



Walking God's Way

*Biblical Encouragement
for Walking with Christ*

GUIDE FOR LIVING

After a Miscarriage

Finding the future through the pain

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INTRODUCTION



The Brothers I Never Knew

"Mom?" I yelled as I slammed the front door shut. Dumping my schoolbooks on the living room chair, I kicked off my shoes on the way down the hall. I stopped short of entering the kitchen when I heard my mother's sobs, then saw her. Her shoulders shook, one hand covered her face, and her voice was muffled as she poured her sorrow into the telephone. Stunned, I backed away and retreated to my bedroom.

A short time later, my mom appeared. The tears were gone, but her eyes remained red-rimmed. I had never seen her look so sad. She patted my back and asked if I was hungry. Looking up at her from beneath my eyelashes, I nodded. Feeling anxious and apprehensive, I followed her into the kitchen. What was happening—my mother *never* cried! A pall hung over our home that evening, and I was glad when it was time to go to bed.

The next morning, Mom roused my sisters and me. She told us we had to drive into Chicago. We had moved to the suburbs a few years earlier, but Mom still went back to the city whenever we needed medical care. Her only explanation was that she had a doctor's appointment.

As the oldest, I took my place in the front seat. I noticed what appeared to be a mason jar wrapped in aluminum foil tucked between my mother and her purse. "What's that?" I asked. My mom got a funny look around her eyes, and for a minute, I feared she would cry again. To my relief, she shook her head. I knew better than to persist in my questions.

Many years later I pieced together what had happened that Friday. My mother had miscarried a baby boy who was three months along. That was the second of two miscarriages; she had lost another baby before I was born. I thought about that during a discussion about whether I would someday be the mother of boys, girls, or maybe both. My mom commented that she wasn't meant to mother boys because she had miscarried twice and both were boys. That was my first glimpse of the pain she usually kept private.

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After a Miscarriage

Introduction

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I believe now that my mother carried the images of those babies with her for the rest of her life. She spoke of losing a fair-haired son and another that appeared to have dark hair. She spoke of the perfection of their tiny bodies. They were not nameless fetuses but little boys that would have been named David or Michael, had they been born.

It hurts me to realize that my mother didn't feel free to openly grieve her loss. I'm sure she, like other women who miscarried, had to endure the well-meaning platitudes: You have healthy daughters. *It wasn't meant to be. There must have been something wrong with them that you couldn't see. It was God's will.*

I am reminded afresh that we are to mourn with those who mourn. My prayer is that whether you are personally experiencing the pain of loss, or know someone who is going through this sorrow, that this guide will support the healing process. I pray you will be reminded that our God is very close to the broken-hearted.

Blessings,

Karen Arneson
Women's and Family Resources

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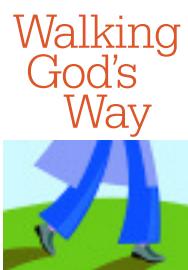
LEADER'S GUIDE



How to use “After a Miscarriage” for a group study.

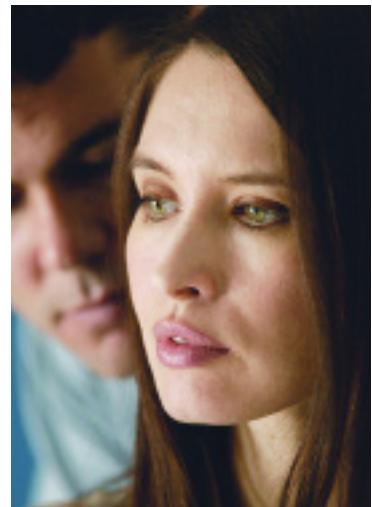
“After a Miscarriage” can be used for individual or group study, but if you intend to lead a group study on this, some simple suggestions follow.

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- 1** Open the session with prayer.
 - 2** Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.
 - 3** Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.
 - 4** Alternatively, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.
 - 5** Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.
 - 6** When working through the Thought Provokers, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It’s important for women to know that others share their experience. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.
 - 7** End the session in prayer.



FEATURES

TODAY'S CHRISTIAN
woman



Mourning a Miscarriage

When we lost our baby, I was haunted by the question *why?*

by Laura L. Mills

The day before, I had discovered for certain that I was six weeks pregnant. Now, as I stared at the widening stain of bright red blood that soaked through my pajamas, my stomach tightened and my neck burned.

No, God! I want to be a mother!

In a matter of seconds, I hurried from the bathroom, woke my husband, and dialed my physician. The diagnosis: spontaneous miscarriage.

“Is there anything we can do?” I asked.

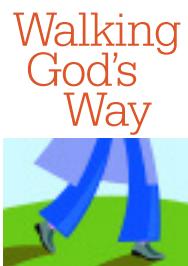
“Unfortunately, no,” my doctor replied. “I’m sorry.”

It was March 9, 2003. I had awakened, pregnant, at 6:00 a.m., thanking God for answering my prayers about having a baby. I wondered whether the baby was a boy or a girl and dreamed about what my child would look like when born in October.

When I hung up the phone, the clock read 7:30 a.m. And my baby was dead.

When God Says No

My body recovered almost immediately from the miscarriage. However, my spirit writhed during the months that followed. I had pictured God as the religious equivalent of a fairy godfather, a granter of wishes who gives us the important things for which we pray. For six hopeful months, I had begged him to let us have a baby. Now I brooded over his “no” response. This was worse than making us wait for a baby’s conception; our baby actually had died. How much more obvious could a “no” be?



While I didn't think God had caused my miscarriage, I despaired over realizing the same God who said, "Seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7) had allowed that door to shut on my hopes for a baby. I wondered if perhaps I had prayed wrongly when I asked Him for a baby, or if I hadn't prayed enough. Did God even care that I had prayed?

Maybe God didn't want me to have a baby at all. Tears poured down my face as I considered that.

I found little solace in the world around me. Though relatively common, miscarriage is a topic whispered around obstetricians' offices. And it is rarely discussed in a society that regards the unborn, especially at the earliest stages of pregnancy, as disposable nonentities. Many people unintentionally undermined my feelings with platitudes like "you can always get pregnant again" or "these things just happen." But I believe human life begins at conception, so my unborn child was a person with a soul. The loss of that unique person left an enormous void in my life. I was physically and emotionally empty, and lonelier than I'd ever been before. The only thing I could do was cry.

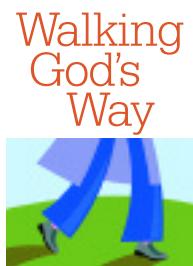
Since childhood I had been taught to turn to God at such times, but I figured I already knew his opinion. I couldn't ask him for help. After all, I knew he wouldn't return my baby to me. What I wanted from him now was an answer: why he had allowed my baby to die. The question plagued me as I read book after book about miscarriage. I half-expected a clue to turn up every time I answered the phone or checked the mail, but none did.

Glimpses of Grace

An invitation to a friend's baby shower when I would have been halfway through my pregnancy intensified my loss. One day at work, I noticed a thank-you note posted beside a colleague's desk. The card included Isaiah 55:8: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord.

I read the words several times and marveled at their timeliness. Had I seen them by chance or was God speaking to me? Hoping for the latter, I decided to give God another chance. Maybe I didn't understand him as much as I thought I did.

During the next several months I prayed for greater faith and deeper understanding. I wasn't sure what to expect. In the meantime, my grief continued. Every time I looked in the mirror, I wondered how large my pregnant belly would have been. When I walked past our empty spare bedroom, I wondered how we would have decorated it as our baby's nursery. What names would we have considered? Would we have known our baby's gender by now? Would our baby have looked more like my husband or me? Oh how I wished March 9, 2003 had never happened.



