

Walking through the Dark Valley of Miscarriage



by Sue Nicewander with Jodi Jewell

Even though I walk through the valley of
the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
(Ps. 23:4)

In a sin-cursed world, suffering and death are part of human existence. My heart has ached beside a devastated friend whose six-year-old son was crushed under a truck in front of their home. I have wept with the mother of a nine-month-old infant who lost a painful battle with brain cancer.

The dark finger of death reached into our family in 2003 when our daughter Jodi and her husband Matt visited for the Christmas holidays. Their gift to us was the announcement of their first pregnancy, but our delight was very short-lived. Her eyes brimming with tears, Jodi quietly told us that their precious gift from God had been taken away just a few hours earlier.

As a mother, all I could do was grieve with Jodi and Matt. As a counselor who has never experienced a miscarriage, I burned with questions. What kind of help should I offer? Does miscarriage differ from other human

death? How does the loss of an unborn child affect parents and those who interact with them? What compels them to move toward or away from God?

My questions led me on an email and telephone quest through which God opened the hearts of nine young Christians (Jodi, Matt, Anita, Nancy, Ruth, Kent, Erin, Mindy, and Andrea) who wanted to help us understand their walk through the dark valley of miscarriage. They share their questions, their struggles, and the means God has used to strengthen their faith so that others might find comfort.

The Frequency of Miscarriage

One out of four pregnancies in the early stage, between thirty-five and fifty days, ends in miscarriage. After those first weeks, there is a 5 percent chance to miscarry during a first pregnancy. Frequency rises to 20 percent after one miscarriage, 28 percent after two, and 43 percent after three.

Following miscarriage, the mother normally experiences intense emotions, physical pain, aching, and fatigue. This can be hard for the father to witness. "One of the biggest struggles was the feeling of helplessness," Matt explains. "It's very difficult as a husband to watch your wife go through the physical and emotional reality of a miscarriage and feel like you are powerless to help her."

Ruth has lost two babies to miscarriage.

**Sue Nicewander is executive director and biblical counselor at Biblical Counseling Ministries, Calvary Baptist Church, Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin. Jodi Jewell, now a mother of two, is Sue Nicewander's daughter. Jodi and husband Matt reside in Madison, Wisconsin.*

She remarks, "I have learned so much about conception and miscarriage statistics in a medical sense. It is amazing that life is ever created with the statistics the way they are. It makes you realize how much life is a miracle and is to be treasured."

The Aftermath of Miscarriage

Parents respond to their loss in various ways. Anita experienced shock and bewilderment: "How could this be happening when life was just starting to come together for us?"

Erin wrestled with an enigma: "God surprised us with a pregnancy and when we finally accepted the idea, He took the baby away."

Nancy found the process to be sacred. "I had so many friends who had gone through miscarriages that I felt it was God doing something very natural. I was sad, don't get me wrong, but for me, it wasn't devastating for some reason."

Among those we interviewed, we noted some generally shared difficulties.

Unacknowledged Loss

Miscarriage differs from other human death. Ruth explains, "My family and friends didn't know about this little life developing in me. It was only through my talking about these babies that they came to know them." But she mourns, "I can't name either of my babies. Both died before we were able to determine the sex. I don't know how to address them or what to call them. I also don't have a place to go to remember them."

Unfortunately, the mother's feelings of loss are commonly dismissed as unreal. Lingering emotional or physical pain may even be considered irrational or hysterical. The mother may find it difficult to be treated as though her baby never existed. Forced to suffer silently, she may lay blame or vent her feelings on her husband—a dangerous pitfall capable of seriously damaging a marriage.

Marital Disconnection

In general, mothers are more acutely impacted by the loss than are fathers. Often the husband does not sufficiently recognize the depth of the grief that his wife experiences. He may appear aloof to her. Most wives recognize

that, in some respects, their husbands are incapable of fully understanding their feelings because they have not had the same physical connection with the child. The husband's attitude is frequently perceived to be insensitive or even harsh: "I miss this baby, too, but I'm ready to move on. Why aren't you?"

Kent admits, "I could have assured my wife earlier that it was not her fault. To me, that was obvious. That idea didn't cross my mind, but later she said she needed to hear me say that."

