as You humble Yourself to be merciful and gracious to a sinner like me. Thank You for not hiding Yourself. Please give me faith and strength to return to You, to rest in You, and to quietly trust You—especially as I carry this child in my womb. Protect and provide for us, our Father. For the glory of Christ, Amen.

1 Henry, M. (1706). *Isaiah 30*. In *Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible (complete)*. Retrieved from <http://www.studylight.org/com/mhc-com/view.cgi?book=isa&chapter=030&phrase=#phrase>



Week Forty
Sounds of Rejoicing

By Lindsay

Jeremiah 30:18-19 (NIV)

This is what the LORD says: “I will restore the fortunes of Jacob’s tents and have compassion on his dwellings; the city will be rebuilt on her ruins, and the palace will stand in its proper place. From them will come songs of thanksgiving and the sound of rejoicing. I will add to their numbers, and they will not be decreased...”

The sounds of rejoicing: happiness in my mother’s voice when I told her we were pregnant again; friends talking about my soon-to-be-born baby at our baby shower; strangers asking when I’m due; the words “maternity leave”; breathing exercises at prenatal class; my husband’s prayers each night before bed; the sound of her heart beating on the Doppler.

What are your sounds of rejoicing? Have you sung a song of thanksgiving to the Lord today?

How hard it is not to doubt that things will be okay. There are so many things that can cause anxiety as I worry about these final days of pregnancy. But the reality is soon I will be holding my baby girl in my arms. The Lord is compassionate. As the final days of pregnancy are counted down, I await with great expectation the morning of her birth. The reality of needing to prepare for a baby was the strangest part of Pregnancy After Loss for me. I had never let myself get ready before. But if this time was the time I would bring a baby home from the hospital then I had better have a place for her to sleep.

Those that wait on the Lord will renew their strength (Isaiah 40:31) and so wait these last days we must.

Here is my song of thanksgiving, Lord. I am so thankful for this life You have created within me. I ask that You will add to our numbers and build our family. Thank You for the sound of our sweet baby’s cry that will soon be in our ears. Amen.



Week Forty-One
The Uphill Race

By Melissa

Hebrews 12:1-2 (ESV)

...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured...

Being pregnant following the death of a baby and the ensuing grief is a hard fought-for joy. Getting to the point of being able to truly celebrate an impending arrival is a huge milestone. So much of the path is behind, yet so much is still ahead. We are still in the process of running the race! And it can be utterly wearying. Verse 13 of this chapter reminds us of tired hands and feeble knees—something that is incredibly real during the last trimester of pregnancy, but especially when the physical weakness is compounded by the emotional strain of PAL. It adds a constant uphill slant to the pregnancy race as well as the race of growing faith.

God has been sanctifying me and bringing glory to Himself through my trials and suffering, as I have suffered physical effects and grieved the deaths of seven babies. This is discipline and chastening that He uses to mature and make me righteous. By my suffering in these ways, He teaches me some of the sacrifice and selflessness that motherhood requires. It may be an aspect of these things that I did not desire to practice, but it seemed good to God to teach me in those ways. So I seek to honor Him by keeping up the pace of the race as I grow in faith.

How do I grow in faith, in this race the Lord has set before me? I must follow what Jesus did, looking to the joy set before me! I must, like Jesus, endure whatever comes my way—including suffering, sacrifice, and shame—and look to the joy that is ahead in laying down my own will, trusting that what comes to pass will give me His joy and ultimately heaven itself. I need courage and strength to keep running, and that is only given to us by God when we look to Jesus constantly. It is the faith that Christ instills in us that continues to give us courage and endurance to run, in the face of huge trials or even smaller daily struggles.

God has already given me courage and endurance to trust Him and His perfect will, even when I have been helpless and hopeless, nearly drowning in grief. He has given me courage and endurance to face the fight for the joy set before me, even when miscarriage was impending. And now I have the blessing of experiencing the beginning of the hard fought-for joy as life grows in my womb and grows our hope for life in our arms.

My own mother tells me that God mingles the greatest joys and greatest sorrows in being a mother. How right she is! I have experienced God's faithfulness amidst huge uncertainties and great earthly loss. I must rest in Him while I yet continue to run. I have fought hard for the joy of this baby in my womb. May God grant me continued joy as I continue to run the race—not only while this baby is in my womb, but as God graciously allows me to be his mother for the rest of my life.

Father of all, Your Son Jesus is my example. Cause me to keep my eyes on Him as I follow Him through the race of faith, no matter what You put before me. Allow me to have endurance and bring us to joy at last. As I have endured crosses before, allow me again to humble myself and rely on Christ's strength as I continue to run, knowing that heavenly joy awaits me at the end of my days. Strengthen my hands and knees, make straight paths for my feet, and give me courage to endure. Amen.



Week Forty-Two
Keeping Our Eyes on Jesus

By Kerri

2 Peter 3:10-12 (NIV)

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

A frustrated grandmother once said, “There must be something wrong with Grandpa’s glasses. Every time he puts them on to read the paper, he can’t hear a thing!”

Of course there was nothing wrong with the glasses, Grandpa just had selective focus. Once he was concentrating on the “important” events of the day, everything else faded into the background.

As normal human beings, we too have selective focus. We get caught up in the day-to-day activities of life. We find ourselves living for earthly pleasures and riding the waves of emotion that each new day brings. Our selective focus blinds us to what really matters.

Now that delivery of a living child is so close, it would be easy to let our eyes drift to birth as a pivotal event in life—the “before” and the “after” event. It is even natural to put our own earthly parameters on it: wanting to have a “natural” birth, refusing intervention, etc. But this verse from 2 Peter reminds us that there is really nothing more important to focus on in life than growing in faith, increasing in sanctification, and keeping our eyes on that place the Lord has prepared for us.