At the same time, through a support group and a network of friends, I met other women who had lost their babies as well. Their stories showed me no matter how hard you pray, tragedies happen, even to good, God-fearing people. In other words, I wasn't the only Christian woman to whom God had said no. In these women I found compassion and validation of my continued grief. And in their desire to hold onto the remnants of their faith, I found the courage to gather mine and—with God's help—to rebuild it.

I stopped looking for answers and started looking for God himself. To my amazement, I found him. I recognized him in my husband, James, who never gave up trying to comfort me. I also recognized God in some family members and friends who, though they admittedly didn't understand my feelings, always listened when I cried. God spoke from the pages of the books I read about grief and healing. And as I closed my eyes and imagined God with my baby in his arms, he showed me a peace beyond any I had ever known.

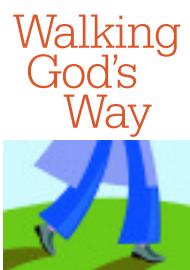
Moving Forward

The void in my life still exists; it always will. Nothing will ever replace my child who died on March 9, 2003. And nothing will ever cause me to cease wondering about my child's gender, looks, personality, and future. As the months roll by, I wonder what my baby, my "Little Soul," would be doing now. I continue to wonder why God allowed him or her to die in light of my prayers.

Despite my lingering questions, I've learned important lessons, too. God isn't a fairy godfather but a teacher. He's with me as I grieve my loss. As I continue to look for him in the people and the world around me, I find the grace of his touch. God says it himself in Isaiah 49:15: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you."

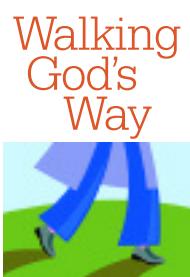
Faith tells me that, in the midst of what I perceive as the upheaval of my life, God has everything under control. It tells me that he, more than anyone, feels my pain, understands the void my miscarriage left, and counts my tears. It reassures me I'm never alone. And it tells me that as long as I remain open to God, he'll continue rebuilding my heart—still, and ever more, the heart of a mother—one piece at a time.

—Laura L. Mills is a writer who lives in Illinois. This article first appeared in the January/February 2007 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.



Thought Provokers

- *If you have lost a baby, what role have you assigned God in your loss? Does it make a difference to you whether he caused, or only allowed, your child to die?*
- *How has that role made a difference in your relationship with God?*
- *Have you turned toward or away from God in your grief? In what ways?*
- *In general, what impact do you believe the prevalence of abortion in our society has on the way people view miscarriage?*
- *The author points to a time when she stopped looking for answers and started looking for God. She describes how she found him. Have you yet experienced God's grace in your loss? If so, describe how you have found him.*
- *If not, what are some ways that will help you seek him? What promises does Scripture offer if we truly seek to find the Lord?*



FEATURES

TODAY'S CHRISTIAN
woman



Empty Arms

How well I understand my friend's grief over her miscarriage.

by Jennifer Maze Brown

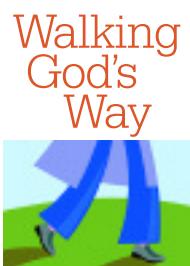
I stand at the kitchen counter, phone cradled between shoulder and ear, jotting on a notepad, and listening. I listen as my friend pours out the sad news of the loss of her tiny unborn baby. I wipe away my own tears, understanding all too well the anguish of this mother's broken heart. I scribble circles and lines and the words to a song: "Little one, loved before knowing...Precious one, in dreams so fair...."

Only a few weeks before, my friend had called, ecstatic that a test had confirmed the presence of the little life within her. She even rejoiced when the nausea started. Then the nausea abruptly stopped, and the spotting began. Now the baby was gone. My friend's hopes and dreams, her plans for new curtains in the nursery, somehow had to be put away.

She weeps, and I weep with her. Most people don't understand. They smile and pat her shoulder and say she can always have another baby. They tell her how thankful she should be for her other children. Or they don't know what to say at all, so they chat aimlessly about the weather and the kids' ball games. She wants to scream at them, "Don't you see? My baby died! I'll never see him (or was it her?) play ball. This was not an illness. This was a human being—someone I loved—and I am grieving!"

I understand. How well I understand. Memories flood back as I sip my tea. Three babies wait for me in heaven. All were born only a few short weeks after their lives began, before onlookers could even tell they were there. But I knew. I already loved them, and now I understand my friend's lonely grief.

After my third miscarriage—a beautiful little baby only about an inch long, with fingers and toes and eyes—I cried out to Jesus in my helpless, agonizing loss. Then the idea of finding some sort



of memorial surfaced. I went shopping, asking the Lord to help me find what he had chosen. I wandered aisles, not even knowing what I was looking for, then stopped. There, sitting high on a shelf, was a tiny, live green bush with pink miniature roses fragrant with life.

Our whole family planted that little rosebush that evening in the corner of our yard by the fence. As we patted soft soil around the little roots, we explained to our children that a rosebud sometimes may swell on this side of the fence, but if the stem grows through that barrier, it actually blooms on the other side. Our baby, like the little rose, began here, but went on to live with Jesus before we could know him. That seemed to make sense to the children. Though they were disappointed, they were content to anticipate getting to know this brother or sister in heaven.

It wasn't so easy for me. My body had sheltered and nourished a new life and now faced postpartum changes with empty arms. A few women who had personally experienced the loss of an unborn child tried to offer comfort (forever endearing themselves to me), but only the Lord could heal my broken heart.

Many times in the ensuing months, I would slip away and sit by the little rosebush, pluck the weeds, and pour out my heart to God. I hated that fence by the bush; it represented the painful separation I felt. But it also became the Lord's teaching tool.

I knew my babies lived just on the other side. The other side was really there and only a step away—just as heaven is. As God taught me to accept his will that I should live on this side for now with those babies on the other side, he birthed in my heart a new understanding of the reality of heaven. Within me grew the assurance that one day in heaven I would hug my precious children who now already lived in perfection. And over many months, as I sat beside the little rose in the arms of my Abba Father, my Comforter, my Wonderful Counselor, my Hiding Place, my heart began to heal.

My tea is cold. I shake myself and glance at the clock. My eyes drift to the little pink rosebush in the yard. I walk out to pick one for my buttonhole as I make a mental list of dinner preparations for my hurting friend.

Main dish and salad, treats for the children, sympathy card—and a tiny rosebush. There are lovely red ones at the garden center, and I'll take her one tonight with the song I composed on the notepad. I'll hug her. We'll cry and pray together, and I'll promise to pray for her every day in the coming months. And I'll do it, too. Perhaps it will help her along as she begins her healing journey.

I smile at the jaunty rose on my shirt, and head outside, tearing off the top sheet of the notepad, reading as I walk:

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*Little one, loved before knowing,
Precious one, in dreams so fair;
My empty arms ache to be holding
My rosebud who blooms “over there.”*

*If you had come to be with us
I’d have shown you the stars and the sea;
But your eyes see them eternally clear ...
One day you must show them to me.*

—Jennifer Maze Brown is a pediatrician and home schooling mother of four. She and her family live in North Carolina. This article first appeared in the May/June 1998 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.

