

“When you’ve experienced loss, it’s scary to embrace hope again. But God invites us to hope, to dare to trust Him with our grieving heart and our broken dreams. If you’re holding this book in your hands, you’ve known that loss (or you love someone who has) and yet, the hope of new life is also upon you. You’ve come to the right place. Teske is someone who has personally walked this journey. She cares deeply about you and wants to help you sort through all that you’re feeling during this time. She’ll walk beside you as a trusted friend and she’ll remind you every step of the way that God is with you and He will not forsake you. May the Lord Himself meet you in the pages of this precious book.”

—**Susie Larson**, national radio host,
author of *Your Beautiful Purpose*

“I wish this book had been available when I was pregnant after loss! Teske hits on all of the major emotions women tend to experience in a subsequent pregnancy—fear, uncertainty, worry, hope, and joy among them. The stories she shares from her own life and from others who have walked this path reassure her readers that such emotions are normal, but she doesn’t leave us there. Instead, she points us to Jesus, not our circumstances, as the true source of hope and joy and peace—something that encourages me as I now parent my two living miracles. I look forward very much to sharing this book with the women I encounter in my Naomi’s Circle ministry and strongly recommend it to others seeking encouragement in this journey.”

—**Kristi Bothur**, MEd, founder of Naomi’s Circle ministry and contributing editor of *Rainbows and Redemption: Encouragement for the Journey of Pregnancy After Loss*

“*Expecting with Hope* is a gift! Not many people understand the complex emotions of pregnancy after loss, but Teske Drake has been there

and it shows. She guides readers through God's Word with tenderness and transparency. Both her personal stories and the stories she shares of other real-life moms will encourage and inspire. This book will be my go-to resource when ministering to expectant moms after loss."

—**Becky Avella**, author of *And Then You Were Gone: Restoring a Broken Heart After Pregnancy Loss*

"Teske Drake knows the anguish of losing a child. She also knows where to take her cracked heart in order to make it whole again. Her honest and helpful book will allow you to regain your joy—finding purpose in your pain and grace among the grit."

—**Karen Ehman**, Proverbs 31 Ministries;
author of seven books including *LET. IT. GO.: How to Stop Running the Show & Start Walking in Faith*; and mom of three on earth and one in heaven

EXPECTING
with
HOPE

EXPECTING *with* HOPE

*Claiming Joy When
Expecting a Baby
After Loss*



Teske Drake

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Expecting with Hope: Claiming Joy When Expecting a Baby After Loss

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For Gabe and Aiyana . . . my two living miracles



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Foreword

There is great joy and reason for celebration when a baby is expected to enter this world. However, I have experienced firsthand that pregnancy doesn't always go as planned. We experienced a miscarriage early on in our childbearing years, as well as the loss of our most recent child, Jubilee, at eighteen weeks along. The pain of pregnancy loss is one that stays in a mother's heart and is an experience that no future child could ever erase. God has made each child one-of-a-kind and graces us, as mothers, with the ability to love each one uniquely.

Throughout the pages of this book Teske Drake shares, with her voice of empathy and experience, words of encouragement in the mix of emotions that you may feel as you experience pregnancy another time around. Like me—and like you—Teske knows the difficulty of loss and the joy of motherhood, and she faithfully reminds us that God has given His Word and the promises contained in it to help us on our motherhood journey and to point us to the source of all hope, joy, and peace—Jesus!

—Michelle Duggar
Mom of TLC's *19 Kids & Counting*

Preface

“When do you think you’ll start to try again?” I despised this question. For a time, I didn’t know if we’d ever “try again.” To do so meant that we’d have to be vulnerable, take risks, and maybe even experience loss again. Fear paralyzed me from the thought of it, and for a season I was perfectly content with having one child to raise. My firstborn son, Gabe, was just four years old when his baby sister, Chloe, died and went to be with Jesus.

Chloe was diagnosed in utero with a chromosomal abnormality (interstitial deletion of chromosome 2) and the accompanying brain condition, holoprosencephaly. The prognosis was 100 percent fatal. We carried her as long as possible, until my body went into premature labor at thirty-two weeks along—labor that couldn’t be stopped. Chloe was born on May 11, 2006, and lived for forty-five minutes before she breathed her last and was ushered into the presence of Jesus: life-giver, life-sustainer, my one true source of all hope. The experience shook me to the core, but I did the only thing I knew to do and turned to the God of all hope: my God who had been there all along, even though I had turned my back on Him years ago. He was faithful to meet me in the depths of my grief, in the hard places of perseverance, and provided me with a strength that could only come from Him. Through Chloe’s birth and death, ministry was born.