This isn’t to say that having a child come home is a “background event.” Quite the contrary. Psalm 127:3 (NIV) reads, “Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from Him.” And the Lord instructs us in Proverbs 22:6 (NIV) to “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” That is quite a responsibility we have! We must keep our eyes fixed on Christ and His coming so that we can instruct our child(ren) to do the same! But our focus shouldn’t begin with our child’s birth. It begins now.

Peter asks us, “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?” An honest look at the Day of the Lord gives us our answer. We need to live holy and godly lives. We long for the Day of the Lord to come. We know on that day all earthly things will be destroyed with fire and the earth will be laid bare. Our homes, our cars, our place of employment, even our favorite restaurant will all be exposed as transitory. That’s not to say that these earthly things aren’t good gifts from God; He gives us all these good things to enjoy the life He has given us. However, we look forward to a new heaven and a new earth as the blessings we will receive in Christ.

Our godly focus helps us clear our minds and our lives of the background clutter that prevents us from seeing our true priorities. Pregnancy and birth of a child are wonderful gifts from God that—especially after our loss—we certainly do not take for granted. Our true joy lies in the Giver of these gifts, and we are careful not to make any gift more important than the Giver.

Dear Father, please let this vision of the Day of the Lord keep our focus on the real priorities in this life, and keep our eyes looking towards eternal life with You in heaven. In Christ's name, Amen.



SPECIAL RESOURCES

PAL and Thanksgiving
In Everything

By Kristi

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Thanksgiving has some bittersweet memories for me. Two years ago, it marked the end of my third pregnancy. The Friday before Thanksgiving, I had a D&C to remove the baby whose heart had stopped beating three weeks earlier, whom my body was not letting go of on its own. I sat through Thanksgiving dinner keenly aware that there should be two more places set, for the babies I would meet in Heaven. It bothered me that family members didn't mention them, when I couldn't go a day without thinking of them.

This year, Thanksgiving meant I was past the halfway point of my current pregnancy. It meant knowing if our baby was a boy or a girl. It meant I was past all of the points of my previous losses. It meant hope that this baby might really make it.

But Thanksgiving was still a time of mixed emotions for me. Even as I gave thanks for the life within me, I was reminded of Paul's command to the church at Thessalonica. "In everything give thanks." This year, it was so easy to give thanks. Two years ago, not so much. What kind of friend of God was I? Could I only give thanks when things were good? Or also when things were bad? Could I be like Job and say, "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble" (Job 2:10)?

The thing to remember about Paul's command is that he didn't tell the Thessalonians to give thanks *for* everything, but *in* everything. In my pain and loss, and in my times of joy, I can find something to thank God for. The love of my husband. The kindness of friends. Sympathetic medical personnel. The hope of Heaven.

What has surprised me about PAL is that sometimes it has been just as difficult to give thanks now as in the times when I was going through a loss. I've been prone to anxious thoughts. Resentment of other women whose pregnancies seem so "easy" compared to mine. Fear that this pregnancy would end like so many of my other ones.

But in PAL, I also need to exercise the discipline of Thanksgiving—"in everything give thanks." When I find it hard, I can remember the promise that follows it—"for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." There are plenty of reasons to complain and worry and fret in all of life, but God's will for us as image-bearers of His Son is that we give thanks in all circumstances. And what God wills for us, He will equip us to do, even when it's hard.

As you approach Thanksgiving in this season of Pregnancy After Loss, focus on the One who "provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Timothy 6:17). Ask Him to show you how to give thanks in this and every circumstance.

Father, in this time of Thanksgiving, help me to see all of the blessings You have given me. Help me to rejoice, to trust You with the unknown, to give thanks for ALL of my children, both in heaven and in my womb. Help me to bring glory to Your name by thanking You in all circumstances. Amen.



PAL and Christmas
Tidings of Great Joy

By Kristi

Luke 2:10 (NIV)

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”

Christmas has been a hard holiday for me for several years. For one, the whole season is about a baby and not one, but two miraculous pregnancies. Add to that all of the advertising and movies aimed at children, plus the children’s programs at church, PLUS the fact that if not for our losses I would be hanging additional stockings on our mantle...well, it’s been a hard holiday.

This year was both different and the same. I still grieve the missing stockings. But this year I could smile at the well-meaning cracks about me being “great with child” as I neared the third trimester of my pregnancy. This year, I had hope that I will have another stocking to hang in future Christmases—but I also had fear. I remembered another Christmas three years ago when we announced our pregnancy to family—only to have those hopes dashed three months later.

It helped me to realize, as I read the Christmas story again, that Mary and Joseph and everyone else involved in the birth of Christ dealt with fear, too. Zechariah was told not to be afraid of the angel. So was Mary, when Gabriel announced that she would carry the Messiah. Joseph was told not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. The shepherds were told not to be afraid because the angels carried good news.

What was the reason they were given not to fear? Because God had a plan that He was inviting them to be a part of. Which meant that God was in control. They could choose to follow Him in faith and see where it would lead, or they could walk away in fear of what the future would hold.

They each chose faith, and their lives were changed forever.

I, too, had a choice to make with this pregnancy—fear or faith. Would I walk through each month in fear that the next day, the next appointment, would bring bad news? Wouldn’t I then miss out on the joy that today held because of the energy spent worrying about tomorrow?

Or would I trust that at least for today, my pregnancy and the life of my unborn son was a part of God’s plan? Believing that would not shield me from pain. Even Mary was warned of the sword that would one day pierce her soul (Luke 2:35), and I could not see what the future would hold for me and my son either. But there could be many days of joy, of anticipating my son’s birth, of feeling him move—and (Lord willing) of seeing my son enter the world and grow to know and fear the Lord.