Thought Provokers

- *Is there someone in your life who understands your grief? How has that person helped you grieve?*
- *The author uses a beautiful metaphor of a rose to describe the eternal life of her miscarried child. In what ways have you thought of your child as “blooming” on the other side? What are some of your daydreams about your baby?*
- *Perhaps the grieving process of losing an unborn child would be helped along if that child were memorialized. Do you believe it is better to “let go” and move on, or stop to remember, then move on?*
- *Describe what would be best for you and why. Why is grieving necessary? How does it help you manage the pain? What else helps?*

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FEATURES

TODAY'S CHRISTIAN
woman



The Empty Crib

Surviving infertility

by Kathryn S. Olson

Note: Every month, millions of women in the United States face infertility. They do all the right things to conceive, so when their period arrives, they once again find themselves rushing downward in failed expectations. Another month of empty dreams, another month with an empty crib.

Infertility is defined by the medical community as the inability to conceive within one year of unprotected intercourse (six months for women over age thirty-five), or the inability to carry a child to live birth. The most frequent causes of infertility include blocked fallopian tubes; poor or absent ovulation, especially in women over thirty-five; endometriosis; and for men, problems such as low sperm count and impeded sperm motility.

Jennifer Saake, founder and director of Hannah's Prayer, a nonprofit Internet- and newsletter-based infertility support group, writes: "Women need to remember that infertility is a medical problem. Too often we're told, 'If you'd only relax or go on vacation, you'd get pregnant! Or we even secretly fear that infertility is God's way of punishing us for some unknown sin. In my own struggle with infertility, I ended up praying and reading my Bible, hoping I'd earn a child. I became angry with God when I did everything according to the 'rules' and didn't conceive. It wasn't until I realized that I was making having a child my idol that I was able to find peace with my situation.

"God understands how desperately I need the healthy release of tears when my period starts unexpectedly or I receive negative test results. The key is not to allow bitterness to blind me to God's compassion in the midst of these trials."

In the midst of those burdens, glimpses of that compassion and healing can come shining through. Among these glimpses is Kathryn Olson's story. Kathryn, thirty-nine, has struggled with infertility for three years. Her story is a poignant reminder, not only of the pain, grief, and stress infertile women experience, but also of the faith, hope, and encouragement that awaits them.

—The Editors

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Grief blindsided me in the cereal aisle of my local supermarket as I ran into my third mother-and-baby pair of the morning. Feeling as if I'd been punched in the gut, I dissolved into tears, hoping no one would notice.

I had headed out early that Monday morning to pick up a few groceries, hoping to get a jump on the midday crowds. Several young moms apparently had the same idea. We smiled at each other as we passed in the aisles. But I wasn't a young mom. I was a thirty-something mom-wannabe. And after seeing my third beautiful child, this one a toddler contentedly munching on a fresh bagel, safely snuggled in his mom's grocery cart, I could no longer hold back the tears.

I had lost my only child in an early miscarriage more than a year and a half before. Time and God's grace had gone a long way toward healing my heart. But that morning reminded me again that the loss of a child in a miscarriage is something a mom never really gets over. Yet I've learned some important lessons on how to survive infertility:

Be gentle with yourself.

It's easy to feel that taking care of yourself is selfish, but sometimes we need a break from people and situations that hurt.

You may need to avoid baby showers for a while or plan a special time for yourself and your husband on Mother's Day. I'm not suggesting you withdraw from life. But on certain occasions—holidays or celebrations that are especially hard for you—cut yourself some slack.

Sometimes an ordinary situation renews your pain. Maybe it's simply the passing of another monthly cycle that reminds you that your dream of motherhood is still a dream. Whatever the cause, when you're feeling especially low, do something just for you. One of my favorite escapes is to snuggle up on the couch with an afghan, a bowl of popcorn, and a favorite book or movie.

Allow yourself to grieve.

Since the loss of my baby, funerals are especially hard for me. At the funeral for my husband's uncle a few months ago, my heart broke as I saw the tears of the grieving wife and grown daughters. It was a stark reminder that God sometimes asks hard things of us, such as entrusting our loved ones back into his arms when we'd much rather keep them here in ours. I even grieve that I was denied this comforting ritual of death for my child.

I now draw great comfort from the Bible verse "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). The shortest verse in the Bible describes Jesus' reaction upon visiting the tomb of his friend Lazarus. Although Jesus knew he could raise Lazarus from the dead, he was moved to tears by the destruction and the grief that death leaves in its wake. I'm comforted by that. It means that when my loss, or that of others, leads me to tears, I'm being Christ-like. It's OK to grieve.

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Expect emotional ups and downs.

Grief comes in waves or cycles and can start anytime. Mine didn't set in until two months after my miscarriage. Until then, I think I was still in shock. By the time the magnitude of my loss sank in, everyone else had moved on with their lives, and I felt funny talking about the miscarriage. Now my grief hits me at unpredictable intervals and unexpected places—such as in the cereal aisle of the supermarket.

I've never been much of a crier, but since my miscarriage, the oddest things set me off. I've learned that is normal. I may be fine with something one day, then the next day feel angry, depressed, hopeless, or weepy at the very same thing.

The hardest emotion I've dealt with is that odd combination of feelings with which I greet the news of each new baby born to a friend. How is it possible to feel such joy and such despair at the same time?

Embrace the life God has for you.

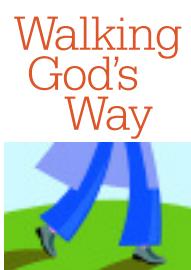
I still hope God will bring children into my husband's and my life, either through natural birth, adoption, or a combination of the two. But I choose not to focus on having a baby. I want the life God has chosen for me, regardless of whether it fits my preconceived notions of what a happy or successful life looks like. I'm learning that true joy is found in submitting to God's plans and letting him mold me into the woman he wants me to be, even when it hurts.

I'll admit it's often impossible to feel good about the holding pattern I'm in right now. So I have to make a conscious effort, especially on my weepy days, to affirm my trust in a God who loves me and who wants the best for me. A favorite quote from author C. S. Lewis expresses it well: "We are not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be."

Look for God's comfort.

Even in the midst of my pain, I've seen evidence of God's loving care. I'm so thankful for one of my close friends who has experienced two miscarriages. I can talk to her about my loss anytime, and she understands.

Another friend encourages me long distance through e-mail and prayer. One morning last summer, I was taking my mom home from the hospital, where she had stayed overnight for some tests. As we were leaving, a couple was departing with their newborn. Something about the new father's delicacy and nervousness as he maneuvered the car seat containing their precious bundle hit me like a physical blow. It didn't help that I'd just had a negative pregnancy test after we thought we had done everything right, and it looked as though I might have been pregnant. That night I cried myself to sleep. The next morning, my friend Beth sent an e-mail: "Just to let you know I've been praying for you. God woke me around 4:00 this morning with you and Timothy and babies on my mind. I felt led to pray for your faith to increase."

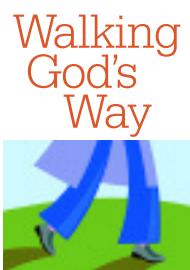


Wow. Tangible evidence that God had not forgotten me. Beth's prayer for my faith to increase was right on target: I need more faith that God's way is best, no matter how it does or doesn't line up with my desires. Regardless of whether I ever become a mom or not, I've come to realize that, as a character in one of my favorite books says, "I just want to look more like Jesus when I get to the other side of this thing." Hopefully, it will be with a baby in tow, but if not, I know God still really does desire the best for me.

—Kathryn S. Olson is a book editor living in the Chicago area. This article first appeared in the May/June 2000 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.