More than a year later, my husband and I began to pray about

whether another child was part of our future as a family. For months we prayed for wisdom and discernment, trusting the Lord's leading in our lives. Within just a few weeks of sensing that it was time to try again—something I wasn't quite sure we'd ever be ready for—we learned that we were expecting. Nine months later, Aiyana entered this world as a healthy baby girl who is five (going on fifteen) as I write these words.

The year that followed brought with it a desire for more children. What ensued, however, was more grief. We became pregnant easily—something I certainly do not take for granted, having ministered to many who struggle with fertility challenges. Yet sustaining pregnancy happened to be my particular challenge. I experienced two miscarriages; one at six weeks and another at fourteen weeks—Jesse and Riyah Mae, two more precious children in heaven whom I love and long for. Shortly after these losses, we came to the conclusion that our childbearing days were through. While we haven't made any permanent decisions or taken any physical actions to prevent pregnancy from happening in the future, we feel a great sense of peace that our family is complete.

I share my story with you so that you know I am a mother who can empathize with the mixed emotions you are experiencing as you embark upon this pregnancy journey. While no two pregnancies are ever alike, the painful experience of miscarriage or infant loss brings many lingering emotions and fears into the experience of subsequent pregnancy. As another mother has said so clearly, "The joy and innocence of pregnancy is lost." It is my great hope that we can walk this road together, deal with the grief that's always there, and claim joy along the way. Thanks for trusting me to come alongside you on this journey.

Introduction

Perfect Peace

peace in the promise _____

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.

ISAIAH 26:3

Breathe in. Breathe out. Deep breath. Repeat.

Let me start out by saying this: I'm proud of you. Yes, you. The one who is reading this book and can't believe it herself.

I'm guessing it took a lot of courage to pick up this book. Or maybe picking up the book wasn't so bad, but opening its pages was a whole other story. And oh, to read the words . . . have mercy! Because to open up this book and to read the words printed here on these pages means one very exciting (and scary, mind-boggling, crazy) thing for you: you're pregnant. Again.

And not just any old again, but pregnant after having had the painful experience of loss—whether by miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant loss—and so now, to pick up a book about pregnancy, well there are some pretty major implications. To read a book about pregnancy

means first and foremost that you are, to some degree, ready and willing to embark on this journey. Ready or not, the baby is growing as the Lord continues to knit and weave this little one's precious body together in your womb. Fellow mommy and my sweet friend Sarah, who has walked this road, wisely prayed, "Keep knitting, Lord."

As He knits away in the secret place (Ps. 139:13, 15), I want you to know that I consider it a great honor and absolute joy to be able to take you by the hand and walk this journey with you. We are going to spend quite some time together, digging deep into some real and relevant biblical promises that I pray are of great encouragement to you along the way. With the Lord's guidance, it is my great hope that you are able to claim joy amidst the grief as a mommy who is *expecting with hope*.

What This Book Is and Is Not

Let's be clear from the beginning as to what this book is *not*. It's not a one-size-fits-all approach to dealing with pregnancy after loss. I can't offer you any magic formula, super fab prenatal vitamin, or stress-eliminating strategies that will replace every unpleasant emotion with pure joy. I wish I could. I would love to see women spared from the pain of grief and the torment of anxiety that accompanies pregnancy after loss.

But in a way, I'm glad I can't, because I have the absolute joy of introducing you to the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17), the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is God who grants peace. It is God who brings healing. It is God who delivers and redeems. The purpose of this book is to guide you into a relationship with God that brings peace: first for your weary soul and second for your circumstances. God offers such peace to us—*perfect peace*—as we place our trust in Him. Peace with God comes by way of the cross of His Son Jesus Christ. Let me introduce you to Jesus, the Prince of Peace (appendix A). Jesus will be our guide throughout these pages. It is my hope and prayer that you follow Him each and every step of the

way, and that your first steps will lead you to your knees in surrender. Jesus longs to be your peace and to bring you peace.