Though fathers may not completely comprehend the struggle, many of them experience the loss deeply and try to relate to their grieving wives. Anita found comfort in her husband's expressions of support. "My husband amazed me," she writes. "In the days immediately following the miscarriage, he would hold me for what seemed like hours, relieving the pain of my cramping uterus with constant pressure of his hands. He listened attentively and sympathetically as I shared my roller-coaster feelings. I couldn't remember him showing such concern since early in our six-year dating relationship. In our new jobs together, sometimes he would take a break to let me cry. Other times he would return to our office with a bouquet of flowers for me."

Kent reached out quietly, setting aside his own grief to minister to his wife. "It's quite possible that I took it harder than the average person," he observes. "What I really found interesting was that when my wife had an emotional outpouring, I would not. My attention focused on trying to comfort her."

Matt describes a conundrum faced by many fathers. "Because I felt helpless to make things better, anything I did try (comforting, praying for/with her, etc.) felt trite to me. I discovered over several months that I simply didn't understand how profoundly this miscarriage had impacted and hurt Jodi. Because there was not the same physical bond between me and the baby as there was between Jodi and the baby, I frankly didn't perceive how deeply she was hurt by the miscarriage. I was confused when she wanted to give the baby a name. That probably made me appear indifferent/distant from her and her needs."

Loneliness

Loneliness is a frequent visitor to a woman who feels disconnected from husband, family, friends, and God. Her isolation is particularly heightened when she believes she is the only one mourning her baby or acknowledging the baby's existence.

"I have found so few want to talk about this," Ruth writes. "It is such a lonely experience because it is so individual."

Encounters with pregnant women or mothers of living infants become especially painful. Jodi recalls that the first baby shower she attended after her miscarriage was difficult. "Though I was happy for my friend, sadness shadowed the celebration for me," she explains. "I wanted to join in wholeheartedly, but my heart was still bruised from losing my own child, and I was more of a spectator than a participant."

Emotional Highs and Lows

The wife who suffers a miscarriage usually finds herself on an emotional roller coaster that dips and slides unexpectedly into shock, numbness, bewilderment, and distressing thoughts. She may be perplexed at the intensity of her feelings, especially when her husband is supportive and she calls on her faith to help her. Alone with her thoughts, she often finds depression her close companion. She may get caught in a vortex of intense emotional pain, denial, fantasy, and negativity. Anger may punctuate her relationship with her husband and family. She may resent those who force her to move on. Sometimes a paralyzing fear of physical problems, future miscarriages, or frightening life changes leads to self-protective measures such as hiding and defensiveness. She may become immobilized by sluggishness and fatigue, experiencing difficulty concentrating or sleeping.

Yet even in the face of such agony, several women expressed reluctance to let go of the emotions that tortured them. "If I let go of these emotions, then I let go of the memory of this child," one young mother explains. "Am I somehow agreeing that this child did not exist?"

A Maze of Questions

Not surprisingly, questions surged throughout the heartache of miscarriage.

Am I a mother? Ruth describes her struggle

when people ask how many children she has. "Somehow, because my babies were six weeks gestation, they are not counted as my children. It makes things uncomfortable." She recalls a Mother's Day in church when expectant mothers received a rose: "If I had been pregnant for just two more weeks, I would be getting that rose," she laments. On another occasion she felt conflicting emotions when mothers were asked to stand up. "My baby is in heaven," she thought. "Should I stand or not?"

Was it my fault? One woman observes, "It is so easy to look back over the period of time before you knew you were pregnant. I shouldn't have worked so hard on the painting, or I should have slept more. I skipped my vitamins for one day. Maybe I lifted my daughter too much. Somehow, I am to blame here. God allowed this to happen as a result of the impact of sin back in Eve's day."

What can I do to prevent this from happening again? "Is there anything else we could have done?" asks one young husband. "Would it have been helpful to monitor levels of hormones once a week and supplement as needed?"

And Spiritual Questions

Not surprisingly, theological issues came into question.

Why me? "Why did this happen to me when I wanted this baby and others just throw them in the trash or abort or do bad things while they are pregnant?"

How can a loving God let this happen? Has God withdrawn His love from me? "People said, 'God loves your baby so much that He wanted the baby with Him,'" Jodi recalls. "I thought, 'Does God love my baby more than He loves me?' Even if you're blaming your husband or yourself, in a lot of ways you're blaming God. You feel forsaken by Him. You think, 'Do you really hate me so much that you would do this to me?'"

Other questions included: *Will I ever see my child again? Do babies go to heaven?*

Walking Through the Dark Valley with Someone Who Has Had a Miscarriage

The following suggestions and principles may be used by believers in any setting to enhance biblical discipleship with someone who has experienced a miscarriage.