Thought Provokers

- *Do you find it difficult to see mothers with their babies? What methods do you use for coping so that you don't withdraw from your friends who are mothers? How do you care for yourself in these circumstances?*
- *Does the knowledge that Jesus wept over his friend, Lazarus—even knowing he would be raised to life—help you in your grief? What difference do Jesus' tears make in your own circumstance?*
- *What other biblical losses show you ways to deal with yours? Think of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12), Eve (Genesis 4), even Hannah, who gave Samuel to Eli to raise (1 Samuel 1:2–28). How did these women cope with the loss of children?*
- *Do you feel free to express your grief when it comes at you from unexpected places and at various times? Or do you feel as though everyone around you expects you to go on with life? How do you deal with the situation?*
- *Read the following that deals with ways to help a hurting friend. From your perspective, what part of the advice is particularly valid? What do you expect from your family and friends in dealing with your loss?*



Six Ways to Help a Hurting Friend

Timely tips for sharing grief

by Kathryn S. Olson

- 1. Give lots of hugs.** Almost always, a hug is better than words.
- 2. Write notes of encouragement.** The simple notes of support I received after my miscarriage meant so much. They also provided an unexpected bridge into the lives of friends who had suffered similar losses. I still take out the cards and letters and read them when I'm feeling down.

- 3. Acknowledge the loss.** Author Rebecca Faber, in *A Mother's Grief Observed*, comments on people's tendency to avoid talking about painful things. In the months following the death of her toddler, William, she found that people were afraid to mention his name. One friend explained why: if Rebecca had momentarily forgotten the pain, they didn't want to make her feel bad again. She writes, "What people forget is that you never forget. The grief is always in your face, always there. It's far better for them to speak and show they care."

The flip side of this is to avoid such phrases as "at least now you know you can get pregnant!" "Those statements are anything but comforting to grieving parents," says Jennifer Saake, founder of Hannah's Prayer. "Any statement containing an 'at least ...' sentiment is inappropriate because you are minimizing another's pain. Simply say, 'I'm sorry you have to go through this.'"

- 4. Be selective in sharing your story.** After my miscarriage, it seemed that almost every woman I knew told me that she, too, had experienced a miscarriage. In a way, that was encouraging; it showed me I wasn't alone. But frankly, when people with broods of healthy children told me about the miscarriages they'd had years ago, it was little comfort to me right then. There may be times when your story will help your friend, but don't automatically assume she wants to hear it.

- 5. Be sensitive to her feelings if you become pregnant or adopt a child.** When my friend, Becky, became pregnant not long after my miscarriage, she knew it could be difficult for me. I appreciated her loving gesture of telling me her exciting news before making it public. While it was hard to watch Becky's belly expand during the following months, her sensitivity to my feelings made such a difference in my ability to cope with it. Now that she has a healthy son, she allows me to set the pace in interacting with him, knowing some days it's fine, and other days it hurts.

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6. Don't take it personally if sometimes your infertile friend simply can't bear to be around you and your little bundle of joy. Be careful, too, about complaining. It's natural to joke about the trials and tribulations of motherhood: morning sickness, potty training, and all the rest. But remember, your good-natured banter might be painful to a friend who longs for a child.

We Opted to Adopt

How losing one child opened the door to another

by Mary Roberts Clark

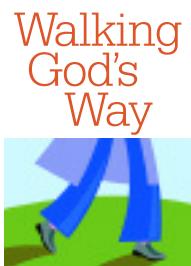
My husband, Al, and I were in our late thirties when we married, and we both wanted to have children right away. I believed I would easily conceive but soon realized something was wrong. For the first time I cried over infertility. The Bible says that God stores our tears in heaven. He must have filled a barrel with my tears over my empty womb.

Al and I went to fertility specialists for tests. I took the fertility drug Clomid and tried just about everything we could think of. Finally, after two and a half years, I got pregnant—and miscarried. I frantically tried to conceive again but was unable.

Al and I prayed about adopting a baby. We read several books on adoption, then put in our application with a local adoption agency. The door to a baby, which had seemingly slammed in our face, was suddenly wide open. Although our age prevented us from adopting an American infant, the counselor suggested we try the Romanian adoption program. It turns out there are 85,000 children in Romanian orphanages. There are many more orphans in Russia, China, and throughout the world who desperately need a mommy and daddy to love them.

We attended the required classes, filled out reams of paperwork, answered intensely personal questions, and a year later traveled to Romania to meet our baby daughter.

Our daughter, Elizabeth, is our great joy today. She has filled our nursery, our home, our hearts with love and laughter. As I watch Elizabeth toil over a Play-Doh project or chase a bright balloon through the house, I wonder if God's purpose for my infertility was simply to provide a home for a little girl who desperately needed one. Did God care so much about this child that he allowed my womb to close?



I don't know. But I thank God every day that my biological child is safe in heaven, while my adopted daughter is safe in our home.

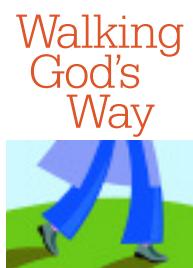
The Bible tells us in James 1:27: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress." You can't go wrong, in God's eyes, when you adopt a child and give him or her a loving home. The only tears I cry these days are tears of joy!

Different Paths through Infertility

Four ways to address childlessness

by Kathryn S. Olson

- 1. Adoption.** I've lost count of the friends and relatives who have become parents through adoption, both domestic and international. Adoption is a delightful way to overcome childlessness, although it, too, has its challenges. It may be difficult to overcome the sense of unfairness about people who are unfit to be parents giving birth every day while we, who seem eminently qualified (in our humble opinion) to provide a loving and stable home for a child, must jump through endless hoops and spend oodles of money to become adoptive parents.
- 2. Fertility drugs.** Two of our friends were unable to conceive without the help of the fertility drug Clomid. Such medication, when used properly, improves fertility and rarely leads to the multiple births that capture the nation's attention.
- 3. Natural medicine.** Though they can't boast the clinically proven success rates of fertility drugs, improved nutrition, vitamin supplements, and natural progesterone show some evidence for improving fertility (see Dr. John Lee's *What Your Doctor May Not Tell You about Menopause* for more information). A particular benefit to this approach is that it focuses on improved overall health rather than just on getting pregnant.
- 4. Acceptance.** All paths through infertility require a measure of acceptance. But some couples have a special gift, enabling them to find peace in their questions, to find joy in not knowing. Some days I actually come close to attaining it.



FEATURES

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Healing for Grieving Parents

When an infant dies, here's how to offer support and comfort.

by Amy Kuebelbeck

My husband and I knew for three-and-a-half months before our baby was born that he would die shortly after birth. We used that gift of time to create memories of our son, Gabriel.

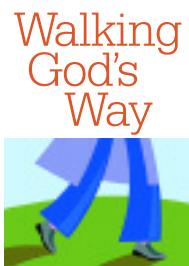
Through reading about other families' experiences with the death of a newborn, we learned that many families find solace in tangible keepsakes such as photographs, even those taken after the baby has died. So my hospital bag was packed with all the usual items plus a plaster-of-Paris kit for his footprints, a baptismal gown, and rolls and rolls of film.

After Gabriel died, my husband and I compiled a set of gift boxes for the hospital where he was born to be given to parents suffering similar losses. Into each box we put a plaster-of-Paris footprint kit, a disposable camera, a baby book specifically for babies who die, a copy of the booklet *When Hello Means Goodbye*, and a small stuffed toy lamb. Our daughters, then ages 5 and 3, had the special job of placing the lambs in the boxes. Both the parents who received the boxes and the staff at the hospital told us that these gifts helped these bereaved parents find a sense of hope and healing, even in the midst of their grief.

If you'd like to create similar memory boxes or would like more information on the keepsakes and literature mentioned here, these websites are a great place to start.