That is the wonder of Christmas. Yes, over the cradle of the baby Jesus was the shadow of the cross—but beyond that, the resurrection. And over it all is the pulsating song of JOY. John would be a joy and delight to his parents. While still in his mother’s womb, he leapt with joy upon Mary’s arrival to visit Elizabeth. Mary sang that her spirit “rejoiced” in God. The message of the angels would bring joy to all people. Simeon and Anna had the joy of seeing the infant Messiah in their old age. The magi were overjoyed to follow the star to worship Jesus. In spite of what *could* lay ahead, they gave themselves over to the joy of trusting God’s plan for them.

Finding the joy in Pregnancy After Loss has not always been easy—but it is worth it. If you are expecting this Christmas, remembering past losses and wondering what the future holds, may I gently encourage you to reach out for the joy that God has for you *today*? Trust His goodness, His love, His power. You don’t know what the future holds, but today, in this Christmas season, imitate the players in the Christmas story who chose faith over fear, and saw God move in their lives and the world as a result.

Father, it is SO hard to let go of my fear and joyfully embrace this child that You have given me. Help me to choose to trust You, whatever the future holds, and to enjoy every day that You give me with this baby. I pray it is a lifetime, but I trust You for TODAY. Amen.



Reaching a Former Due Date

The Balm of Fruit

by Melissa

Habakkuk 3:17-19 (ESV)

*Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.
GOD, the Lord, is my strength; He makes my feet like the deer's;
He makes me tread on my high places.*

Today was my due date. Not for the baby currently in my womb, but for a previous baby. One who was born directly into heaven. I could not hold him and kiss him, but I know that Jesus did. I started today by singing a song based on Habakkuk 3:17-19. It was an interesting way to start the day. This is the first time in seven pregnancies that I have reached a due date without having another miscarriage in the meantime. I can't tell you what a balm the sweet baby is in my womb. Heartbeat and kicks and general sickness have been sweet reminders today of this balm that God has so generously gifted to our family. This life doesn't replace his big brother who was expected to be born today, nor does he replace his six other siblings in heaven—but it does somehow balm the pain. My arms may not be holding a newborn today like we had hoped, prayed, and thought they would be... but my womb is not empty and our hope is not completely gone. The Lord's mercies are still new every day. We still have the privilege of anticipating heaven. We still have the unique blessing of having *extra* sweetness to look forward to when we reach heaven; because not only do we get to see Jesus face to face, but we get to see our children again.

Habakkuk 3:17 talks about unfruitfulness, barrenness, things that ought to grow but aren't. And yet in the midst of that fruitlessness (when, in fact, we may have been not only hoping for but truly *expecting* much fruitfulness!), it emphasizes praising the Lord and rejoicing in Him. It doesn't say that we need to rejoice in the barrenness. It says that *despite the barrenness*, we rejoice *in the Lord*. How beautiful!!

The mention of "vine" also made me think of Psalm 128, which words are always bittersweet to me. I have wondered how I could be called a fruitful vine (Psalm 128:3) when my womb has failed to bring forth fruit season after season after season, especially today as I reach another due date void of harvest. Of course everyone consoles me with the idea that "fruitful" doesn't just mean "fruit of the womb" (although in the context of that verse, it certainly seems connected, doesn't it?), but it means fruitful in service, in ministry, in wifehood, etc. In *so many areas* that aren't limited just to motherhood. But as far as the womb goes, my fruitfulness has been so different from what I had always expected it to be! We certainly weren't thinking I would be the mother of *nine children*. So in that sense, God had planned way more fruitfulness for me than I had imagined! But in the short-term sense as far as life and ministry on earth, I have been so much less

fruitful than we had expected. To have my body physically incapable of carrying seven of our children to term is incredibly deflating, to say the least. It makes me feel way beyond *fruitless*. It makes me feel like a dead, rotting vine that spreads disease to any grape that dares to try to grow upon it.

But what this passage in Habakkuk reminds me is that, in some sense, fruitlessness doesn't even matter. If the fruit is not on the vine, blessed be the name of the Lord anyway. I don't have to find joy *in my lack of fruit on the vine*, but I can still find joy *in the Lord* regardless of my lack of fruit. Despite the recurrent miscarriages that have plagued our home for years, the Lord has been our joy. He has, indeed, caused us to walk upon His high places! Even in the midst of incredible grief, He has lifted us out of the mire and sustained us. And *that* is beautiful. That is worth shouting from the rooftops to the entire world. I may not have had the best harvest off my vine over the last couple years, but the Lord has been praised in our household anyway, by the strength of His sovereign grace. And now the Lord has planted again, He is growing new fruit, and He gives us hope for a harvest not so very far in the future. And now, again regardless of the fruit that *is on the vine*, we still find joy *in the Lord*.

So I remember the son of mine who I expected to hold today, but who is far beyond the reach of my arms. And I am balmed by the kicking, wiggling little son who now inhabits the warm depths of my womb. I am reminded to rejoice in the Lord no matter what, for He is faithful in all circumstances, regardless of whether there is visible fruit on the vine.

King of the Universe and Prince of Peace, please extend Your grace to me today as I feel the emptiness left behind by the babies You have called home to heaven. Please comfort me with the knowledge that they abide with You, and that I will see them again. Thank You for the balm of the baby who has once again brought life to my womb. Thank You for not leaving me fruitless but for growing fruit once again and allowing us to eagerly anticipate an abundant harvest. Teach me to find joy in You in all circumstances. You are worthy, O God. Amen.