Listen Compassionately

Patiently listen without judging. Compassionate listening and careful questions are especially important with a mother who believes her pain has been dismissed as irrelevant or unimportant. Ruth comments, "I got the most help when people came beside me and grieved with me. When Christ said to mourn with those that mourn and rejoice with those that rejoice, He was right. It is very healing."

Gently get involved without pushing. Offer to spend time walking with parents through their grief. Point tenderly to the Lord all along the way. "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Encourage faithful church attendance and small group interaction to allow for appropriate burden-sharing.

Anita saw the hand of God in friends He brought to her during her time of grief. "I felt like my life was in an upheaval, but I could also see God's care in providing me loving support when I would desperately need it. I couldn't help but believe He loved me and was aware of the details of my life."

Speak Carefully

Be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit to know when to speak and when to be quiet. Don't say something just to make yourself feel useful or helpful. And don't try to fix the situation by rationalizing the experience, trying to reason away the pain, explaining the unexplainable or offering solutions for the loss.

Avoid pat answers such as "It is God's way of handling deformities," "God loved your baby so much that He wanted the baby with Him in heaven," "Well, at least you have your other child(ren)," "I know how you feel," "God planned it this way," "It wasn't really a baby," or "You can try again." Such comments are not only insensitive, but they deny the inscrutable transcendence of our God who often does not choose to supply answers.

And please don't say "I'm praying for you" unless you're actually going to pray. Jodi said she became tired of hearing those words because she didn't believe them. "I'll pray for you" is a common Christian lie. Prove you are praying by immediately stopping to pray with the parents. Then let them know that you will continue to

pray for them and how you are approaching God on their behalf. Periodically ask if they have further needs for which you may pray. Then pray.

Jodi advises, "Say 'I'm sorry for your loss,' but that's all unless she asks for your advice. It's better to do more listening than talking. Just be there for her. Our society is uncomfortable with silence, with quietness. But be quiet." Friends and counselors alike should be careful to acknowledge the loss without gushing or feeling like the subject must be brought up every time they see the parents outside the counseling office. Grieving couples want to be able to talk about other things, too, without pretending like the miscarriage didn't happen.

Share the experience of loss you have in common, not in great detail, but to express concern and to offer hope. "I think the one thing I would have liked would have been for someone to tell me (maybe just by relating their own story) how difficult it is for a husband to fully appreciate what a miscarriage means to his wife," recalls Matt. "It's not at all that the miscarriage was an unimportant or insignificant thing in my mind or heart; it's just that I didn't appreciate the extent to which it impacted Jodi (both right after the miscarriage and for many months afterwards). Hearing about this from someone else who had gone through it would have been helpful."

Be Patient

Scripture allows for time to mourn (Eccl. 3:1,4,7). Give parents the time and space they need to grieve. "Let the parent cry with you," Jodi advises. "This is probably the most important thing you can do." Rather than apologizing for your ineptitude when the mother's tears flow, express your compassion at her suffering. Be careful to express sorrow rather than disapproval. Ruth was criticized for weeping, but she wisely answered from Psalm 56: "God knows of our tears. He even has a bottle to collect them. It is okay for me to grieve. I don't have to pretend that everything is okay. I just lost my baby."

Encourage and guide parents to spend extra time with the Lord in His Word as they mourn. "Life moves on, and you realize that you must too," observes Andrea. "The world does not stop for long, for one person's tragedy.

I think that God wants us to seek Him out, and seek out His truth. If we try to move on too quickly, we forfeit the blessing that comes in closer communion with Him. But this is not to say that we should wallow in sorrow for an unhealthy amount of time, either."

Mindy agrees, "I believe that I did not allow myself to really grieve the loss. It all happened so quickly and so much was happening in my life at the time that I did not take the time to deal with pain when it happened or in a healthy way."

Share the Word of God

Let the parents ask tough questions without condemning them. Guide them to base their questions on the true character of God, then search Scripture together for the answers. Scripture was important to everyone we interviewed, especially passages concerning God's unfailing love and sovereignty. Andrea found help in the following verses in the psalms:

Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have multiplied; free me from my anguish. Look upon my affliction and my distress. (Ps. 25:16-18a)

One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek Him in His temple. For in the day of trouble He will keep me safe in His dwelling; He will hide me in the shelter of His tabernacle and set me high upon a rock. I will sing and make music to the LORD. (Ps. 27:4-5 & 6b)

The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped. (Ps. 28:7)

I will be glad and rejoice in Your love, for You saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. (Ps. 31:7-8)

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. (Ps. 34:18)

Each of these passages brings together Andrea's sufferings and her Lord's kindness.