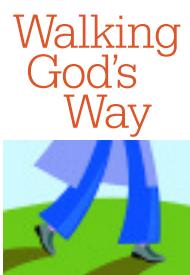
- A Place to Remember: www.aplacetoremember.com
- RTS bereavement services at Gunderson Lutheran Medical Foundation: www.bereavementprograms.com

—Amy Kuebelbeck is the author of *Waiting With Gabriel* (Loyola). This article first appeared in the Summer 2003 issue of CHRISTIAN PARENTING TODAY.



Thought Provokers

- *It seems that a major obstacle to healing for parents of an unborn child is the absence of acknowledging the baby as a person. Miscarriages may happen at any stage of development, but what are your thoughts on the appropriateness of recognizing your loss as that of the loss of a person?*
- *God uses our grief to enable us to help others in similar situations. What have you learned about the loss of a child that will help you reach out in compassion to others?*
- *In what ways is God working your loss together for good? If you haven't yet arrived at this point, how is God helping you process the grief? What good things have happened to you in this loss?*



FEATURES

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When Children Grieve

Help your kids move from heartache to hope.

by Joanna Bloss

"Kayley and John, your mom and I have something to tell you. We went to the doctor today to see if everything was okay with the baby," my husband said, taking a deep breath as four big, blue eyes watched him closely. "Guys," he said gently, "the baby died."

Just hours before, a doctor told us the baby I'd been carrying for five months had died. All afternoon I worried about how to break that news to our two older kids. My grief was intensified knowing how sad they would be, especially our seven-year-old daughter, who had prayed earnestly that I would conceive this baby.

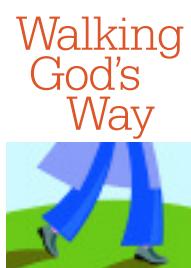
"It's okay to cry, Sweetie," I said to her, as the flood of tears began.

Grief. It's hard enough for grownups to deal with, but when our kids' hearts break, the load seems unbearable. Adults know that death, pain, and loss are inevitable. But how do we explain that to our kids?

Although death is generally the most painful form of loss, we grieve hundreds of losses throughout our lives. Families move, parents get divorced, a big sister goes to college. These events may not be equally traumatic, but each loss is significant in the eyes of a child. Though we can't prevent loss, there are things we can do to help our kids bear the load and even grow stronger because of it. Here are some of those ways:

Prepare now for future losses

When my five-year-old asks if he will die, my first impulse is to tell him not to talk that way. But I wouldn't be doing him any favors if I pretended that death isn't a reality. In *Helping Kids through Tough Times* (Standard, 1995), Doris Sanford writes, "The spiritual and emotional growth



available for children after a death is a result of facing the pain, not avoiding it.” Even if your children haven’t experienced grief yet, look for opportunities to talk about loss and death. Children’s books, TV shows, even current events can open doors to helpful conversation. By discussing these issues with your children, you let them know that no subject is off limits. Then, when a loss does occur in your child’s life, you’ll have already begun to prepare the child for a healthy grief process.

In John 16:33, Jesus tells us trouble in this world is inevitable. Rather than trying to keep our children’s lives pain-free, we are wiser to lay a strong spiritual foundation before crisis strikes.

When Nancy, a fifty-six-year-old mother of three, was age thirteen, her mother died suddenly of a brain aneurysm. “I am so thankful for the time my mom invested in helping me memorize Scripture,” she says.

Deuteronomy 6:7 stresses the need to share God’s commandments with our families: “Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

Help your children memorize verses they can use to fight life’s battles later on.

Recognize their pain

Our kids will grieve over things that seem minor to us, but it’s important to recognize their pain. Think back to what it was like to be a kid. Taking second place in the science fair might not seem like a big deal to an adult, but to an eight-year-old, it feels like the end of the world.

The death of a pet is often a child’s first experience with grief. When Karen, a thirty-two-year-old mother of two boys, was in third grade, her kitten had to be put to sleep. “I fell apart at the vet’s office,” she says now. “I remember my mom telling me we’d get another one, but I loved that kitten.”

Let the tears flow

In an effort to help our kids feel better, we often wipe their tears, telling them, “Shhh, don’t cry.” But crying is a healthy part of healing. Even Jesus wept when his friend Lazarus died—and Jesus knew that he would be bringing his friend back to life. Tears are a gift from God, not a sign of weakness.

When I told my daughter that one of her best friends would be going to a different school in the fall, she collapsed on her bed and cried. My first tendency was to point out all the friends she had left. But it was important that she grieve this loss. It’s not always my job to take away the hurt, but I can offer an empathetic, listening ear.

Focus on their needs

When the whole family is in the midst of a crisis, it’s easy to forget that children need special attention. When my husband was twelve, his father lapsed into a

**Walking
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sudden coma. For reasons he doesn't completely understand, his mom failed to take his nine-year-old brother and him to visit their dad in the hospital. The next time they saw him was in a funeral home.

"In hindsight, I think that caused some bitterness and resentment and actually prolonged the grief process for me," my husband says now.

The circumstances surrounding a death, serious illness, or even a move can be confusing for children. Allowing them to visit a loved one in the hospital, helping to plan a funeral, or making decisions about some aspects of a move will give them a sense of security and help them cope more easily with loss. If you're not sure what your child needs, just ask. Then take the time to listen and respond. If you aren't able to answer questions or talk freely because of your own grief, ask a trusted family member or friend to help you.

Follow your child's lead

When children are afraid or confused, they ask a lot of questions. "Be simple, accurate and brief," says Marguerita Rudolph, author of *Should the Children Know?* (Shocked Books, 1978). Avoid using euphemisms such as "Grandpa went to sleep." This only confuses children and gives them misconceptions about death. They need to be able to trust you completely. Telling them lies or half-truths interferes with their ability to believe everything else we say.

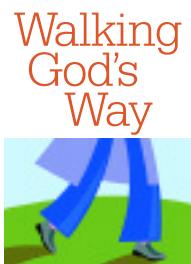
On the flipside, be careful not to share too much information. In an effort to be completely honest with my daughter when our baby died, I began to explain to her what would happen to the baby's body. I stopped short when I realized this was probably more information than she needed. Instead I said simply, "The hospital has a special place for babies who have died." This was all the answer she wanted.

Celebrate your hope in heaven

Parents can share the hope of heaven with their children. If your child hasn't made a commitment to follow Christ, a crisis is a wonderful opportunity to share the gospel. Also, share stories of loss from your own childhood. Tell how God worked in your life and used the situation to help you grow. Read James 1:2–12 together and discuss how trials can make us stronger. Remind your children that even though we have trouble on earth, Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33) and that God promises he'll never leave us (Heb. 13:5).

Finally, celebrate with your children the promise of heaven. Revelation 21:4 says, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Those words offer enormous comfort in the midst of pain.

When I was age sixteen, an acquaintance was killed in a car accident. My father

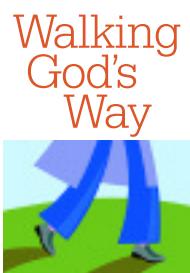


helped me grieve. He went with me to the funeral home and took off work to sit next to me at the memorial service. He didn't have all the answers, but he gave me something I'll always treasure: the gift of his presence. Grief is hard work. But with your help, your child can learn to face loss with hope and strength.

Joanna Bloss lives in McPherson, Kansas, with her husband, Rob, and their three children. This article first appeared in the September/October 1999 issue of CHRISTIAN PARENTING TODAY.

