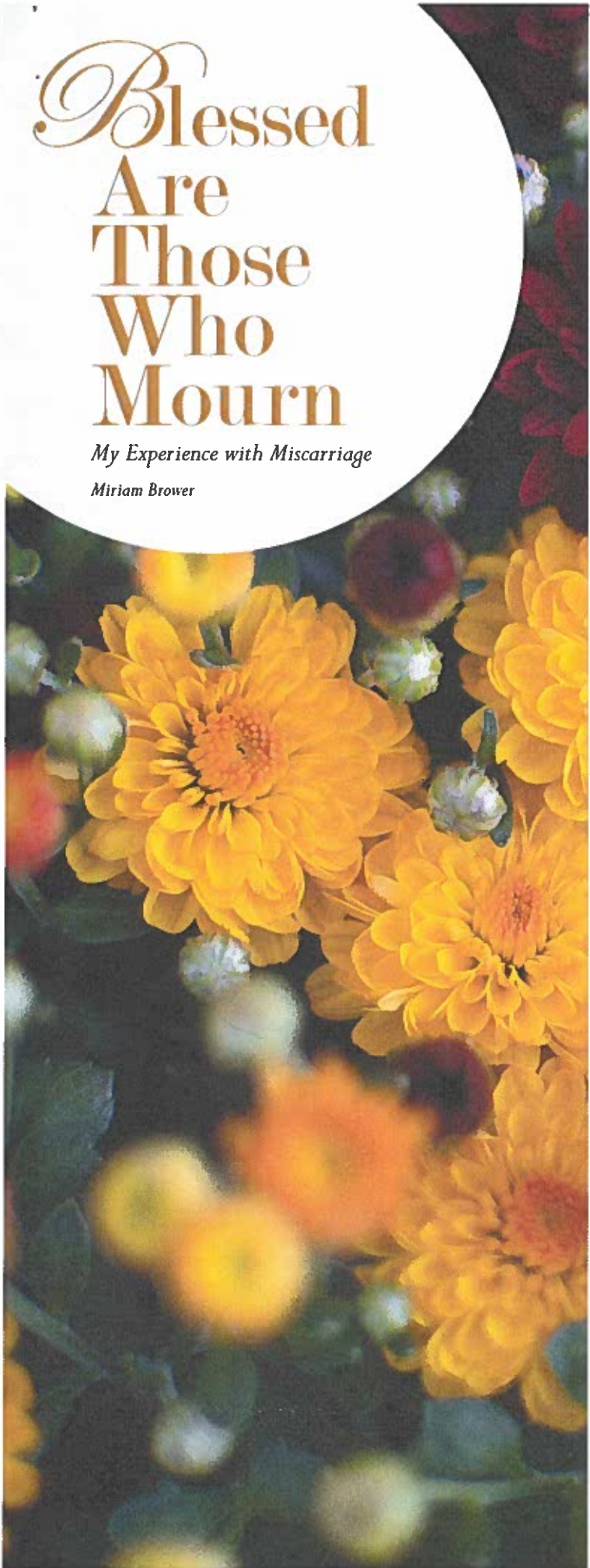




Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

My Experience with Miscarriage

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Many of us have been taught, whether spoken or simply modeled, that the goal when experiencing suffering and grief is to make sure it goes unacknowledged and to “get over it” as quickly as possible. Escaping into our phones, our work, even attempting to spiritualize the pain away has become second nature. We hide our vulnerability, perfecting the art of pretending we are not feeling what we are truly feeling when, despite being in the midst of deep suffering, we give an automatic and often robotic, “I’m fine” response. We live in a culture that expects grief to be a private matter, not a public one, and certainly not something to be shared or expressed. I think this is often the painful reality for those of us who carry the hidden cross of miscarriage.

When I was a little girl and someone would ask what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would often answer “a mommy!” with great enthusiasm. My heart was so drawn to motherhood and babies, even at a young age. I couldn’t imagine anything more fulfilling. When I met my husband and we began to share our visions for our life together, the first thing we talked about was children. We both wanted a large family (lots of kids!) and we couldn’t wait to make this dream a reality.



The first few years of our marriage were focused on starting up a private practice so that once my husband's law practice was up and running, we could focus on building what really mattered most to our hearts—our family. Looking back at this time, I think we made the mistake a lot of newly married couples make and we treated our fertility like a switch that you turn on and off when you are “ready,” instead of reverencing it as the gift it truly is.