Praying for Your PAL Baby

Give Ear

by Melissa

Psalm 54:2 (ESV)

O God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth.

As we go to war, praying for the life of the baby in my womb—oh God, we are praying Your Words right back to You.

John 1:1-5 (NKJV)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

Hebrews 11:3 (ESV)

By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

With Your words, with *the* Word, You can sustain this baby's life. With just a simple word. With a breath. With a vowel. It is not too hard for You, O God.

Jeremiah 32:27 (NKJV)

Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?

Psalm 115:3 (NKJV)

Our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.

O God who lives and reigns in heaven—be pleased to shower Your mercy and covenantal love upon us. Be pleased to grant life to our tiny child, and be pleased to show Your miraculous works to the nations!

Isaiah 45:7 (ESV)

**I form light and create darkness,
I make well-being and create calamity,
I am the LORD, who does all these things.**

We know, Lord, that You are in control of all things. No matter what is contained in Your perfect will, it is Yours and it is perfect. Even when we can not see the breadth and depth and width of it as You can.

James 1:12 (ESV)

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him.

As I struggle with the “blessed is the man who...” concepts in Psalms 127 & 128, I am encouraged by this “blessed is the man” concept. We are not exempt from Your blessings, Lord, simply because we have a very limited number of arrows in our quiver & olive shoots around our table. We praise You, O God! Cause us to remain steadfast, and cause our eyes to be upon the crown of life!

And thank You, God, that earth is not the point. If earth were the point, I would be in total despair. But earth is not the point. Life on earth is but a passing breath. In the eternal ranks of heaven, my olive shoots are many and my arrows are many! Thanks be to You, my God!

2 Timothy 1:7 (ESV)

God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

O God, allow us not to give in to a spirit of fear, but give us power by Your Spirit, love beyond measure, and self-control that we can not explain. Please fill us with Yourself and take away the dross that we feel threatening to choke us today.

Psalm 29:11 (NKJV)

**The LORD will give strength to His people;
The LORD will bless His people with peace.**

Strengthen us today, Lord, in body and in faith. Build our spiritual & physical muscles. Bless us with peace that passes our understanding and that overflows from our hearts out our fingertips.

Isaiah 26:12 (NKJV)

**LORD, You will establish peace for us,
for You have also done all our works in us.**

Among the nations, and in the sight of the Church as well as the heathen, O Lord, bring us peace. We do nothing without You. We have done nothing apart from Your ordained will. We continue to seek Your wisdom and ask for Your guidance. Prepare our footsteps and set our hands to the works You have ready for us. Give us peace as we move forward in whatever direction You are about to lead.

1 Kings 8:57 (ESV)

The LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us or forsake us...

Be with us, God, today as we wait. Be with us, Lord, tonight as we sleep. Be with us, Father, as we go through with appointments, bloodwork, ultrasounds. Be with us, King of the universe, as our ears and eyes prepare to hear and see what news You will deliver us in these uneasy, tenuous, frightening times.

Beware in your prayer, above everything, of limiting God, not only by unbelief, but by fancying that you know what He can do. Expect unexpected things, above all that we ask or think. Each time you intercede, be quiet first and worship God in His

glory. Think of what He can do, of how He delights to hear Christ, of your place in Christ; and expect great things.

–Andrew Murray

Oh Lord, my great Shepherd and the Shepherd of my children, cause me to believe with power, to not limit You in my prayers, to not presume to know Your greatness, and give me the courage to expect the unexpected.

Do we know the power of our supernatural weapon? Do we dare to use it with the authority of a faith that commands as well as asks? God baptize us with holy audacity and Divine confidence! He is not wanting great men, but He is wanting men who will dare to prove the greatness of their God. But God! But prayer!

–A. B. Simpson

Give me the faith to command with my prayers. Give me audacity and confidence through the righteousness of Christ with which I am clothed! Cause me to dare to prove how majestic and miraculous You are. Put words in my mouth that will accomplish this.

1 Peter 5:6-11 (ESV)

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To Him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Oh Lord, You humble us; please take away our anxieties. The devil seeks to devour my soul—give me the strength to resist him now! Remind me, O Father, that regardless of this pregnancy's outcome, that we have a glorious hope for the future: including eternal glory, restoration, confirmation, strength, and establishment. Hallelujah!

Proverbs 3:1-2 (ESV)

**My son, do not forget my teaching,
but let your heart keep my commandments,
for length of days and years of life
and peace they will add to you.**