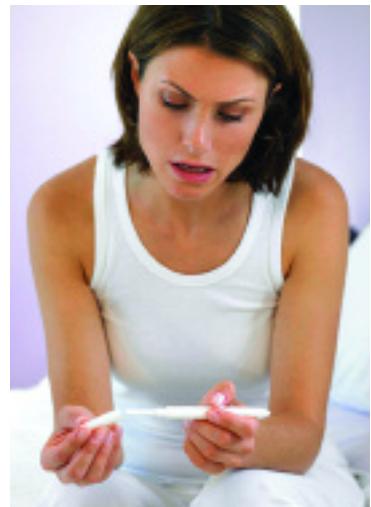
Thought Provokers

- *When my mother had a miscarriage, she didn't talk about it with me or my sisters. All we knew was that mom was crying. I remember feeling confused and anxious. What might my mother have done differently?*
- *One of our greatest blessings as believers is the truth that in every pain and trial God can work it for good. What are some ways that the loss of a baby might be worked for good in the lives of your family members?*
- *We are not to grieve as those who have no hope. How does the hope we have in heaven make a difference in how we respond to the loss of a baby?*



FEATURES

TODAY'S CHRISTIAN
woman



From Tears to Joy

**How my miscarriage is
helping unwed mothers.**

by Mary Cunningham Agee as told to Una McManus

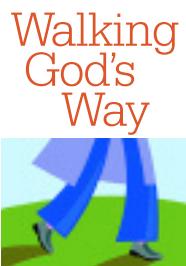
My husband, Bill, and I had found professional fulfillment in the corporate fast lane, yet we longed for the deeper personal fulfillment of parenting. So when I became pregnant in December 1983, it felt like a Christmas miracle.

Several months later, I was seized by intense pain. I'm only five months pregnant!, I thought. I can't be in labor! Bill rushed me to the hospital, but it was already too late. Our baby daughter had died.

That loss carved a deep grief into my soul. My arms ached to hold the daughter we had lost. After returning from the hospital, Bill and I sat quietly in our dark living room, trying to come to terms with our loss. A thought from a sermon I'd heard years before kept returning to my mind: "Unless there's a Good Friday, there will never be an Easter Sunday." Those words began to take on a new meaning.

"Bill, if I feel this much sorrow over a miscarriage, what kind of anguish must a woman who aborts her child feel if she felt that abortion was her only choice?" I asked softly.

As the days slipped by, I found my thoughts incessantly returning to women who aborted their babies. As I prayed, I felt called to help them. Little by little, I gave birth to the Nurturing Network. As a successful strategic planner, I knew I needed to know which women were most likely to choose abortion and why. The answers I discovered shattered my stereotypes. Of the 1.6 million abortions in the United States each year, 70 to 75 percent are performed on women ages 20 and older, according to the Centers for Disease Control and the Alan Guttmacher Institute. These women are mostly middle class. Many are in college or on their first job. As young professionals, they've been told they have the most to lose by continuing an unplanned pregnancy.



Our sophisticated society seems to assume that professional and college women don't have crisis pregnancies. If they do, they know how to handle it. But the banker hurts just as badly as the high-school student. Unwed pregnancy can be especially difficult for a woman in the business world because she often loses credibility and is judged as irresponsible and naive. College students also are supposed to be "smarter than this." It became my special challenge in the months ahead to respond to those needs.

My first step was to conduct an informal survey. I contacted ten abortion clinics nationwide and asked that my telephone number be given to women willing to discuss their experiences anonymously. More than a hundred women responded. I asked them, "If you had had access to whatever help you needed, would you have preferred to give birth to your baby?" The answer was a resounding "Yes!"

I then asked what help meant to those women in crisis. I learned it meant a quick college transfer, a discreet job relocation, or a confidential, supportive place to live for the duration of a pregnancy. These women needed the support of someone who understood their fears and loneliness. They talked about the importance of meeting their professional responsibilities and of being able to meet mortgages and car payments.

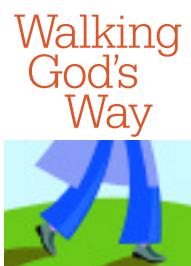
I asked about the fathers of these unborn children. Could they be counted on for help? What support could these women's own families provide? The same sad refrain echoed throughout the stories: men who were important in their lives had walked out. Embarrassed parents had rejected them or weren't even aware of the abortion.

One theme clearly emerged: a woman in this situation isn't experiencing freedom of choice; shame and hurt propel her toward abortion out of desperation because she feels she has no other choice. The more I prayed, the more determined I became to turn my tragedy into a blessing for other mothers.

As a Christian, I needed to ask the essential question, "What would Christ do in this situation?" If he would heal, clothe, and feed these women, then this was what I should do, too. With that realization in mind, my blueprint for the Nurturing Network became a Grand Central Station of caring and support to link each mother-to-be to the help she needed in six vital areas: employment, education, housing, medical care, counseling, and finances.

In two years' time, I conducted a formal marketing study, drew up a realistic strategic plan, and completed a financial analysis and budget. I then invited several of my business colleagues and friends from my corporate days to join our fledgling effort. Their response was encouraging.

Using the proceeds from the sale of our second home as seed money, the Nurturing Network was launched on Mother's Day in 1985. With a small volunteer staff, I



opened the first office in Osterville, Massachusetts, where Bill and I lived at the time. My initial goals were modest: to help just one woman each month. But we ended up serving twelve clients in the first month alone!

That was 9,000 clients ago. They hear about us through word of mouth, from other organizations, on television or radio broadcasts, or in newspaper or magazine articles. The Network has grown to include more than 22,000 dedicated volunteers in the United States and twenty-three foreign countries—friends willing to step forward to help a pregnant woman in need. These supporters may be professionals such as doctors or counselors, caring families with an extra room and love to share, or compassionate people with the heart and means to help financially. Every type of support is needed—and each is deeply appreciated.

I still remember one pregnant young woman, Muriel, who contacted us. Although her job was never formally threatened, her situation was tenuous. At twenty-eight, she'd worked her way to the top of her company and had a visible position within a large interior design firm in a major city. She dreamed of returning to school for a degree in architecture and needed her job in order to pay tuition.

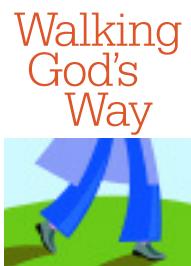
As the weeks crept by and Muriel's waistline thickened, she became increasingly fearful. She was convinced she'd be demoted or lose her job when her pregnancy became obvious. Muriel had never given much thought to abortion. It was something on the evening news that didn't affect her life. Now it beckoned as a quick solution.

Muriel didn't usually watch TV. She just happened to have it on one Friday night and heard me share our Network program with an interviewer. Muriel called our toll-free number in the middle of the night and left a message.

We talked at length early the next morning. She tearfully relayed her concern that if she lost her job, college would be an impossibility. Her parents could never afford to pay for tuition, especially with the extra expense of an infant. When I asked if her boyfriend was supportive, Muriel said, "Phil's not ready for the responsibilities of marriage, and neither am I. Rushing into a hasty marriage would be disastrous."

I listened empathetically and assured her we could help. Within days, we located a Nurturing Home for Muriel near a fine architectural school in another state. The couple she stayed with helped her apply for college admission and find a part-time job.

Several weeks after delivery, Muriel put her daughter up for adoption because of her conviction that children deserve and prosper better with two parents. Although this was a difficult, lonely decision, she also saw it as an opportunity to find a loving, grace-filled solution to a personally agonizing problem. Muriel's confidence and self-respect grew tremendously in the process of turning her unplanned pregnancy into a bountiful blessing. I felt a deep joy as I witnessed Muriel's emotional and spiritual growth.



The saddest moments at the Nurturing Network are when we receive a call or letter from someone for whom our help came too late—like one sobbing woman who was speaking from a pay phone in a laundromat. She'd just come across one of our brochures, telling her that help was available by calling our toll-free number. "I had an abortion yesterday," she cried. "I had no idea you even existed. If only I'd known."