Anita found Psalm 100:5 to be comforting.

"The LORD is good and His love endures forever. His faithfulness continues through all generations." She writes, "Somehow, in that confusing time, He gave me confidence that He was working out His faithfulness to the next generation, even though that generation would be without my baby."

Jodi rested in two passages: "He tends His flock like a shepherd; He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart." (Isa. 40:11) and "Draw near to Him and He will draw near to you" (James 4:7).

Matt recalls "very distinctly that on the night of the miscarriage, I went out into the living room alone and read Job 41-43. For me this was a powerful catharsis—to be reminded that God was in control of the earth and our lives, and that He acted according to His own will and not to ours. I am not sure if this kind of Scripture might cause some to distance themselves from God, as it would remind them that God, in His power, could have prevented the miscarriage. I certainly found that Scripture was a powerful force for healing in me, but of course it is the Holy Spirit that reveals the right passage to minister to each individual."

It is comforting to know that God has a purpose for the unborn child (Jer. 1:4-5). This knowledge may bring hope that God's plans for human life are not limited to this world alone.

And be careful about how and when you use Romans 8:28: "For we know that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." If you choose to refer to this verse, be careful to point out that God's definition of the word *good*, "Christlikeness," is found in verse 29. And show how honest sufferings and struggles are not being ignored (Rom. 8:18-27; 35-39). Otherwise the words of this verse may seem empty as the parent struggles with the idea of anything good coming out of such a loss. Romans 8:28 is usually best shared by someone who has experienced miscarriage, who can personalize it, and who is sensitive to the parent's level of pain. The truth of the passage becomes more evident after the parent has walked through the valley for awhile.

Though God does not always offer explanations, the following passages may provide some helpful responses. Hebrews 4:15-

16 and 1 Peter 2:18-21 express God's personal experience of pain and suffering. God understands your pain because He suffered, too. His only Son died an agonizing death. Some of God's purposes for pain and suffering may be found in Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2-4; and 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. Use these passages to provide hope in God's unfailing plan for them. Take care to avoid minimizing their pain or expecting them to move on too fast.

Reinforce perseverance, faith, and trust in God. Encourage these hurting parents not to abandon their faith. "I have to trust that God will help my feelings catch up with my head," one woman replied. "I tell myself all the things I know about God. Many times I have to say, 'I don't feel it, but this is what is true about God.' I can't do this life without Him. I can't do any of it on my own. It is too painful."

Encourage her to persevere with passages like Proverbs 3:5-6: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

Offer Comfort

Give cards and words of love, but not too many words. Be sensitive without ignoring the pain. Matt affirms that "It was best not to say too much. Mostly I just wanted to know that people cared about us and were praying for us." Be careful not to stay too long or to talk too much, even when offering Scripture.

Suggest spiritual music and God-focused journaling. Ruth keeps a daily journal with careful guidelines that focus on God's Word rather than her pain. "I wish I had journaled like this my whole life," she writes. As a musician, Jodi was so deeply moved by worship songs such as "We Will Dance" and "Glory Baby" that she wrote her own lullaby to commemorate her baby.

Remember with them. Most of the young mothers we interviewed found comfort in lasting memorials that acknowledge their baby's existence. Several named their babies. One husband had a birthstone added to his wife's bracelet. Another couple planted some flowering trees in their yard that will blossom in the spring, the season their miscarriages occurred. Other parents created artwork, chose figurines or Christmas ornaments, added a page

to a scrapbook, or planted a special garden.

The one-year marker is a particularly critical time for most, and memorials seem to soften the pain. Ruth relays, "Somehow the body just knows. My body groans for those lost babies. Two years after I lost our first baby, my pastor was invited to speak at our local hospital's annual memorial for mothers who have had miscarriages. The organizers gave him a little cross and asked him to write the name of a baby on it. God put our baby on our pastor's heart. He wrote, "Baby Christensen, forever loved." It was a wonderful reminder that God was caring for my precious little baby."

Get More Help

Informal counseling offered by friends can be very effective when the counsel is biblical. Enlist other friends to take time to sit with the grieving parents, to be available at critical junctures, to listen without feeling compelled to talk, and to be prepared to offer timely help from Scripture.

Arrange for practical help, such as child care, laundry, meals, shopping, rides, and so forth. Offer specific help, not "Call if you need anything."

