

A Couple's Guide after Miscarriage

By L. Kathleen Cline

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How to Praise God in the Fog of Grief

Respecting the Grief of Others

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding,"

Proverbs 3:5.

Most of us are determined to listen to someone if we believe they understand our circumstances based on shared experiences. When it came to children, Rich and I were unable to have children naturally or via adoption.

My husband was in the Navy, so we were privileged to be stationed in London, England. We were a dual-income couple with no immediate plans to have children. Then, on a long weekend, I got pregnant. I remember talking to God about the change and how excited I was about this new adventure. Tragedy struck, and I began to lose the baby. The military is a family, and since we were all in a foreign country, everyone knew everyone's business. It felt like every American lady in the area called me to tell me their tragic story of a miscarriage. I never realized how common miscarriages were. Because of this overwhelming burden of carrying my own nightmare story along with all the other stories, I was beyond distraught. In my opinion, the National Health System cannot be compared to American medicine. My husband, being a Family Medicine doctor and having several patients with botched procedures, requested that I allow the baby to expel naturally. Unfortunately, this put me into postpartum depression. For months, the only words of prayer I could say were "Dear God." I blamed myself for everything, and that hate became consuming, which only added to the hormone-induced depression.

The worst part for me was watching my husband pull away from me because he could not fix this problem. My prayer of "Dear God" was all that was necessary for God to talk me through and to stop my desire to turn on my husband. He was hurting just as much as I was hurting, but differently because men hate what they cannot repair. I need to ask this question out loud. Why do we allow our emotions to attack the ones we love?

Let me give you a visual that God gave me. I was standing outside my house, talking with my neighbor. She was taking her two tiny dogs out for a walk. Another neighbor started walking by with their dog, and the two small dogs began barking fiercely. Suddenly, since they could not reach the other dog, they turned on each other and started biting at each other. Is that not what we do with each other? We cannot scream at death, so we choose

to verbally abuse the one in the room. It is the craziest thing, but we do it all the same. Today, we acknowledge that everyone mourns differently. We will also determine in our hearts to place our anger, disappointments, guilt, bitterness, and all other negative emotions in God's hands. Even if my husband did everything I asked him to do during this time, the facts would still be the same. My baby died, and my body was reeling with hormones. No man could ever change what was happening, but I could change the way I reacted.

Let's stop for a moment and seek God with a Proverb. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding," Proverbs 3:5. During extreme grief, there is no rational thought or understanding. If you are like me, you first go into denial or panic mode, trying to find a moment of hope to run into so you can deny the reality of the moment. Once denial and panic serve no purpose, then anger comes marching in to blame someone or something. God is asking us not to rely on these extreme emotions because they will destroy us and everyone else around us. Anger is one of those emotions that people can live with for decades or till Jesus comes. If you believe that God is always good, can you trust Him with your grief at this moment? Please, no questions of why. "I trust you, God, to walk me through this nightmare." Entrusting God with our emotions is not usually taught in church.

We are told different things about our feelings, which often convey the message, "Feelings mean you do not trust God." Take a look at John 11:35, "Jesus wept." To me, weeping involves a great deal more than a few tears. Most likely, there is the noise of crying, accompanied by snot and tears. We ladies call it the ugly cry. Jesus had such compassion for this family, which led Him to mourn the loss of life and the people's unbelief. Death is a consequence of sin that all of us should weep over. It is theft in the highest form, and I look forward to the day when no one has to endure it again. Our emotions are not sinful, but how we express our feelings can lead us into sin. That precisely is why God teaches us not to trust our own understanding of situations.

Write out Proverbs 3:5

What does this verse mean to you concerning your miscarriage?

If emotions were a pair of glasses, which emotions are you looking through and allowing to determine your point of view?

Write a simple prayer, turning those emotions over to God.

There are moments in life where we are so brokenhearted that we cannot form a thought, much less a prayer. Let's take a look at Romans 8:26. "In the same way, the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." As I said before, all I could muster up were two words. I love the fact that as a child-of-God, the Holy Spirit will intervene on my behalf before God. Those two words, "Dear God," helped me recognize Who God was for me. Dear God was a proclamation that only He could intervene and make a difference in my situation, especially concerning my health. Breast cancer runs in my family, so hormones were not an option in helping with postpartum depression. It got so bad for me; I remember looking in the mirror and not recognizing myself. The doctors tried to help with depression meds, but all the pills gave me were adverse effects, and I gained ten pounds. God, on the other hand, gave me a knowing that He was there even in my darkest hour. Knowing is a word that many confuse with the word belief. I may believe that a chair will hold my weight, but I don't really know until I sit down. To know something means you have to experience it yourself.