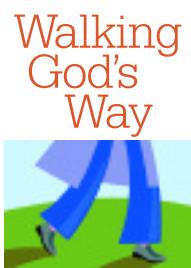
Those words tear at my heart with special poignancy—but they also keep me going. On the days when there doesn't seem to be enough hours and energy available, I hear her voice. I hear another Voice as well: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

This is the Nurturing Network's continuing promise to mothers and children in need: You are not alone. With the Lord's help, we'll carry you in our arms. You don't have to forsake the life of your child out of despair. In the midst of all you're going through, never forget for one moment that your baby is the greatest gift. The gift of love. The gift of life.

—Una McManus is a freelance writer who lives in Maryland. To contact Mary Cunningham Agee at the Nurturing Network, call toll-free 1-800-TNN-4MOM. Or write: The Nurturing Network, Campus of Franciscan University, University Blvd., Steubenville, OH 43952. This article first appeared in the November/December 1997 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.

Thought Provokers

- How might the author's words: "Unless there's a Good Friday, there will never be an Easter Sunday" (remembered from a sermon) give new meaning to your loss?
- Rather than feel bitterness toward women who seem to "get rid of" their babies, the author found empathy in her heart for them. God used her understanding to provide a ministry opportunity. Is God prompting you to ministry as a result of your pain?
- We live in a world that is both seen and unseen. Have you pondered the spiritual link between the loss of your child and what God might want to accomplish in and through your life as a result?



FEATURES

TODAY'S CHRISTIAN
woman



The Mother in Me

I learned how to be a “mom” to others, even though I didn’t have children of my own.

by Dandi Daley Mackall

It was the most dreaded day of the year.

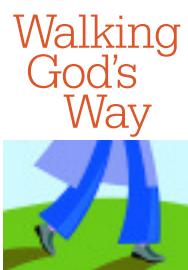
Maybe I should just skip church and stay home under my covers. Pretend it's an ordinary day, I thought. Instead, my husband and I headed for church. Once seated in the back, rather than in our regular pew, I looked around at the other women who seemed to glow this morning. They wore corsages. I buttoned my raincoat, grateful for the morning drizzle that gave me an excuse to hide my uncorsaged dress. As long as nobody says anything, I thought, I'll be ok.

The music started with Bach. I studied my bulletin and almost believed I'd make it through the service until the pastor got to the microphone ... "Happy Mother's Day!" he said to the congregation of proud moms. Happy Mother's Day.

For seven years I'd wanted children and prayed for children, but my womb wouldn't hold a child. Mother's Day marked the childless years for me, underscoring what felt like my failure to become a mom. My husband tried to help by giving me a corsage or volunteering to stay home with me. But we'd run out of ideas on how to survive the day.

In church, when all the mothers were asked to stand so we could pray for them, my pain came to a head. I knew women were standing who'd never wanted to become mothers. I'd heard other women complain regularly about the burdens of motherhood. Yet there they stood. And there I sat. Mother's Day hurt.

It was a week after a particularly grueling Mother's Day when I began finding a path through some of the pain of my childlessness. I'd been attending an inner-city church in Southside Chicago, where I taught a small Sunday school class of junior high students. One girl, Tanya, belonged to a



gang and brought me to wit's end dozens of times during the year. That Sunday, I'd spent half our class time trying to get Tanya to stop punching the other girls.

Tanya didn't stay for church. But as she slipped out the back door, she called to me over her shoulder, "See you around, Mom!" She laughed and made her exit. But before she turned away, I caught her eye. She meant what she said. In some way, I was like a mother to that strong-willed girl who liked to act so tough.

That Sunday, God gave me a glimpse of an extraordinary calling: He could give me spiritual children. I could serve as a mother to a world full of people who need the love I have to give!

I started actively praying for children who needed someone to act like a mother to them. As soon as I opened my heart, my mind began filling with possibilities. There was one seventh-grade boy in my class who needed someone to talk to. He thought he should be able to date but his parents wouldn't allow it. All his friends had girlfriends. I didn't tell him anything his parents hadn't already said—but it helped him to hear it from someone else.

Another classmate, Rosa, only came to Sunday school class twice. But God urged me to pray for Rosa "like a mother" long after she left. Many mornings when I awoke, Rosa was the first thing on my mind. I prayed God would reveal Himself to her, and that she would listen. I asked God to give her a Christian friend, a classmate to help her say no to temptations. I prayed for her school work, her teachers, her parents.

As I began to experience spiritual motherhood with the children in my Sunday school class, I prayed God would give me unconditional love for them. I soon realized that telling my Sunday school kids I loved them didn't go far enough. I had to show it. So I took them to the zoo. Sunday afternoons we played softball in the park. One girl started showing up before Wednesday night prayer meetings so I could help her with her math homework. Several times Tanya stopped coming to my class. Each time, I went looking for her at her home or at the school yard. And every time Tanya was amazed that I wanted her back.

I wasn't the only one caring as a mother in the small missions church in inner-city Chicago. I got to know Karen, who studied nights at a city college. Despite a busy schedule, she still found time to look out for Juanita, a thirteen year old living with a grandmother and eleven siblings. Karen made sure Juanita stayed in school and did her homework.

About the same time, Karen's mother took a ten-year-old girl under her wing. She bought the child school supplies and talked regularly to her about the Scriptures.

**Walking
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Way**



Another woman in the church bought eyeglasses for a boy whose mother couldn't find the time or money to take him for an eye exam.

Mothers are doers, caring unselfishly in practical ways such as giving rides to church or school activities, helping with homework, or babysitting. Or it may show up in the form of hospitality—giving someone a place to stay.

Erin and her husband have no children of their own, but their home is the place high-schoolers bring their friends when they want them to see a good, Christian couple, when they want them to hear the gospel, or when the teens themselves want someone to listen.

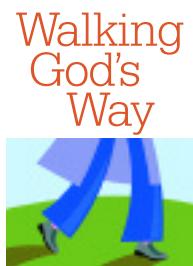
At my own church, the youth pastor and his wife have no children of their own, but they are like parents to dozens of kids. They have a God-given capacity to love and relate to teens, some of whom barely speak to their own parents. One teenager says, "When they ask me how I'm doing, they really want to know. Most people just want you to say fine. I always feel they actually care how I'm doing. So I tell them."

In some cases, we might see the effect we have on another's life. But in others, we may never realize this side of heaven the powerful impact we can have on someone by being like a mother to him or her.

That's the case with Margaret, a widow, who showed unconditional love for her neighbor, eight-year-old Steven, one of the least lovable kids in the neighborhood. He and his mother had lived in a commune for more than a year. Steven never knew his father. Already he'd learned the art of lying. Some days Steven responded to Margaret's love, coming over unannounced to rake her leaves or bring her the morning paper. Other days, he made fun of "the old lady" behind her back. But every day, Margaret showed Steven she was glad to see him. She cut out newspaper articles about his class at school, field trips they had taken, subjects she knew interested him. She asked for a picture of him. Margaret invited Steven and his mother for dinner. And she prayed for both of them.

When Steven and his mother moved away, Margaret grieved. But she knew she'd played an important role in Steven's life. She tried to keep in touch through cards and letters, but eventually lost contact with them. Yet to this day, she hasn't stopped praying for Steven and his mother.

Like Steven, Peg is a woman who, as a young rebellious child, benefited from a spiritual surrogate mom. Now sixty-something, Peg lights up when she talks about Mrs. Kowalski. "For as long as I could remember, Mrs. K. lived next door alone," she says. "Her home was a second home to all of us kids in the neighborhood. We didn't go there for the Bible stories she'd tell us. We went for cookies. But we knew her and trusted her as a mother. To this day, I believe God used her prayers to bring me to



Christ. I went the long way around—through alcohol and back. I wish Mrs. Kowalski hadn't died before I made it 'back.' But someday, I'll tell her about it in heaven."