Well, we flipped that switch when we were “ready,” but to our complete surprise, something very unexpected happened—the switch didn't work. We discovered after years of a very long and painful trail of negative pregnancy tests, that I had (we had), something my doctor labeled as “unexplained infertility.” We were devastated. We prayed and talked about adoption and gave God time to work.

And work He did. In the spring of 2013, after 4 years of suffering through infertility, my love/hate relationship with pregnancy tests turned into nothing but love when that pink line finally succumbed to my pleas and multiplied. After years of dealing with the painful reality of infertility, our pregnancy test was finally positive. I'll never forget the look on my husband's face when I uttered the words, “I'm pregnant!”

I had a healthy pregnancy and just about nine months later, Isabella Maria was born. We felt like we had been given a piece of Heaven. I worried that we wouldn't be able to conceive again, but when Isabella was just 10 months old, I became pregnant with our second daughter. We were stunned and so, so grateful. I had another healthy pregnancy and welcomed our second little love, Lucia Grace.

Although we were exhausted with having two littles 18 months apart, we were very excited when we became pregnant with Baby Brower 3.0 just a few years later. However, this pregnancy would be very different than the first two. Our sweet baby was born into Heaven just a week after I found out we were pregnant. That night, I had to take my little daughter to her ballet class.

There I was listening to this beautiful classical music,

watching my daughter dance around in a sea of pink frills, and all the while someone was literally dying inside of me. And I felt as though I couldn't say a word.

We went on to have two more miscarriages after that first one. All were extremely devastating in their own way, but I think our last baby made the biggest impact. Because I had already gone through two miscarriages, when I became pregnant for a fifth time, I was extremely nervous. The experience of a miscarriage can be a complete joy-stealer for any future pregnancies, and I was a wreck.

Data is something I have always loved, probably because I struggle to trust in God's provision. Data can provide an illusion of control, and when I was knee-deep in anxiety, I relied heavily on a combination of prayer and miscarriage statistics to cope. So, I knew the statistics, and that the risk of miscarrying after seeing a healthy baby on an ultrasound visit is very low. Once we had that first ultrasound appointment, saw our sweet girl's precious little body and the flicker of that beautiful beating heart, I felt like how I imagine it must feel to win the mega millions lottery. Matt and I were thrilled, and it gave me some much-needed peace.

However, that peace would be very short-lived. About four weeks later, my morning sickness left me suddenly. I kept telling my husband something was wrong, but he kept sweetly reassuring me that I was probably just (understandably) nervous given our past experiences. I tried to tell myself that that was the case, that he was right, but deep within my heart, I knew.

At our next ultrasound appointment, as I laid there with the goop on my tummy, paddle pressed down firmly, I watched my poor husband's face turn from excitement to complete brokenness as the ultrasound technician uttered the words you never want to hear: “I'm so sorry, but there is no heartbeat.” That day was Isabella's 5th birthday.

*The Lord giveth and the Lord
taketh away.
Blessed be the name of the
Lord.*

Our house was full of balloons and streamers that we had set up the night before. We ate cake, opened gifts and sang Happy Birthday to our first little miracle. In the midst of this beautiful celebration of life, for which we were so grateful, I was holding my other child in death. I felt like a living coffin.

Good-byes are never easy for me. About a week later, I was being wheeled down to the operating room for my D&C procedure and I remember thinking to myself that this was my Garden of Gethsemane. Oh, how I prayed that this cup would pass from me, I begged God for a miracle, unable to realize at the time that he had already given me that miracle in the life of this child.