How have you experienced God? Please take a moment to consider this. Often, we miss God and His presence because we are focused on our grief. Job said it this way when he worshipped God in Job 1:20. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked, I shall return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Job said this prayer after he tore his robes in sorrow and shaved his head because of all his children's deaths. The chapter goes on to say that Job did not sin, nor did he blame God. When we become acquainted with God's ways, He helps us come to terms with our sorrows without betraying our faith or God. It is difficult to put into words. That is why you must seek God for yourself so you can personally know God as His child and grieve your baby's death appropriately.

Personal thoughts:

One of the most frequently cited verses during a crisis is Romans 8:28. I have broken down the meanings of the words, which will be in parentheses, so we can examine their purpose and apply them to your loss.

"And we know (understand) that God causes all things to work together (fellow worker to cooperate) for good (abstract things, something useful, profitable or beneficial) who love (serve with fidelity) God, to those who are called (those who obey) according to His purpose (spoken of eternal purpose)," I remember once sitting in a nursing station charting. One of the nurses wanted to encourage another because her child had oxygen-deprived brain damage during birth. The encouraging nurse said, "God gives special children to special people." The cliché triggered an angry response, "Are you saying I don't deserve a normal child?" Often, the verses we use can hurt because we are looking at them through our emotions. Let me paraphrase Romans 8:28: If you cooperate with God and understand that all things are possible, He can take this ugly tragedy in your life and create an unexpected outcome that will become precious to you and for His glory. Death is ugly, and I often tell God how much I hate what it steals from people. But God is a phrase that I not only rely on, but I brag on to remind Satan that Jesus won. I praise God that my mom and dad know my children's names and whether they are girls or boys because of Christ's salvation. My only memory of my child is an ultrasound picture of a perfectly formed baby that looked deflated, but I know I will meet them face-to-face one day. No sorrow can steal away that hope given to me by God.

Hope is an expectation or desire that you know will be fulfilled. What hope are you asking for at this moment during your sorrow? "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus," Philippians 4:6-7.

God, I am asking for the hope of:

Although you and your spouse mourn differently, you two are still mourning the same loss. Early on in my marriage, I almost destroyed my marriage by expecting my husband to fulfill my heart's desires. I am not disparaging anyone with this statement, but how stupid we are to expect a man to complete our most profound desires when they have no clue how to express their feelings about a situation. It is unrealistic and cruel. God is to complete us because only God knows our hearts. As husband and wife, we are to journey together in life, respecting each other's differences. We complete each other. God made us this way, so the two will make a whole. The wife usually brings the emotional aspects, while the husband tends to display logic. If you can see through each other's eyes, then as a couple, you can heal from the loss. If you choose to reject your spouse's mourning method, then the outcome may become tragic. Not only the loss of a child, but the demise of your marriage.

Discussion:

When your spouse is sad, do you allow them to express it freely, or do you shut them down?

If you are closing them down, is it because emotions make you uncomfortable, or do you feel the sadness is consuming them?

When your spouse is logical about your child's death, are you allowing them to speak freely or closing them down?

If you are closing them down, is it because you feel the lack of emotions makes them seem cold and heartless, or do you think they are belittling your choice of grief?

God's word teaches us in Psalm 34:18-19, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all." God does not differentiate between the logical mourner or the emotional mourner. Praise God; he comforts us, period! Let's honor each other and our God by allowing people to grieve according to their personality. I jokingly tell my family that the things I love about my husband are what I hate about my husband. I married him for his strong character, but I cannot denigrate him when his character becomes inconvenient to me. Satan wants to use the death of your child to steal one more thing from you. Please do not allow this to happen. By leaning on God and allowing Him to walk you through the process of grief as a couple, then your marriage will become more intimate.

Write a prayer for your marriage.

Dealing with the Questions

Hear my cry, God; Give Your attention to my prayer. 2 From the end of the earth I call to You when my heart is faint; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. 3 For You have been a refuge for me, A tower of strength against the enemy. 4 Let me [dwell in Your tent forever; Let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings.

Psalm 61:1-4

Speculation is something I think we tend to do because there is a need to understand. Living with the unknown can be challenging in certain situations. Often, people begin to look for someone or something to blame. If you are not careful, there might be a tendency to speak for God or blame God. So let's look at the different issues.