Spiritual mothering doesn't have to be limited to young children. For example, a college friend of mine was known as "Mom" by four sophomores. Only two years their senior, she had been instrumental in leading them to Christ. She nurtured them and became their spiritual mother. Age doesn't have to be a limiting factor in spiritual motherhood.

Another friend, Janice, talks about a time when she needed a mother. Her husband left her with three small children and no money. She couldn't make the rent and didn't know where to turn. That's when her aunt stepped in, acting like a mother to her.

"Aunt Ruth, who lived a few miles from me, took me in with all three kids," Janice says. "She listened to me, but never asked about things I didn't want to talk about."

I can't name a person who stands out as being a surrogate mother to me, but several women have offered unselfish care when I needed it most. During one of my toughest seasons of life, my friend Laurie checked on me every day and simply did whatever she saw needed doing—laundry, work on my car, grocery shopping. She'd drop by with salad and fruit to make sure I was eating well. Other women have been around at just the right time, with just the right word of advice or encouragement.

When we long for children but don't have them, a vacuum can develop deep inside us. I believe it's God who gives us the desire for children, the desire for motherhood. Where else would we get a yearning to serve, to love unconditionally, to give unselfish care?

Since God gave us the longing, only God can fill it. God may eventually give you biological children. That's up to Him. But right now, this minute, we can allow Him to fill that vacuum with spiritual children. We can answer God's call for spiritual motherhood, a powerful and fulfilling role in its own right.

This Mother's Day I'll rejoice, as I have for a number of years now, in my two adopted daughters and my stepson. I'm now legally one of the standing moms in church on Mother's Day. But I pray that I never forget the pain of those past Mother's Days or the high calling to which God challenged me.

The call to be like a mother to others hasn't ended because I now have children. There are enough people out there who can use a spiritual mother. As great as the joy of motherhood is, there is another joy not to be missed. John wrote, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children [spiritual children] are walking in the truth" (3 John 4).

Don't miss the joys of spiritual motherhood!

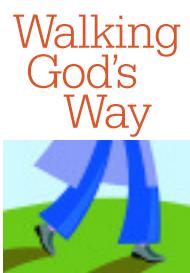
**Walking
God's
Way**



Dandi Daley Mackall is author of Kids Are Still Saying the Dandiest Things (Prima), more than twenty books for adults, and more than one hundred books for children. Her latest book is Kindred Sisters: New Testament Women Speak to Us Today (Augsburg-Fortress). This article first appeared in the May/June 1997 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.

Thought Provokers

- *I know a woman in her 60s who has been single all of her life. In a recent conversation, she told me that she has been a mother in every way except one – she has never been pregnant or given birth. I laughed and told her it sounded like a win-win situation to me. While reading through the articles for this download, that conversation came back to me. I now understand the callousness of my remark, yet I can't help but wonder: What if the need to mother were channeled into ministry? What impact might childless women have on our world?*
- *Mothering involves service, unconditional love and unselfish care. Has God put anyone in your life who needs a mother?*
- *The author writes: "When we long for children but don't have them, a vacuum can develop deep inside us." Have you experienced this vacuum, and what conclusions have you drawn in your own case?*
- *If that vacuum exists within you, what will you do to fill it?*



RESOURCES



Additional Resources

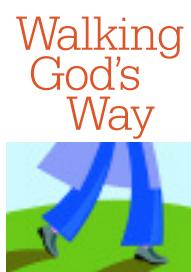
Books to help you further

☞ **Silent Grief: Miscarriage-Child Loss, Finding Your Way Through the Darkness**, by Clara Hinton (New Leaf Press, 1998). Almost 200,000 couples in America each year suffer through the tragedy of miscarriage. And that statistic only tells us about first trimester miscarriages. The emotional pain of longer-term miscarriages, and the untold number of mothers and fathers who kept silent about their hurt, make this form of child loss especially cruel. In this book the author talks about her own grief and interviews many other couples who have dealt with this to let you know you are not alone. She also talks about issues such as stillbirth, missing children, and adult children who succumb to an accident or illness.

☞ **Empty Arms: Hope and Support for Those Who Have Suffered a Miscarriage, Stillbirth, or Tubal Pregnancy**, by Pam Vredevelt (Multnomah, 2001). As joy and anticipation dissolve into confusion and grief, painful questions refuse to go away: Why me? What did I do wrong? Doesn't God care? With the warmth and compassion of a licensed counselor and a Christian woman who has suffered miscarriage herself, Pam Vredevelt offers sound answers, advice, and reassurance to the woman fighting to maintain faith in this heartbreaking situation.

☞ **A Rose in Heaven: A Journey of Hope and Healing for Women who Grieve the Loss of Their Baby**, by Dawn Siegrist Waltman (Heart Rhymes & Roses, 1999). Each year thousands of women lose a child to miscarriage, stillbirth, or early infant death. How can family, friends, and church leaders help in the face of such tragedy? Written by a mother who has experienced the pain, this sympathetic guide provides support for grieving parents, reassurance of God's love, and the hope of heaven.

☞ **Breaking the Silence: Recovering from Miscarriage, Stillbirth, & Early Neonatal Loss**, by Sylvia Sheets McDonald (Carepoint, 2007). The author shares her private and painful experience—expressing grief, anger, and hunger to understand how God can be good and loving and still take away her precious babies. Using Scripture she reminds us that God promises to provide treasures in the midst of darkness and trouble as He provides hope for what may now seem to be a hopeless life. *Breaking the Silence* will encourage you to turn your heart toward God for healing, no matter what the silence might be in your life.



 **An Empty Cradle, A Full Heart: Reflections for Mothers and Fathers**

After Miscarriage, Stillbirth, or Infant Death, by Christine O'Keeffe Lafser (Loyola Press, 1998). Nearly a million parents suffer a miscarriage or infant death each year. Theirs can be a lonely, quiet grief with many deep emotions experienced but not easily expressed. This collection of more than a hundred short meditations beautifully interweaves the overwhelming and very real feelings of bereaved parents with scripture passages that provide comfort, direction, and a sense of hope.

 **I'll Hold You in Heaven**, by Jack Hayford (Gospel Light, 2003). What happened to my baby after she died? Will I ever see her again or recognize her? Why did God let this tragedy happen? What if I've had an abortion? Drawing from concrete passages in Scripture, Hayford offers compassionate, reassuring answers for parents who have lost children through miscarriage, stillbirth, abortion, or early infant death.

 **I'll Hold You in Heaven Remembrance Book**, by Debbie Heydrick (Gospel Light, 2003). While there are many books that address the issue of grieving the loss of a child, this book stands alone by inviting the parents to express their emotions in an interactive way with what they are reading. This book will not only honor and validate the very real loss of a baby lost through miscarriage, stillbirth, or early infant death, but it will also provide parents a way to get through the loss with help from Scripture, encouraging quotes, soothing art work, space for journaling, and a very gentle tone that says, "Your baby and your loss are very significant." The keepsake book provides a place to write one's personal story of loss and "love letters" to the child, and includes a list of loss support resources and practical ideas for treasuring memories of the child.

 **Mommy, Please Don't Cry**, by Linda DeYmaz (Multnomah Gifts, 2003). This is a picture book written for mothers who have lost a child. Since it is written from a child's perspective, it is also meaningful to share with children who are grieving the death of a sibling or friend.

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