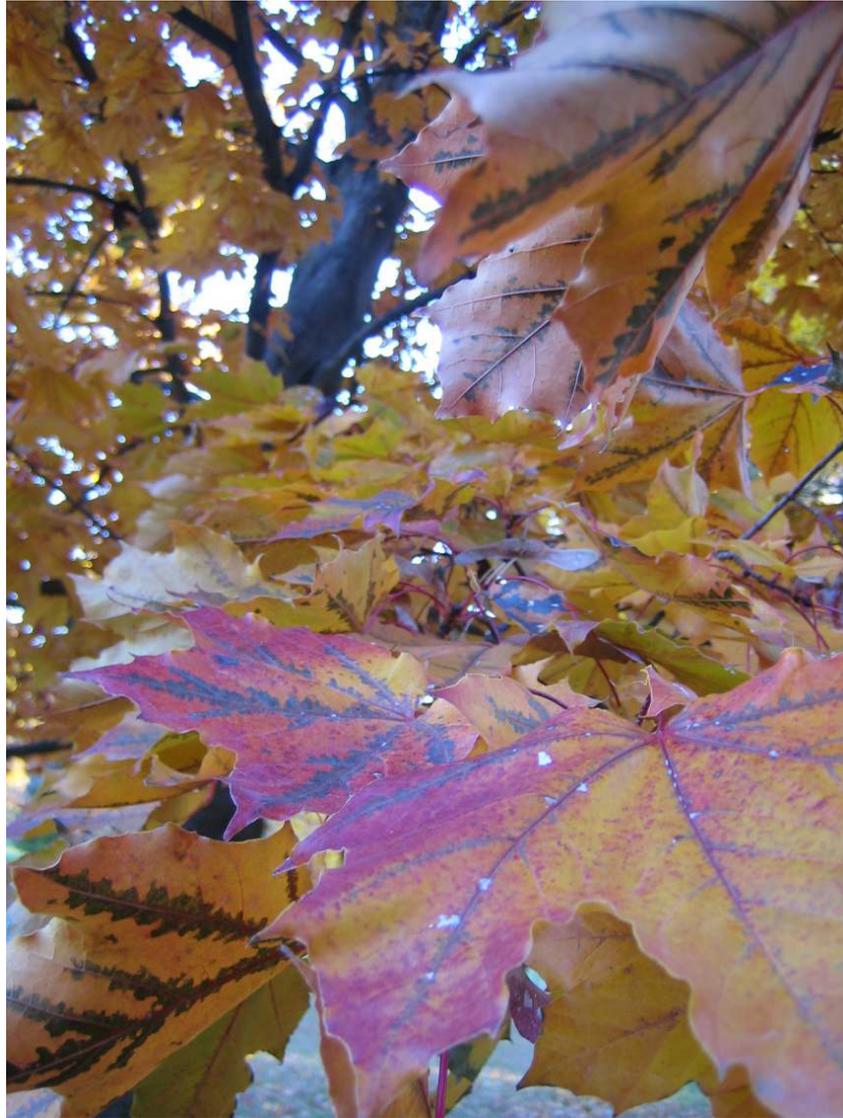
Heavenly King, I pray this for the baby in my womb. Teach this little child, even in its unborn state. Faith is a gift from You; teach this child in my womb, cause his heart to keep Your commandments. Add length of days and years of life to him. Bring abundant peace to his heart.

Romans 8:6, 11 (ESV)

For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Above all, my God, set my mind on the Spirit. Give life through Your Spirit!! Give LIFE, O God!! Save, Lord!! *Amen!*



Holding Your Rainbow, Staring Redemption in the Face:
Motherhood after PAL
The Goodness of the Lord

By Melissa

Psalm 126:3 (NKJV)

*The LORD has done great things for us;
and we are glad!*

Psalm 27:13-14 (NKJV)

*I would have lost heart, unless I had believed
That I would see the goodness of the LORD
In the land of the living.
Wait on the LORD;
Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart;
Wait, I say, on the LORD!*

I have two living sons, each a “Rainbow Baby.” When my first son was born, I don’t remember what I said to him when my husband and I first held him. But I do remember being overwhelmed with thankfulness for God’s great kindness. I remember being so thankful that I was in the hospital instead of on my bathroom floor; that it was my baby crying instead of me crying; that I held a body full of life in my hands instead of a lifeless body.

When my second son was born, that thankfulness was even greater, deeper, stronger. It was Thanksgiving morning, just before sunrise, when we received the enormous blessing of welcoming our ninth baby—our second living child—into our arms. When we could finally see him with our own eyes, we were overwhelmed with the goodness and mercy of looking upon *life*. As I held our baby on my chest for the first time, I told him “*I have waited so long for you: I can’t believe you’re alive*” and sobbed over God’s goodness and grace. To say that it was completely overwhelming is an understatement.

I cried so hard in disbelief that I couldn’t breathe for a couple of minutes. And although this baby is now three months old, currently cooing on my lap as I write, his life still takes my breath away. Each morning, I am still amazed that God’s mercy has seen fit to allow this baby to live. No longer do I take life for granted. Instead, I embrace each day as a miraculous gift. The Lord has done great things for us—we are so glad, we are practically speechless.

The goodness of the Lord is so obviously and easily evidenced here, and the reminder in this psalm to wait on the Lord is closely connected to deep faith. “Unless I had believed.” How many times during my pregnancy did I doubt God’s goodness? How difficult was it not to lose heart? Waiting on the Lord during recurrent miscarriages was hard; waiting on the Lord when trying to conceive was difficult; waiting on the Lord during my nine

month PAL journey was excruciating. And now as I gaze at one evidence of the Lord's goodness, I am reminded yet again not to lose heart but to wait on the Lord.

Motherhood has so many facets to it. It requires much self-sacrifice, patience, fortitude, and indescribable love. None of these things comes naturally to us, no matter how maternal our personality. We are sinners and our human nature naturally makes us selfish, impatient, lazy, and egotistical. It can be easy to assume that we will automatically be the perfect mother, due to having struggled so long and so hard to hold our living baby. It is devastating to realize that just because the journey *to* motherhood was longer or harder than average doesn't give you a free pass on the difficulties of motherhood itself. While we may know intellectually not to take any aspect of life for granted—including the sleepless nights, breast engorgement, inconsolable cries, and impossibly fluctuating hormones—when the rubber meets the road, we are just like every other parent God has blessed with a living child. We are still weak, frail, selfish creatures. Having overcome the past of recurrent miscarriages does not automatically make me a perfect mother, even though I wish it did. God is still perfect though, and this is not the time to forget what God has done. This is the time to remember! The time to wait on the Lord, to proclaim His goodness and believe it, to be courageous, and to allow Him to strengthen my heart—because I can not do those things on my own.