I do not know why, but outsiders want details. You have the right not to answer people's questions concerning your loss. There is a weird aspect to not answering; I don't want to be rude, but in actuality, the one being rude is the one asking an invasive question. You do not need to argue about this; you simply do not need to answer the questions unless you choose to do so. You can allow the question to hang in the air. You can also continue by changing the subject, but do not allow yourself to be baited. Often, questions about your miscarriage will lead to the "Do you know how far along you were?" Which usually gives the impression that an early miscarriage is not an actual loss. Twenty years later, and I still will not answer that question. My faith declares that life begins at conception. So the loss of my child will not be disparaged by arbitrary societal markers. I met a dear friend who had a plaque on her wall. It was a memorial for her miscarried daughter. The couple agreed on a name and had a beautiful wooden memory created to commemorate the child's short life. Often, a token like this can help bring closure by creating a lasting remembrance that stays with you. No, they did not know for sure they had a daughter to answer your inside question.

Next comes the "Did the doctor say what caused the miscarriage?" I praise God; no one asked me that question. May I ask a question, please? Will knowing why the child died bring back your baby? Then I suggest letting the why question fade away in your mind. Now, the exception to this is if you have repeated miscarriages, then yes, you need to know if it is a medical issue or not. For me, I took a flu shot. I blamed myself for years as if that caused the miscarriage. I think our minds are grasping at anything to relieve ourselves of pain and hurt. So, this will be a perfect spot to stop and look at God's word. Only God can fill the emptiness that death brings. When we allow God to be the center of every situation, God is faithful in walking us through those heartbreaking moments in life.

Maybe there is a part of you that questions, "Why does God allow death in the first place?" "Why do parents have to mourn the loss of their children?"

To understand, you must go back to Genesis 3 and also understand your enemy.

Your enemy "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly," John 10:10. From the very beginning, Satan planned to destroy God's beautiful creation any way he could. Satan took God's spoken word given to his children and twisted it, intending to deceive. Speaking from my own experience, I bet Satan is trying very hard to get you bitter at God for the death of your child. For months, I said the strangest phrase to God: "Foul ball." I never went any deeper than that phrase, so I think I was trying to tell God I felt cheated. To be honest, I cannot tell you if this was a thought I felt, God relaying His thoughts about the situation, or if this was a thought Satan was encouraging me to feel. Either way, I have made my point. Evil will always push us towards bitterness, entitlement, and rejection of God.

A Show of Grace

"Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever," Genesis 3:22. Once man sinned against God, a curse was placed on us, which is "By the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return," Genesis 3:19.

God did not want His beautiful creation to eat from the tree of life and be locked into this curse forever. When Adam and Eve were kicked out of the garden, it may not appear at first as a very kind behavior. When you understand that God would purchase back His creation, you also understand the need for eviction, as salvation was coming.

"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. The one who believes in Him is not judged; the one who does not believe has been judged already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God," John 3:17-18.

Salvation: Let's examine the salvation plan in its entirety. Your child is in heaven at this moment. The hope that parents now have is to ensure they have the same destination: to live eternally with them and God.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord," Romans 6:23. In Genesis 3, the judgment of death was implemented.

"But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," Romans 5:8.

"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth, he confesses, resulting in salvation," Romans 10:9-10.

The meaning of the words *confess* and *believe* are the key to these verses. One must publicly acknowledge Jesus and worship and pray to God. It is not the words themselves but the heart's intention to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior that saves.

"Since all his 'children' have flesh and blood, Jesus became human to identify with us fully. He did this so that he could experience death and annihilate the effects of the intimidating accuser who holds against us the power of death," Hebrews 2:14 The Passion Translation. Satan is the one that kills and destroys. Jesus died so we can say, "oh, death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of

sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," 1 Corinthians 15:55-57. "The last enemy that will be abolished is death," 1 Corinthians 15:26.

I hate death. I say this often to God. Whether it is the death of a human, the death of a relationship, the death of reputation, or spiritual death, it all makes me cry out to God. There are two promises that I cling to concerning death. "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One, and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades," Revelation 1:17-18. "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire," Revelations 20:14. My hope will always be in God, Who intervened on my behalf and paid the price so I would not have to face eternal death. He did the same for you. So this would be a good time to stop and have an honest conversation with God concerning death. I listed above different types of death. You are mourning the loss of life and losing a dream, and your identity is tied to that dream. Part of your family unit is missing. If you are not careful to seek God and burden Him with your loss, Satan might be able to add the destruction of your marriage.

