

FINDING HOPE IN THE DEATH OF A CHILD

This is a summarization of the tribute delivered by Karen Gottsponer at the memorial service for her infant daughter, Rebekah Joy Gottsponer, who passed away on October 13, 2009.

Dale and I and our family want to thank you all for being here to support us during this time.

We are thankful for the time that God gave us with Rebekah Joy. I was so blessed to have had the privilege of carrying her for almost 37 weeks and blessed that the kids and Dale had an opportunity to place their hands over my belly and pray over her these past few months. Today is about honoring her and giving glory to God for her sweet little life.

As we have been ministered to this week by so many, we have come across numerous verses that have touched our hearts and have spoken life into our weary souls. Looking back, we realize that God in His tender mercy was drawing us toward Him and preparing us for what we would be facing.

As the reality of Rebekah's passing began to seek in, I spent time in the hospital bathroom crying out to God to fill my hurting heart as only He could. I didn't know if I could face another moment without my sweet baby girl. I felt that our hopes were lost, our dreams unfulfilled and our plans unfinished. But God whispered in my heart that this was not true. If this is what we believed we could not make it another day but would just crumble into a heap of despair.

Our hopes are not lost because we know we will see Rebekah's sweet little face one day!

Because of Rebekah's passing, our faith is being tested as never before. Do we believe everything we say we believe? It's so easy to pray and praise God when our world is right. However, what will we do when things don't go as planned? We now know we must cling to His word because He is really all we have. I was reminded of these verses: "These two things cannot change: God cannot lie when He makes a promise, and He cannot lie when He makes an oath. These things encourage us who came to God for safety.

They give us strength to hold on to the hope we have been given. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, sure and strong." (Hebrews 6:18-19 NCV).

As women came in our hospital room with stories of their own losses, Dale and I realized that we too could "rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (Roman 12:15 NAS) because we had "been there" and felt that same grief.

And even though I have a baby book at home left uncompleted, God has reminded me that Rebekah's sweet days were ordained in His book before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139:13-16).

We are scared of the "firsts" that are coming. The first time we are asked how many children we have. The first day Dale goes back to work. The first time we go back to church without Rebekah. The first time I am asked by someone who doesn't know our loss, "How is your newborn?" Though these unknowns frighten us, God "will lead the blind by ways they have not known." (Isaiah 42:16).

Dale and I had thought a lot about the tone we wanted this memorial service to take. Do we celebrate? Do we grieve? Do we mourn? We eventually decided that we wanted friends to see that we do indeed grieve for our little baby—so deeply from a place in our hearts we never knew existed.

But we also wanted them to see that we grieve with hope: hope of seeing sweet little Rebekah's face again because we are in Christ. (1 Thes. 4:13-18). We can honestly say we can praise God through this storm. These past few days, His word seems sweeter, His grace ever present, His love surrounding.

We have been blessed in so many ways this past week: To know for sure the cause of little Rebekah's death. To have a wonderful doctor who cared for me throughout my pregnancy and prayed and cried with us at

the end. To have friends that immediately rallied around us and cried and prayed with us. To have a dear hospital staff member to take care of Rebekah when we were not able and to minister to our weary hearts. To have friends that cared for our children, taxied them around, played Monopoly with them, took them out for shakes. To have children who helped run the household, cleaned bathrooms, greeted guests. To have family members who came with love and coworkers and neighbors who called, provided meals, shed tears, wrote words. And much more.

Thank you all from the bottom of our hearts. Thank you for walking down this path with us the first few days as we stumbled along. Though we know we have to walk alone now, we are reassured we aren't really alone, for God is with us every step. And we know He will also bring people along our paths when we need them to help us in this journey.

May God show you how much each of you means to us. Thank you, and God bless you.

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THE HOPE

I weep for you my little one,
My heart is full of whys:
Why snatched from me so suddenly?
No answer satisfies.

I'll never fully comprehend
The darkness in my soul,
But from my pain—and dawning bright—
A wonder now unfolds:

That God could take my deepest hurt
And from its depth extract
A hope in Him, a confidence,
A love that knows no lack.

Not even death with all its sting
Could ever steal from me
The wondrous hope we'll meet again
And share eternity!

In Memory Of:
Rebekah Joy Gottsponer
October 13, 2009

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