How to Use This Book

Each chapter of this book focuses on a different promise from Scripture as it relates to the experience of pregnancy after miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant loss. Bible verses, which I call *Peace in the Promise*, as well as my own story and the stories of other women, are interspersed throughout the teaching of each chapter. *Pregnancy prayers* will help guide you into a quiet time with the Lord. In addition, each chapter concludes with one week's worth of five devotions, including a *pregnancy promise*, relevant Scripture, a short anecdote, prayer, and a journaling prompt called *pen the promise* to help you apply the devotions to your own situation. I encourage you to be honest in your responses, and write them down. Recording your responses will allow you to eventually add them to your child's baby book, if you so choose.



The Promise of a Hope and a Future

peace in the promise _____

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

JEREMIAH 29:11

You open the first pages to find yet another cliché: God has a plan and a purpose. If you’re reading this book, you’ve no doubt heard such clichés a time or two before as you trudged through the pain of grief (and perhaps still are). Well-intentioned loved ones, friends, and acquaintances offered up clichés like:

It was God’s plan.
I’m sure it’s for the better.
Heaven needed another angel.

I imagine you recognize these clichés and, sadly, can probably expand upon this list far beyond what I could manage to think up on my own. I'm sorry that you've endured the experience of miscarriage or infant loss. It's an isolating experience. My hope for us, in the time that we will spend together traveling through these pages, is that we can sift through the messiness of grief and embrace moments of joy along this journey of pregnancy after loss.

Hear the depths of my heart when I present this truth to you: there *is* a hope and a future. God's Word tells us clearly, as we saw in our peace-in-the-promise Bible verse from Jeremiah. God knows the plans for our future, which consist of hope, not harm. I can't guarantee that this means a carefree, full-term pregnancy resulting in a healthy baby. Quite frankly, that's a promise I wouldn't dare make, though it is my deepest desire for you. But I can guarantee that God's Word is true, real, and relevant for each and every one of us, regardless of our circumstances in life.

In the gospel of John, chapter 17, Jesus was praying for His disciples. He asked God the Father to "Sanctify them by the truth" and went on to declare, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). Jesus Himself was acknowledging to God that His Word is true. Paul's second letter to Timothy states that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16–17). I point these verses out so that we may know that God's Word is true; it's "alive and active" (Heb. 4:12) and is not mere cliché. With this truth in mind—the authority and accuracy of God's Holy Word—we will delve into a deeper understanding of who God is and of the peace He brings through His promises.

Your Creator Knows You

I've found words from Psalm 139 to be a healing balm to my hurting soul in the aftermath of loss, reminding me of God's loving involvement in each of my babies' lives:

For you created my inmost being;
 you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
 your works are wonderful,
 I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you
 when I was made in the secret place,
 when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed body;
 all the days ordained for me were written in your book
 before one of them came to be. (vv. 13–16)

It's possible these verses have been of comfort to you, as well, as you've grieved over the loss of your baby prior to this pregnancy. And as I say *grieved over*, by no means do I intend to imply that your grief is over. Rather the idea of grieving over my babies illuminates painful memories of many nights I spent hunched over with emptiness, longing, and pain for my three little ones who are in heaven. The hard work of grief—yes, it is work—is a continuous process.

These words from Psalm 139 that have brought comfort during times of mourning have also brought me hope and encouragement in times of expectation, especially as I think back to the time of my pregnancy with Aiyana, our precious daughter, born after Chloe who is in heaven. Just as I had been comforted in my loss by the truth that God knew each day that was ordained for Chloe before it came to be, I gleaned comfort in knowing that the life of Aiyana, my unborn child, was also in His hands. As keenly as He knew both of them, He also knew me. He knew my fears, my anxieties, my hopes, and my dreams, and He loved me more than I could fathom. I had to let these truths sink into the depths of my soul as I wrestled with God's good plan and questioned whether He truly had a future and a hope for me.

While these verses from the middle of Psalm 139 are of great

comfort and encouragement, it's important that we examine the psalm from the beginning. The psalmist, King David, begins by declaring:

You have searched me, LORD,
and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue
you, LORD, know it completely.
You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you. (vv. 1–12)

These verses paint a beautiful picture of how intimately our Creator God knows the psalmist. These words also convey His intimate knowledge of each and every one of us.

Consider how you might apply the truth from these verses into your daily life as a woman who is expecting with hope . . .

When two pink lines appear, He is there.

When you don't know whether to rejoice or mourn, He is there.

When you hear that first heartbeat,

He is there.