Encourage biblical counsel from a mature Christian who is familiar and comfortable. "I felt a paradox of desperately wanting counsel, but also feeling so vulnerable that I didn't feel I could trust anyone new to give me the real truth," says Anita. "I felt comfortable talking with the head pastor of our church. When I looked into meeting with him and discovered that I would be meeting instead with the counseling pastor that I didn't know at all, I declined. Instead, I talked to the music minister who I had known fairly well and had also experienced miscarriage."

Help for the Biblical Counselor

Believers found their faith tested as they were forced to face intensely personal, difficult, or impossible to answer questions. Some felt overwhelmed. Nearly all said they went to the Scriptures for answers, but many expressed confusion at their inability to find comfort there.

As a biblical counselor, you are in a good position to gently encourage exploration of important theological issues. Do so patiently and with great compassion. Suffering and grief

are not sinful, but the process of walking through the dark valley can be long and arduous. The wise counselor travels quietly alongside to encourage faith in God, not to judge. Listen closely and be very slow to speak (James 1:19). Remember that the Holy Spirit does His work.

Keep these key goals in mind as you work with those who have suffered through miscarriages.

1. Identify the parents' yearnings and questions.

Seek to know the object and expression of the grieving parents' heart yearning. Ask many exploratory questions, such as,

What gives direction and meaning to your lives?

Where do you seek your strength?

How important is parenthood to you?

Why?

How do you respond when emotions are at their peak?

What thoughts do you dwell on?

How has the experience of miscarriage driven you to God, or away from Him?

Why?

How relevant is God in your daily existence?

When God fails to act as you expect, how do you think, feel, and behave?

Do you seek God Himself in your suffering?

Or do you just seek answers to your questions and relief from your misery?

Also note the nature of the questions they ask. Carefully explore assumptions behind those questions. Listen for their interpretation of the miscarriage experience. Does Scripture form the basis for their questions and conclusions? To what degree might a faulty premise have produced or intensified their anguish?

Turn to Scripture to test assumptions and interpretations. Based upon the true character and goodness of God, gently help to redirect and rebuild questions from a biblical perspective. When you restructure questions with patience, compassion, and care, hope begins to grow.

2. Help them express grief.

Encourage struggling believers to walk by faith rather than by sight and to hold onto the

promises of God. Exemplify the spirit of hope found in passages such as the psalms.

The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them.

He delivers them from all their troubles.

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

(Ps. 34:17-18)

Point out the enduring benefits God is building in them as they follow Christ and His example (e.g., patience, experience, hope, strength, and perseverance).

Andrea's grief led to newfound hope in the sovereignty of God: "Seeking out answers, our pastor very lovingly but honestly and firmly replied, 'You have to accept this from the hand of God. He doesn't make any mistakes. Nothing slips through His fingers.' From that day on, God has given us the strength and the courage to do just that: Trust in Him, despite what happens or how things may appear from an earthly focus."

3. Identify with their suffering. Point to God as our comforter.

Urge them, "Turn to God's Word. Talk to God. Lean on God. Believe, putting your faith and hope in God regardless of your feelings, even when heartache and pain continue. Let hardship drive you toward Him, into His everlasting arms. Let Him teach you more about Himself because of this trial. Learn to look to Him rather than earthly comforts. You will find He remains trustworthy." Use these passages to give them encouragement.

And the God of all grace, who calls you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast. (1 Pet. 5:10)

4. Be aware of self-pity and wallowing in anger, fear, or despair.

Self-pity says, in effect, "God has not been good to me" and "God isn't big enough or caring enough to protect me." While a woman cannot directly change her emotions, she does not have to let them rule her. Gaze into God's Word for truth about God's faithfulness, love, sovereignty, and power. Not only is God in control, but He has given believers a spirit "of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Tim.1:7).

Help the parents to focus on the character of Christ when He experienced strong emotions, and to pattern their responses after His. Listen to hear how Christ offered prayers:

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the One who could save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from what He suffered and, once made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him. (Heb. 5:7-9)

The Christlikeness mentioned in Romans 8:29 grows out of our experiences of pain and loss.

5. Encourage them to build their relationship with God.

Teach that God has withheld some answers, but He has not distanced Himself.

His thoughts and ways are too high for us, so we will not always be privy to His understanding.

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD.