Father in heaven, You are showing us Your goodness in this land by our living child. What mercy and kindness! Thank You. Teach me not to take life for granted: neither my own life nor my baby's. Strengthen my heart for the monotonous daily tasks You are putting before me, and allow me to continue seeing the miraculous in the mundane. Help me to continue waiting on You because You are faithful. Amen.



Holding Your Rainbow, Staring Redemption in the Face:
Motherhood after PAL
Complete Joy

By Alex

Philippians 4:4 (NIV)

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

1 John 1:1-2, 4 (NIV)

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us... We write this to make our joy complete.

I waited a long time to be a mother—a long time to hold a child in my arms, sing her to sleep, feed her gently in the dark night. I spent so long hoping, crying out to the Lord—wondering whether I would have the joy of pushing a child in a stroller, of bouncing a baby in my lap, of cleaning up a house full of little clothes and scattered toys. And finally, I have my child. She’s alive and well and sleeping right now in her crib. She wakes, she smiles, and I dance with her over my shoulder as the sun streams through her nursery window. I have everything I had hoped for and more. And yet, so many nights and so many mornings, I’m disappointed by some small thing or another. I’m sad that something I planned didn’t work out or I’m frustrated by my skills as a mother or my daughter’s behavior. I’m finding more and more that everything I felt *before* she arrived still comes out *after* she arrived in some way or another. I love her with every fiber of my being, but my joy—my true joy in Christ—isn’t complete.

I thought that when I had a child, my world, my attitude, and my outlook would change. And in some sense, it did. And in another sense, it didn’t. I still face the same disappointments, the same incompleteness, the same moments of despair that haunted me before her birth. I suppose I thought that when I had a child, I wouldn’t feel a need for anything “more”; that my heart—my joy—would be complete and automatic, even. I had a child; therefore, I would “naturally” be joyful. I didn’t realize, as simple as it sounds, that even though I was a mother, I would live in this same broken world, with my same broken spirit, and I would have to choose joy every day just the same. No child would make my joy complete. Only Christ would. And I would need to surrender each day, each moment, to Him, just as before. I would still face my same demons of perfectionism and fear and control, and now that I loved another tiny person so much, perhaps I would face them even more. And moment by moment, my strength could—and would—only come from Him.

So now, in my time of joy, just as I had in my time of want, I find the need to remind myself of a simple verse, a verse I learned when I was a child: to rejoice in the Lord *always*—no matter what the next morning brings.

Glorious God, make my joy complete in You. Help me to rejoice in You and Your character as well as in what You have done. Amen.



When PAL Ends in Loss...Again

The Rainbow is Gone

By Kristi

Ruth 1:20-21 (NIV)

“Don’t call me Naomi,” she told them. “Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”

If you are finding this devotional even necessary, I am so sorry. I am heartbroken for you. I can only imagine the thoughts swirling around in your mind right now. *This isn’t fair. This isn’t right. I’ve already been through loss. How can God let this happen to me again? Why would a good God allow this to happen? What kind of trick is He playing to get our hopes up just to take our child away? How can I survive this again?*

Twice after we lost our little Naomi, I started down the road of Pregnancy After Loss, only to find myself at a road block called “miscarriage” and “chemical pregnancy.” The PAL road for us those times did not end in a take-home baby, but in pain and sorrow—again.

Naomi’s words in the Scriptures resonated with me in the days following my first loss and my recurrent losses. “I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty... The LORD has afflicted me...brought misfortune upon me.” In the world of Pregnancy Loss, there is seldom a human cause to point at—which often leaves us shaking an angry fist at heaven. After all, God *could* have prevented this loss, this pain. So why didn’t He?

I don’t have the answers to that, and even if I did, I doubt God’s reasons would satisfy the hurting heart of a bereaved mother, who longs only to hold her child in her arms. We are told that God’s ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9), and I suspect the chasm between those are so great that He does not reveal them to us this side of heaven because they cannot be understood in our finite humanity, but only in our eternal existence.

If you are finding yourself at this roadblock at eight, or twelve, or twenty-two, or even forty weeks, where can you turn? Can you trust God, who has let you down again? Is it possible to survive this new loss with your faith intact?

Again, I don’t have adequate answers, but let me share a few things that I learned during my recurrent losses that may help you as well.

God can handle your anger and bitterness. Over and over in the Scriptures, God’s people have boldly expressed their disappointment with His handling of their affairs—check out Job, the Psalms, and the prophets. You are in good company with others who did not understand how God was moving or why He allowed events to unfold as they did. Don’t feel like you need to put on a brave front—for others or for God.

Every loss is different, and losses build on each other. Just because you've walked this road before doesn't mean you know how to "do it." You've never lost *this* unique child before. You and your husband were different ages before, your circumstances were different, *your child was different.* Don't put pressure on yourself to feel or do things the way you did the last time. And be prepared for the fact that previous losses impact how you grieve current losses. You may find yourself grieving a previous loss more now than you did then. Or past losses may amplify what you are going through now.

There is life and hope on the other side. Cling to this—there is an "other side" to this heartache. Many of the women writing in these pages have dealt with recurrent pregnancy loss. The lessons shared in this devotional were hammered out on the anvil of those losses. They know the darkness of the valley, and they will testify that God did carry them through it. They will also testify that the hope on the other side is not a newly positive pregnancy test or even a take-home baby—it is in the Person of Jesus, in the God of all comfort.

Loss, even recurrent loss, doesn't change who God is. God is good. He is strong, He is loving, He is able to carry you through every storm, including this one. Your loss doesn't change Him, nor does your anger or bitterness or questions or fears. *He remains the same,* and He *will* carry you through the fog of grief that now envelops you. As comforting as it is to hear how He did it for others, your journey through Loss will be uniquely crafted for you by your Creator. And on the other side, you will find your faith strengthened and your love for Him deeper.