When you grumble over morning sickness—

then thank Him that you have it—He is there.

When you see those first glimpses of your little one through ultrasound,

He is there.

When your mind races with what-ifs,

He is there.

When you struggle with guilt over embracing a tinge of joy,

all the while missing your little one(s) in heaven,

He is there.

When you lie in wait for movement,

holding your breath with each and every kick,

He is there.

On that day when your precious child enters this world,

there too, He will be.

With each of these moments, in every thought, worry, fear, and celebration, He is there. We will dive deeper into the promise of His presence in chapter 3, but for now, take heart as you rest in the knowledge that God knows you intimately and has a future and a hope in store.

With All Your Heart

God's hope and future for you is not some far-off promise. The promise of a hope and a future is a promise to embrace right now, in the present. We began this chapter with the words, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jer. 29:11). That

chapter of God's Word goes on to unveil the key to this promised hope and future: "Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (vv. 12–13). This is a promise to embrace now, in these very moments of seeking. God is calling you to seek Him with all your heart. All of it. And when you seek Him with all your heart, He is sure to be found, just as His Word proclaims.

If you're anything like me, seeking with all your heart can be a bit of a challenge. Not because you don't desire to seek God, His will, or His plan and purpose. Truly, I constantly long for that. But I struggle in giving it *all* to Him. At times life has been filled with turmoil, heartaches have taken me into the deep, and worry has gotten the best of me. Sure, circumstances in life have something to do with it, but not nearly as much as the circumstances of my heart. When I'm seeking God with all my heart, trusting in Him and who He says He is, I truly experience perfect peace. My circumstances may not change, but my perspective sure does.

In contrast, if I'm trying to guard my heart with my own strength, then I'm not truly seeking God with all that I am and all that He's asked of me. As a result, I fail to let Him be my peace. We need to allow the peace of God to rule in our hearts and let Him do the work of standing guard. He withholds no good thing from those whose walk is blameless, according to Psalm 84:11. It's difficult to seek God wholeheartedly and trust Him rather than ourselves, especially when it comes to the life of our child. Thanks be to God for His patience and His mercy in our lives; He is with us when we wonder (worry) and when we wander (stray).

peace in the promise —————

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 4:7

Wondering . . . and Wandering

There will be times, and likely have been already, when wondering and wandering become part of your experience while pregnant after a loss. You may be wondering what in the world I mean by these two words that sound so much alike, yet contrast in meaning. Let's explore.

Wondering. According to Merriam-Webster, the primary definition for wondering is, "to be in a state of wonder" or "to feel surprise." This could describe many of us at hearing the news of our pregnancy, whether we were "trying" or not. As a mother whose living children are twelve and six years old, I remain in a state of wonder when I watch them interact; see them run off the bus, across the front yard, and into our home, racing to get to me first; or gaze on them when they are fast asleep. It's an amazing, awesome thing to be entrusted by the Creator with the care of these little ones, starting from the moment they are conceived. God chose me to be the mother to all five of my children; three in heaven and two here on earth. God chose you to be the mother of your little ones as well; those whom you've had to say good-bye to, those who may already be in your care, and this little one who now grows within. My, the wonders of an unborn baby growing and developing in a mother's womb, reliant upon her for his or her every need. Yes, this is a wonder!

A secondary definition of *wondering* offered up by Merriam-Webster is, "to feel curiosity or doubt." Bingo. This may be more like the wonder you can relate to as you journey through pregnancy after loss. Wondering thoughts tend to permeate our minds, our hearts, and our reactions to every physical symptom (or lack thereof) that we experience. During my pregnancy with Aiyana, I recall wondering whether she would also be diagnosed with a chromosomal abnormality, as her sister Chloe was. Even after the ultrasound revealed a healthy, growing baby girl, I wondered whether she would be born alive. Given my past experience with loss, wondering in this manner seemed to be the default. Such thoughts have the potential to consume us if we aren't careful.

Wandering. Merriam-Webster defines wandering as "to move about without a fixed course, aim, or goal; to go idly by." In pregnancy, we

certainly have a fixed course in mind: forty weeks of smooth sailing, periodic appointments, and milestone moments resulting in a full-term, healthy baby. Those of us who've endured loss know well that there is no fixed course in pregnancy. Our naïveté died just as quickly as our precious babies left our wombs. So to say that we are moving about this pregnancy without a fixed course may be accurate. After all, we've conditioned ourselves to believe that nothing is certain and that anything can happen along the way. Hard experience serves as the basis for this mind-set.