Can you identify the emotions that are overwhelming you? E.g., anger, blame, bitterness, self-hate.

While you are talking with God and reading the verses, have you found a verse that helps you answer questions concerning that emotion? If not, ask God for a biblical answer.

Knowing God has your child, does that bring peace to your mind? If you are still angry, stop and talk to God about your anger. Ask God to help you find peace concerning your loss.

The Fear to Dream Again

"I certainly believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Wait for the Lord; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the Lord,"

Psalm 27:13-14.

God created all life, unique and irreplaceable. Just because you desire another child does not diminish the lost life. When you do not deal with your emotions, you might fear considering another child, as we talked about above. The Psalms above was from King David. If you read the Psalms, you will quickly understand that David's life was difficult. The above proclamation is what kept him moving forward. Satan wants you hopeless and emotionally drained to the point that you give up.

My husband did a tour in Seattle for two and a half years. Towards the end of the tour, he called me with a request—a set of twins born without kidneys needed to be adopted to be considered for a kidney transplant. Foster children at that time did not qualify for transplants. I remember asking him directly, "Are you asking me to adopt two children so I can bury them?" His reply will always resonate in my ears. "Everyone deserves to be loved at least once in their life." So, I began the process of adoption. The Navy had already given us orders, and the soon-to-be stationed city was not close enough to a transplant hospital. Washington state would not give us the children without the orders changed. The Navy would not change the orders without the children. Finally, Washington state stopped talking to us. What's the point? Sometimes, God allows us to walk into our worst fears to test what we truly believe about Him. I was tired of mourning, and I was scared to open up my

emotions to another risk. If I thought all life to be valuable, was I brave enough to step out of my comfort zone and risk being hurt again?

Life is full of danger. Are you willing to walk with God through insecurities? Are you courageous enough to believe that you will see the goodness of the Lord in your life, come what may?

1 Samuel chapter 1-2 is the story of Hannah. Hannah's simple little prayer for a child saved the direction of Israel. We will look at Hannah's Thanksgiving song, but I need to tell you the result of her prayer. She was required to give Samuel, her firstborn son, to serve in the temple of God. Samuel brought Israel back to God. Have you ever thought about your child's life and the impact they may have on the world? I can tell you the short life of my child changed the direction of my marriage. Our lives are a story of our God. You get to decide how to tell your story and your child's. Let's look at Hannah's song.

Hannah prayed:

I'm bursting with God-news!

I'm walking on air.

I'm laughing at my rivals.

I'm dancing my salvation.

2-5 Nothing and no one is holy like God,

no rock mountain like our God.

Don't dare talk pretentiously—

not a word of boasting, ever!

For God knows what's going on.

He takes the measure of everything that happens.

The weapons of the strong are smashed to pieces,

while the weak are infused with fresh strength.

The well-fed are out begging in the streets for crusts,

while the hungry are getting second helpings.

The barren woman has a houseful of children,

while the mother of many is bereft.

6-10 God brings death and God brings life,

brings down to the grave and raises up.

God brings poverty and God brings wealth;

he lowers, he also lifts up.

He puts poor people on their feet again;

he rekindles burned-out lives with fresh hope,

Restoring dignity and respect to their lives—

a place in the sun!

For the very structures of earth are God's;

he has laid out his operations on a firm foundation.

He protectively cares for his faithful friends, step by step,

but leaves the wicked to stumble in the dark.

No one makes it in this life by sheer muscle!

God's enemies will be blasted out of the sky,

crashed in a heap and burned.

God will set things right all over the earth,

He'll give strength to his king,

He'll set his anointed on top of the world! 1 Samuel 2: 1-10 The Message

I refuse to allow Satan to have a voice in my story. Yes, I temporarily had depression concerning a life-altering event, but my God was bigger and stronger. I can stand in the gap of mourning and guide others on the correct path to find joy again. Nothing about my journey was easy or desirable. I would wish it on no one ever. What I can see is the godly lady who came out on the other side of grief. I adore the man I see in my husband, even though I will never understand his form of mourning. It worked for him, and I see a godly man I respect.

You might not be able to write a song of thanksgiving at this time, and that is okay. I just need you to see that with God, you have a future. There are very few couples like my husband and me where God said no to children, period! God has removed all bitterness or resentment concerning this issue because I asked Him. I don't know how it works, but prayer does work, and God does answer. My advice to everyone is the same. Seek God for all answers. Only God knows what path you need to take.

Notes