

‘The Lord gives and takes away’

Pregnancy after loss



By Audrey Daenzer
St. Paul, Hamel

“Dear Jesus, please let our baby not die, and keep it safe and healthy until it can be born. Amen.”

So prays my six-year-old nightly at bedtime, and each time I am struck by both her familiarity with death and her childlike faith. She knows that babies sometimes die. She speaks often of her younger sister and brother who are with Jesus. Yet she also believes that her Lord can preserve the life of her youngest sibling, still growing in my womb, as easily as He creates life in the first place.

Meanwhile, my own prayers are not nearly so faithful or trusting. I know exactly what can go wrong in pregnancy, because it has already happened to me: two miscarriages, at 17 and 16 weeks respectively, even after the reassurances of morning sickness, healthy heartbeats and tiny kicks in my belly.

And now I am pregnant “after a loss” and overwhelmed with conflicting emotions. I am filled with joy at God’s gift of new life within me, yet troubled with the fear that I will never bring this baby home. The anxiety that began after my first miscarriage comes out in full force. By the time each doctor’s appointment rolls around, I have convinced myself

that there will be no heartbeat and I will have to relive the whole nightmare once again. Memories of my babies, delivered in silence, crowd out the hopes and anticipation of a healthy new infant.

The glowing pregnant women in the baby department at Target seem blissfully naive as they plan their beautiful nurseries. Occasionally I pause to admire the tiny outfits, but I will not buy anything, not even a package of diapers, until the last minute — so I can return it if something goes wrong. I do not want to get my hopes up too high. I do not want to bury another child. I feel alone and weak and powerless. Lord, have mercy!

Every woman’s experience is unique, but for many, a pregnancy following a miscarriage, stillbirth, infant death or similar traumatic experience is cause

for both immense joy and intense anxiety. Excitement over a new baby is often mixed with grief over another baby who has died, fear that the current pregnancy will end in loss, feelings of isolation, guilt, helplessness — the list goes on. Some mothers may relax after reaching the point in pregnancy when a miscarriage previously took place, but others will have no peace of mind until a healthy, screaming baby is in their arms. These reactions are all normal, but some might question whether it is worth trying to have another baby at all. Why not avoid the physical pain and emotional turmoil, the risk of suffering loss again?

The Christian response is uniquely hopeful. Children are a great blessing from God, and we welcome them into our families with joy, while placing our trust in God’s loving care. We bring our little ones to the font; raise them to be faithful Christians; provide them with clothing, food and a loving home.

“**Our children, including those in the womb and those awaiting the resurrection, are in the Lord’s hands. And thus we commend ourselves, our children, our fears and anxieties, our grief and uncertainty — indeed, our whole lives — to Him.**”

Yet like Job — who proclaimed after the death of his 10 children, “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21) — we recognize that our children are not ours to keep. They belong to God, who has entrusted them to us, some for only a short while. This is a hard thing, but also the source of great comfort. Our children, including those in the womb and those awaiting the resurrection, are in the Lord’s hands. And thus we commend ourselves, our children,

our fears and anxieties, our grief and uncertainty — indeed, our whole lives — to Him.

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This faithful trust in God's mercy is reflected beautifully in an 18th-century prayer for pregnant women:

O great God, according to Thy goodness Thou hast blessed me with a fruit of the womb; but who am I that I should bring it into this world? How many mothers have conceived children, but not given birth to them! How many were joyfully anticipating beholding a living fruit, but did not obtain their wish! Therefore, O Lord, Lord, all my desire is before Thee, and my groaning is not hid from Thee. Lord, Lord, what Thou hast graciously given me be pleased to preserve according to Thy mercy. I commit myself entirely to the fatherly protection of Thy mercy. Lord, guard me by day and by night, that I may not meet with harm. ... Let my soul be at rest and peace.*

Amen. God grant this to all Christian pregnant mothers and their children.

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**From Stark's Motherhood Prayers For All Occasions, available as a free download from Emmanuel Press (emmanuelpress.us/downloads).*

Supporting those anxious in pregnancy

Here are some ways to encourage a woman who is pregnant after the loss of a baby:

► **Offer your congratulations!**

God's gift of life is a reason for joy, no matter the circumstances. Include the mother and baby in your prayers, and remind her often that you are praying for them.

► **Avoid clichés:** "Don't worry; everything will be fine this time." "God won't give you more than you can handle."

"Now that you're pregnant again, you can move on." Instead, recognize that the mother may be experiencing very real fears and complicated emotions. If you feel

comfortable, offer to be a listening ear: "I don't know exactly what you're going through, but I'm here if you need to talk."

► **Offer to provide childcare.**

Some pregnancies after loss are high-risk and require extra appointments. Or ask if the family would like help during church. The combination of morning sickness and anxiety, especially while caring for young children, can increase the difficulty of attending church at a time when the comfort of God's Word is desperately needed.

Remember that a healthy baby born after a loss does not replace the baby who has died or "fix" the family's grief

Women who give birth after a loss are at a higher risk for postpartum depression and anxiety. Encourage your friend to seek help from her health care provider if she seems to be struggling.



SUICIDE PREVENTION

Resources focus on biblical response

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States.

The LCMS Office of National Mission continues to respond to the need for resources to support mental health and combat suicide, most recently with the release of a new book by the Rev. Peter Preus. *I Will Grieve for the Suicide* includes chapters on the stigma and shame that are sometimes associated with suicide; the feelings of anger, blame and guilt that may come with the suicide of a loved one; the blessings and limits of psychology in addressing suicide; and a consideration of sin,

grief and grace as they apply to the topic of suicide.

The book and an accompanying Bible study, *Gospel Relief for the Despairing*, are available for free download from LCMS Life Ministry (lcms.org/life).

Also available from Life Ministry is *The Days That Were Formed for Me*. The free, downloadable resource includes chapters by Rev. Dr. John T. Pless, Rev. Dr. Harold Senkbeil and others on topics such as suffering and the theology of the cross, assisted suicide and merciful end-of-life care.

A Biblical Response to Suicide by Kristian Kincaid is available at cph.org.