A secondary definition of *wandering* offered up by Merriam-Webster asserts, "to go astray." Let's ponder this idea of going astray, specifically in regard to our emotional and spiritual lives. Have you ever gone astray? Have you ever wandered off course? I certainly have. In my sin, I have wandered far from God.

I think specifically about the time when a tragedy in our family sent me into an absolute tailspin. I was eighteen years old and in my freshman year of college when my stepbrother, Chad, was killed in a car accident by a drunk driver. I had grown up with Chad as an older brother and considered him such, as his dad and my mom married when I was ten years old. Though I had surrendered my life to Jesus at the age of sixteen and had entered into a relationship with the Prince of Peace, this loss shook me to the core. I wandered far from God, initially questioning whether He even existed. My mind couldn't reconcile the injustice of it all with what I had been taught about God's character. It didn't make sense to me that the innocent died while the guilty lived. It wasn't until later that I appreciated that that's precisely what Christ did for me. When I returned to my college dorm room, after being home for a week or two with family, my roommate had taped a note on my side of our shared mirror, and in her own handwriting it said: "For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jer. 29:11). I'll never forget those words. It wasn't until the next emotional earthquake several years later—the prenatal

diagnosis of Chloe—that I turned back to God, but throughout those intervening years, He never let me go. Even though I was wandering, He remained constant, and His promises proved true.

We all do this to some degree or another. We wander off course spiritually and emotionally. As I think about the experience of pregnancy after loss, I remember how every day I wrestled with my wandering emotions. My heart longed to grieve for Chloe, who was in heaven, but it also wanted to rejoice for this baby who was yet to be born. Add in the hormonal surges, and I was an emotional roller coaster. Can you relate? Are you in a place of wandering now—spiritually or emotionally?

I've walked through several more trials since the time of my pregnancy after loss—including two more losses by miscarriage and a major marital trial. My wondering and my wandering were managed only by resting in God's promises, in His Word, and in the reality that He does have a hope and a future for me. That hope and future don't guarantee a trial-free earthly existence. Rather, by embracing the promise of the future hope He has in store—made available only through His Son Jesus—there is peace now and eternity forevermore.

peace in the promise —————

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

ROMANS 5:1–2

Embracing the Promise

You don't have to know what the future looks like because you can trust in the One who's ordained it. This is where faith comes into play. According to Scripture, "Faith is confidence in what we hope for and

assurance about what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1). We need to embrace this promised hope and future now. For some, it will mean surrendering lives to Jesus for the very first time and entering into a faith in God that you’ve never known. In the apostle Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, he proclaimed, “Now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2). I echo Paul’s words; now is the time! Don’t wait for the future to unfold before you place your trust in Him. Trust Him now, so that as your future unfolds—whatever the outcome—He is there to take you by the hand.

For those who’ve already placed their trust in Christ and who’ve acknowledged Jesus as Lord of their life, may the encouragement to embrace the promise be a challenge to live out your faith with great hope and a sense of peace. You will face difficult days and may be prone to wonder and to wander. In those circumstances, may you surrender to God, who holds your hope and your future in His hands.

As we trust in God by believing what His Son Jesus Christ endured for each and every one of us on the cross, there is perfect peace. We possess peace with God because our sins are forgiven, which means that we will experience eternity in heaven; what greater future hope could there be? We also experience peace in life as a result of our genuine faith, even amid difficult times. Do you truly know the Prince of Peace? I pray that you would meet with Him today.

My Pregnancy Prayer for You

Creator God, I come before You on behalf of the woman who is reading here and I pray boldly that she would understand, through the power of Your Holy Word, how intimately You know and love her. May she embrace the truth that You have a future and a hope in store for her and for the precious child that You are knitting together in her womb. Father, give her faith to believe that Your promises are true, even when feelings and circumstances try to convince her otherwise. Bring peace for this journey, Lord. Help her to embrace her future and hope in You, now. Amen.

Plans for a Future Hope

pregnancy promise _____

God has a future hope in store for you!