The pages of this devotional have been covered with prayer for the women who it will touch—including you, who have been called to detour on a different path than the one you anticipated and hoped for. But the Savior will walk with you there as well as here, and if He eventually leads you back to the PAL journey, we hope you will allow us the privilege of walking with you again.

Father, a single pregnancy loss is hard enough to bear—and loss upon loss often seems impossible to withstand. May those experiencing recurrent loss—those whose PAL journeys have been cut short—find extraordinary measures of Your peace and comfort beyond all they could ask or imagine. Walk with them on their unique journey to a new understanding of the hope and love found only in You. Amen.

A Puritan Testimony
The Love of God

By Edward Elton, 1623

Romans 8:38-39 (NKJV)

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is so, that no creature in heaven, on earth, or in hell, can possibly break off or keep back God's love from His children, or can make one who is beloved of God not beloved of Him, or less beloved of Him. Surely the due consideration of this shall yield thee matter of exceeding great comfort; therefore, think on it to thy comfort, whosoever thou art that hath evidence that thou art a child of God. Now, being beloved of God in special manner, thou shalt so continue forever.

It is not all the power and strength, or all the wit and skill and cunning and subtlety of all the creatures of heaven and earth and hell, if they all joined together as one, that could possibly break off or keep back God's love from thee, or wrest thee out of the kind favor of God. Thou mayest lose all favor of men, either by thine own fault or by the malicious practice of envious men, thou mayest fall from the highest ranks of earthly powers, but thou mayest never be so poor that thou canst, in any way, lose God's favor, neither by any thing done by others or by thy self, God's love being utterly unchangeable.

Not in any way can thou be wrested and wronged out of His love by any adversarial power, for He knows all things, and is stronger than all. He is able to keep thee safely in His love, though Satan personally with all his armies assail thee. God hath so far manifested His great love to thee in this, that he sent His only and dear Son to shed His Blood for thee, and to suffer the pains of earth and hell for thee, and God shall never suffer the power of hell to draw thee out of His love. Assuredly, He will not!

Let, then, the devil and all the enemies of thy good do whatsoever they can against thee, and though the Lord suffer them to prevail far, to thrust thee out of house and home, to strip thee of health and wealth, of liberty and of all outward good things and means of comfort, yet God's love they canst take from thee, nor lessen or diminish His love towards thee, nor make thee less beloved of Him, who once has been loved of Him. And, when thou art plunged into the deepest distress they can bring thee into, thou art still beloved of God, and still as dear to Him and as precious in His sight as ever thou wast, and that mayest be a sure ground of sweet comfort unto thee.

Think on it ever to thy comfort. ¹ *Amen.*

¹ Elton, Edward (1623). *The Triumph of a True Christian Described, or an explication of Romans 8, wherein the sanctified sinner's heaven upon earth is laid open with explication of the comfort of it to as many as are so qualified, delivered in sundry sermons, and now published, intending the good and saving comfort of every true believing soul that shall please to read it.*

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Alex's Bio

Alex is, first and foremost, the daughter of a loving and pursuant God who never ceases to give her opportunities to grow in faith. She is a wife to Kurt, a picture of God's provision, and most recently, the blessed mother of two children—one in her arms and one in heaven. After two years of heartbreaking infertility, the Lord gave—and then took away two weeks later—Alex and Kurt's first child in July 2010. Then after further waiting, and through the amazing gift of modern reproductive technology, Alex was able to conceive and give birth to a beautiful daughter on October 15, 2011, which, quite aptly, is also National Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Day.

Alex and Kurt continue to seek opportunities to use their gifts and passions to be part of God's redeeming work on earth; and they look forward with hope to the family God has planned for them.

Heather's Bio

Heather is a devoted wife and math teacher, but her greatest love? Jesus Christ! She is passionate about international missions, scrumptious dark chocolate, and making people snort water out their noses. She and her husband have been on the bumpy & exciting road of foster-to-adopt while still riding the infertility/loss rollercoaster. To their great joy, Heather's womb has been blessed with two children: their first baby Ellis preceded them to heaven, while their second—a daughter—is expected to arrive in May 2012.

Julia's Bio

Julia and her husband John are the mother and father to seven much-loved children in heaven (six miscarriages and a lost twin) and one precious living son who was born at 29 weeks. (Doctors say he was 11 weeks early; we know that God's timing is perfect and he was born exactly on time.) Formerly a fine art children's photographer, Julia is thankful to have entered the most joyous season of her life as a stay-at-home wife and mother. Before God brought them together, Julia and John had endured a season of singleness throughout their 20's which was in many ways as difficult as long-term primary infertility (Julia refers to that dark time as "long-term primary singleness"!). John and Julia's prayer is that God might use their years of heartbreak to minister to others going through similar journeys.

Julie's Bio

Julie has been the blessed and grateful wife of Brian since January 2005. Brian and Julie have walked through both primary and secondary infertility, including many months of

medical intervention to both establish and maintain pregnancy. They were overjoyed to welcome a sweet gift from God, Anna Claire, in December 2008, and are currently expecting a precious little boy due in May 2012.

Julie has known God's grace through the grief of both early miscarriage and embryo loss, and holds in her heart 9 beloved children awaiting her in heaven. She spends most of her time homemaking, mothering, and serving in the church, as well as teaching and freelancing as a professional musician.