As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isa. 55:8-9)

Andrea observes, "There are so many things in life that we will never understand. It's keeping an eternal perspective, eyes fixed on Jesus, that makes all of the difference in the world. It may be a simple response, but it has made all of the difference in the world as we have had to deal with operations, emotional issues, the miscarriage, and so forth over the years. God is sovereign, *and* He is good. They are not mutually exclusive terms, but exist together, in perfect unity."

6. Emphasize hope through worship.

God's finished work in Christ gives a *present* hope that assures these grieving parents of His continual care. He also gives *future* hope for reunification with loved ones who have departed this world in Christ.

But we do not want you to be uninformed,

brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope." (I Thess. 4:13.)

Their identity with Christ's suffering is cause to adore God afresh, as they more clearly recognize the sacrifice involved in the death of His beloved Son.

And magnify God's imminence. God designed and created their baby. He brought their baby's days to full completion, accomplishing everything in that little life that He intended to accomplish.

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.

(Ps. 139: 13-16))

God is no less involved in the lives of the parents. "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

Let the frailty of humanity speak to our utter dependence upon God. Life is a gift that must be cherished but must not be grasped too tightly. Kent says such counsel would have helped him during the initial stages of pregnancy. "The first time I learned how common miscarriages are was when we went through our first one. If I had known that, I would not have taken that pregnancy for granted or taken the miscarriage so much by surprise."

Urge the mother to attend to her health, but remind her that God is sovereign over medicine. Usually the cause of miscarriage is unknown except to Him, so that preventive measures and attempted explanations may be frustrated. Still, the heart can rest in our loving,

infallible, and almighty Creator.

"My miscarriage caused me to look to Him for even the most basic needs," Mindy says. "I also believe it strengthened my relationship in knowing that God is Sovereign."

Point to heaven. The ugly consequences of living in a sin-cursed world cause us to groan and long for our real home. We are strangers here, but heaven awaits.

7. Work to strengthen the marriage

Look at the character of God's sacrificial love from 1 John 4:7-19. Many couples misunderstand the nature of God's love so they do not know how to love one another in Christ as God requires. (See also Matt. 22:37-39 and Eph. 5:22-23.) Seek to strengthen the marriage relationship by building biblical love between husband and wife. From 1 Corinthians 13, teach them that love acts in the best interest of the other person. Share specific practical ways they can apply each of the qualities of love from that passage. Teach couples how to reach out to comfort, edify, and support one another. Communication with patience is very important, even when it is very difficult to know what to say. Wayne Mack's book, *Your Family God's Way*, may help facilitate meaningful conversation.

Encourage Scripture study and prayer, especially when fear of another pregnancy is affecting intimacy. Each should seek to serve rather than to be served, but to accept help with a grateful heart. Point out the ways God is using their struggle to draw them closer to one another. Urge the whole family to become involved in a sound local church for worship, encouragement, comfort, fellowship, godly examples, preaching, teaching, accountability, outreach, and ministry opportunities.

8. Show how they can minister to others who have suffered miscarriage.

Scripture clearly states that God "comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor. 1:3-4). Ruth believes God is drawing people closer to Him because of her babies' deaths. "God can use someone even if they never take a breath in this atmosphere." God used one mother's prayer letter to bring an avowed atheist to his knees. Kent found

miscarriage to open some doors for evangelism at work. "It took people out of their routine and brought to mind God and His will for us."

Praise God for the ways He has deepened spiritual maturity and broadened ability to love others. "I'm able to listen and communicate my true sadness," Erin writes. "But also communicate my hope in the Lord and in His sovereignty." Christ's likeness is a lifestyle of growing love for other people.

Hope for Grieving Parents

When offered with the Bible's patience, compassion, and sensitivity, the wisdom of biblical counsel becomes invaluable at critical points during and following miscarriage. As we guide believers to Scripture in their times of great need, they meet Jesus there, ready to comfort, exhort, strengthen, and forgive. Loss becomes inexplicable gain in Christ.

Let me close with Anita's description of a valley of hope: "I was devouring the Bible study material. I couldn't get enough of Jesus and the way He made Himself known to those hungry for Him. It dawned on me that if either of my little ones had made it, I wouldn't have had these times with Him. I started to wonder if this was how He planned it—if it took losing babies to make me hunger for Him the way He wanted me to. The two years since my loss have been filled with many ways of discovering that the only guarantee in this life is Jesus. As that truth increasingly fills my heart, I find myself able to open my hands that hold too tightly to all I think is mine. Ironically, as I let go I find myself much less consumed with fear of loss. What I find instead is a tender shoot of grace growing in my heart."