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

JEREMIAH 29:11

Lindsay was one of the first friends I told when I became pregnant with Aiyana. Together, we cofounded the Mommies with Hope ministry and were in our first year of carrying out the support group meetings for women who, like us, had experienced the loss of their babies. I remember being incredibly nervous—nervous about telling her (or anyone else for that matter), nervous about the pregnancy, nervous about whether things would truly turn out the way I hoped. Nervousness was just one of many emotions I experienced during my pregnancy with Aiyana.

Shortly after sharing my news with Lindsay, she gifted me with a treasure that now sits neatly on Aiyana’s nightstand—a square, wooden plaque with the word *Hope* adorned across the top, followed by these words from the Bible: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jer. 29:11).

Aiyana was yet to be born, but Lindsay gave me the gift as a reminder that hope always lives. Her gift helped take my focus off of the *what ifs* regarding my pregnancy. Instead, my focus became what had always been true: God’s plans for me and my precious baby who was growing within me. He has given us a future and hope, just as His Word promised.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your perfect plan and purpose for me

and my unborn child. You have a wonderfully beautiful purpose for each and every one of us, Lord, and we rest in this promise today. Help me to trust in Your plans, especially when anxiety weighs down my heart. My hope is in You, Jesus. Amen.

pen the promise _____

Do you believe that God has a future and hope for you? Journal your response and explain why you believe or doubt this truth from Scripture.

Each Day Ordained

pregnancy promise _____

God knows each day.

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

PSALM 139:16

Before we saw two lines on a positive pregnancy test, heard that first murmur of a heartbeat, and long before we captured a glimpse of our little one through the technology of ultrasound, God was there. Our Creator God is weaving and knitting this little one together and has chosen the secret places of your precious body to give this tiny baby a place to grow and thrive. Each day is ordained for this precious child, just as you have been ordained to be this baby's mother. What an amazing gift to ponder.

I reflect back to my fourth pregnancy. I found out that I was pregnant just about as early as a woman possibly could. I vividly remember the joy and excitement—amidst the great trepidation—that the news of this pregnancy brought. One week later, at six weeks along in the pregnancy, I began to bleed, and it was confirmed by ultrasound and blood tests that my baby, Jesse, was gone. It was so early on that there was no “evidence” of the baby, and ultrasound revealed only an empty yolk sac. I was deeply saddened by the loss but encouraged by the truth that even though I had no tangible evidence of my baby, the Lord knew each and every one of that precious child's days. The Lord knew my child and what this baby's earthly life would entail before I could possibly know that Jesse was alive inside of me. While Jesse's existence was brief on earth, I have eternity to look forward to in heaven with this little one.

I share this story not to alarm you or cause concern, but to offer hope in the truth that while you may not be able to see the unformed body of your little one who grows within you now, you can trust that Creator God has already ordained each and every day. You can rely on God, even when you are unsure, because He knows all things. Despite the pain and sadness of our early miscarriage, I can look back and see how God was involved in every detail of Jesse's life. God is also involved in the details of your unborn child's life and you can trust that no matter the outcome, He knows each day before even one of them comes to be. He knew your yesterday, and He knows your tomorrow. In this knowing, there is great hope.

Heavenly Father, I am in awe that You have chosen me to be this baby's mother. Help me, Lord, to embrace this high calling that You have placed upon my life and to do so with faith, even when past experience and fear of loss again make it so hard. I long to know this child intimately, just as You know me and this baby You've blessed me with. Amen.

pen the promise _____

It is true that the Lord knows each day that is ordained for your child. As a mother, consider your own hopes and dreams for your child and write them down now. In prayer, surrender your list to your Sovereign God and ask Him to align your heart to His good and perfect will for your unborn child.

All Things for Good

pregnancy promise _____

God's plans are always for good!

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

ROMANS 8:28

I vividly recall a lunch conversation with a good friend. It was after the loss of my daughter Riyah Mae, who was now my third baby in heaven. In two years' time, I had managed to give birth to a healthy girl and then experience two miscarriages just a few months apart. My friend asked me how I was doing, and I knew she meant for me to tell her how I was *really* doing. So I told her it was hard. In my lament, I said, "I should have five children right now." My sweet friend said something in the most gentle way. "Teske," she said. "You're right. On earth, it would not be humanly possible for you to have all of your children with you. But in heaven, you have three who are already there."

We went on to talk this through, and I couldn't agree more. Because of the timing of the pregnancies and the way that they overlapped, there is no possible way that all five of my children could've been born had they survived. It pains me deeply to think about. I wish that all five of them were here with me in our little three-bedroom bungalow. But God, in His great plan and mercy, has made a way for me to one day go to them. Even now, He is working things out for my good as I continue to trust Him. He is doing the same for you, my friend.