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### **Kerri's Bio**

*Kerri has been blessed with a marriage to Jeff for 11+ years. Their first pregnancy resulted in a miscarriage at 8 weeks. Only God knew that it would be 6 long years of infertility tests and treatments before their next pregnancy. But in His wisdom God had something different planned for their first-born son Hunter, who was born into heaven during labor at 37 weeks. Following another miscarriage, they were finally blessed to take home a living son. Now, after a third miscarriage, they are trusting in the Lord that "Sweet Baby Six" will arrive safely into their arms in summer of 2012. Kerri's faith in Christ and dedication to her family continues to be fortified by her journey to motherhood, and she is encouraged by the outreach work God is working through her and the memory of baby Hunter.*

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Kristi's Bio

Kristi is a pastor's wife, former ESOL teacher, and the mother of five—two on earth and three in heaven. She and her husband Eric have been married for nearly ten years. Their first daughter, Lydia, was born after several years of a frustrating "unexplained infertility" diagnosis. Less than a year after Lydia's birth, they were delighted to be expecting again. However, at 18 weeks, Kristi developed a non-pregnancy-related abdominal infection that took the life of their unborn daughter, Naomi. Over the next year and a half, they lost two other children in first trimester miscarriages (Kyria at 8 weeks and Jordan at 4 weeks) before conceiving their son, Caleb, who was born shortly before Easter. Kristi and Eric minister to other parents of babies in heaven through Naomi's Circle, which is an outreach to parents who have lost babies during pregnancy or shortly after birth. In her "free" time, she enjoys reading, handbells, and writing.

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### **Lindsay's Bio**

*Lindsay is currently enjoying maternity leave at home with her baby girl. She enjoys sewing, knitting, baking, gardening, and curling up with a book. She and her husband of seven years were blessed with two previous pregnancies before the birth of their daughter. They look forward to meeting their first two children on the other side of heaven's doors.*

*Lindsay doesn't plan on going back to work anytime soon and instead is looking forward to renovating the dollhouse her grandfather built her many years ago.*

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Melissa's Bio

Melissa is wife of Steven and mother of nine. After a devastating first miscarriage, God granted them a living son, Gabriel (which means "the Lord is my strength"). After three and a half years of medical research, testing, treatments, and trying for another baby during which time they endured the overwhelming recurrent grief of six more miscarriages, God granted them a second living son, Asher (which means "happy and blessed"), appropriately born on Thanksgiving Day. Their family seeks to glorify God through the story He is speaking through them, in their sorrows as well as their joys. Steven and Melissa seek to grow His Kingdom and proclaim His faithfulness to their children, their neighbors, their church, and the world. Through the help of modern medical science, God has provided health and protection for Melissa's "rainbow and redemption baby." And through the power of the Holy Spirit, He has provided renewed faith and strength for their entire family.

Melissa seeks to grow in godliness, femininity, and joy as she pursues being a deeply dedicated wife, mother, and homemaker through the strength of Christ Jesus her Lord.

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**Ramona's Bio**

*After five years of marriage, Ramona and her husband Tim decided to begin adding to their family. During the first two years of that time, they lost two pregnancies to early miscarriage and have recently welcomed home their third sweet baby—a precious daughter. During their challenging times, they have learned to lean on God and His word for strength, hope, and guidance. Ramona continues to grow in her relationship with God through regular Bible study and serving as a volunteer leader at their church. In her free time she enjoys playing with their two dogs and training for and running various triathlons and marathons.*

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Tahirah's Bio

Tahirah is blessed to be the wife of a godly man. She has 7 children, 5 in heaven with our Lord and 2 here in her arms. She enjoys encouraging others with the encouragement she herself received to walk more closely with our Lord. She struggles to be all that God designed her to be as a wife, mother and keeper of the home so she leans heavily on the promise of God that He will show His strength in her weaknesses. She longs to one day hear from her Father, "well done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your Master."

Online Ministry for Infertility & Loss Support, and Beyond

Hannah's Prayer Ministries

The women who have written this devotional met each other in the forums of [Hannah's Prayer Ministries online](http://www.hannah.org) (www.hannah.org). This is an online ministry for Christian women from diverse backgrounds, both personally and spiritually. While many of the Hannah's Prayer Ministries members have never been pregnant, many of us have faced one or more miscarriages, ectopic pregnancies, stillbirths and/or infant deaths. Some members have one or more biological children and are dealing with secondary infertility. There are many adoptive moms in the group, including survivors of adoption losses. A few are pioneers in the brave new world of embryo adoption. Some of our members are just beginning to ask if there is something medically wrong while others have already exhausted all medical options. The Lord has led some members to not seek any kind of medical aid while others have prayerfully delved into assisted reproduction methods.

Member's ages range from teens on up. Our marriages (and time dealing with fertility challenges) may be newlywed or spanning more than 20 years of experience. While most of our members live in the United States of America, we span multiple countries and cultures. We are interdenominational, meaning that our members come from many church backgrounds, but all agree to abide by our central Statement of Faith as we share common views about Faith and Fertility. Some members have spent their lives attending church, some are new to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and some have faith but feel very far from God right now. With all of our differences, we have at least these four things in common: we are married, we are Christians, we are women, and we are seeking God to aid us in surviving our fertility challenges.

Because infertility and loss have a lifelong effect on us, and because we are not all at the same stage, our Community Forums provide over 70 specific regional and topical support groups, including Pregnancy After Loss.

If this free devotional has been a blessing and encouragement to you, we would love to have you [make a donation](#) to the Hannah's Prayer Ministries nonprofit organization, in honor of RAINBOWS AND REDEMPTION. We would also love to fellowship with you in the Hannah's Prayer Ministries forums, so if you are not yet a member, please consider joining us there—and be sure to let us know how this devotional has impacted you.

Grace and peace.