Heavenly Father, I trust that Your plans are for good and that You are working all things together for good, even when it doesn't seem to make sense. Lord, I pray that You would help me to know and understand Your

love. Help me to see Your mighty hand at work in my circumstances, even when it's difficult to look beyond the moment. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

pen the promise _____

How have you seen God working all things together for your good? Write about it now.

Untroubled Heart

pregnancy promise _____

Jesus brings comfort to a troubled heart.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me [Jesus].”

JOHN 14:1

Days are long and nights are hard when walking through life with a troubled heart. Add the physical and physiological implications of growing a whole new person in your body to the mix, and the scenario can be debilitating. When my friend Betsy was pregnant with her daughter, Layla, she struggled with believing that her daughter was going to live. Betsy had one healthy child, but since his birth, she had experienced back-to-back miscarriages. So when she became pregnant after the miscarriages, the default setting of her heart and mind was to prepare for the worst.

When Betsy was around six weeks along with Layla, she received word that hormone levels from her recent blood test didn't come back as great as hoped. This news was extremely discouraging, and she braced herself for the potential of a third miscarriage. She had to wait for a few days to retest and see if the numbers were increasing. During that period of waiting, Betsy experienced an unburdening of her understandably troubled heart. She cried incessantly in bed while a close friend came and held her. As Betsy recalled this experience, she told me, “In that moment, I just had to give this pregnancy up to God, knowing that whatever it resulted in was His plan and only He knew what would happen.” As a result, she says it was “like a weight had lifted [by] putting my trust of this pregnancy in Him.” I'm happy

to say that Betsy's results came back positively and the pregnancy progressed normally. Layla is now almost a year old. But this doesn't mean that there weren't struggles along the way. It's a constant fight of the will to live in surrender to God and His plans. Our natural tendency is to control.

What we can learn from Betsy is that there is peace in the surrender, regardless of the outcome. God wants to carry the weight of our burdens and bring peace to our troubled hearts. Jesus Himself tells us to believe the Father and to believe also in the Son. Give your troubles over to Him today!

Dear God, please be with me as I struggle with circumstances that bring trouble to my heart. Help me, Lord, to believe in You and to believe also in Your Son Jesus, who brings great peace. Lord, please replace the troubles of my hurting and confused heart with a peace that passes understanding. I give my troubles over to You. I need your peace, Jesus! Amen.

pen the promise _____

Write the troubles of your heart in your journal. In prayer, ask God to carry the weight of these burdens. As a symbol of your surrender, tear this sheet out of your journal, rip it into pieces, and discard or safely burn it.

God Can Do All Things

pregnancy promise _____

God's purpose prevails.

"I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted."

JOB 42:2

We are blessed with modern medicine, diagnostic procedures, screenings, and interventions that can be a wonderful blessing to an expectant mother. At the same time, the options can be overwhelming. Should we do this screening or not? What if an undesirable result comes back? How can we be sure if a diagnosis is accurate? These questions, and more, rise to the surface during pregnancy. Some women who've experienced a previous loss find pursuing screenings is a must, while others choose to avoid such tests. Each woman must decide for herself.

What you can know and trust in without a doubt is that God's purpose will prevail. He doesn't need a screening or a test to determine the fate of your little one because He is the creator of this child to begin with. He knows each day of this baby's life before one of them comes to be (Ps. 139:16), and He has numbered every hair upon your child's precious head (Luke 12:7). In our key verse above, Job, a righteous man who was greatly afflicted, recognizes that God's purpose ultimately prevails. It was he who said, "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (Job 1:21). I ask you in all sincerity: can you echo the words of Job as you consider your own circumstances? It's difficult to give praise when all is stripped away. In the moment, it seems impossible. But with God, who can do all things, nothing is impossible.

Father in heaven, You are a good God with plans for good. Your

purpose prevails, always. You can do all things, Lord. Be with me and my precious baby that I am carrying now. Bestow upon me Your favor of peace as I navigate the many care options that pregnancy presents. Guide and direct me, Lord. Help me to ultimately trust in You and Your mighty plan. Amen.

pen the promise _____

As you think of your pregnancy and your history of loss, what is your reaction to Job's words in the key verse above? Write about it in your journal.