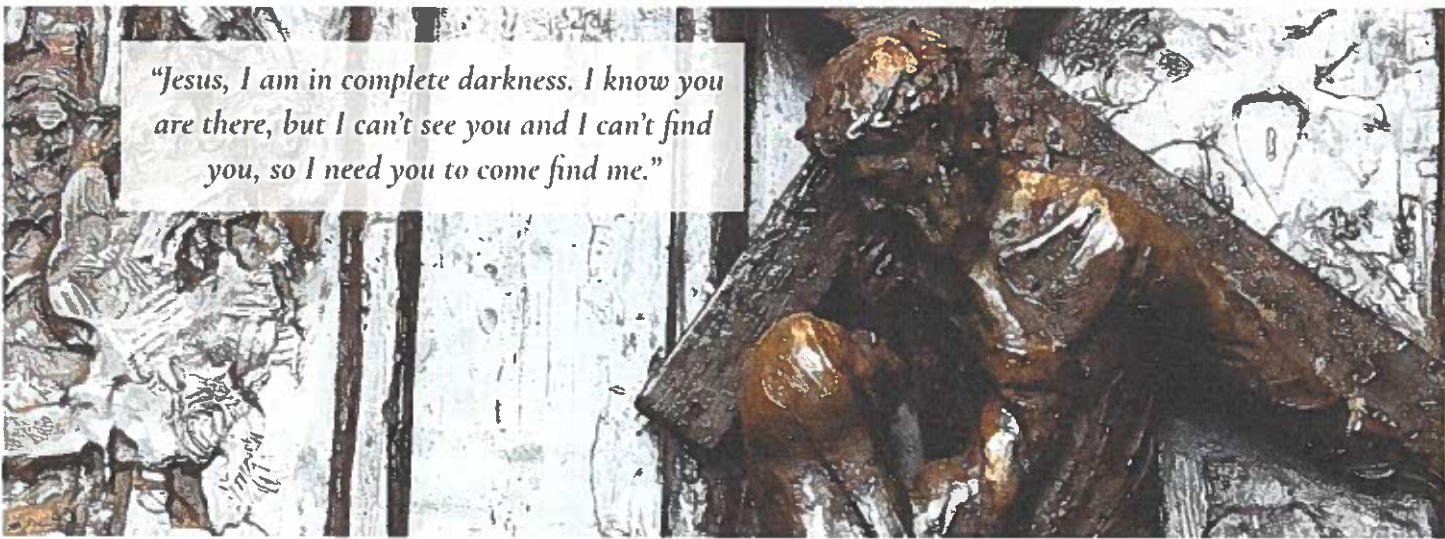
Before starting the procedure, I asked my doctor if I could please see my baby one more time so I could say goodbye. She granted my request, and as my head was lifted so I could see the screen, I saw her. Our beautiful girl. I whispered, "good-bye my darling. Mommy loves you. I will see you in my dreams," and was very grateful as the sedation medication kicked in, and sleep came to rescue me.

In the weeks that followed, I was not myself. It was extremely difficult to be present to my family or to offer any kind of consolation to my husband, who was also in deep grief. I stayed home as much as possible, and avoided contact with friends if I could help it. One day, I escaped to the only room in the house where a stay-at-home mom of two littles can find refuge—the bathroom—so I could grieve. Would she have had curls, like Lucy? Or big brown eyes, like Bella? I would never know, and the ache in my heart consumed me. I was in complete spiritual desolation, and I remember offering up this prayer through a solid stream of tears:

And He did. About 4 years ago, when my youngest was 6, she asked if she would always be the younger sister, wondering with great irritation when she might be given a shot at being the big sister! In that moment, I knew we had to share with the girls the story of their sisters, so Matt and I did. I took a breath, begged for the Holy Spirit to come, and told my daughters all about their sisters in Heaven, and how she was indeed a big sister. Matt and I had decided to keep the story of our babies just between the two of us until the girls were older. But that was a big mistake. I thought I was withholding unnecessary suffering, but instead I had withheld unimaginable joy.

My daughters acted like we had announced a trip to Disneyland. The youngest couldn't believe she was a big sister to 3 younger siblings, and she asked what their names were. I had to admit we had not chosen names as, up until that point, the grief from their passing was still too overwhelming. We sat down then and there and, as a family, we named all three. Something was freed in me that day, and this was not the first time my children provided a much-needed spiritual perspective and healing. Since that day, we have talked about their sisters regularly and ask for their intercession daily. *Every night when I tuck the girls into bed, I tuck their sisters in, too.*

Today, I can speak about my babies with joy and sorrow and allow friends to accompany me in the tidal wave of grief that still sometimes washes over me. Moments when I wonder how old they would be now, or when looking through family pictures it hits me all over again that three little people are missing. Today, when I'm asked how many children I have, I'm able to respond "Five. Two here and three in Heaven," and it fills my heart with joy that all my children are seen



"Jesus, I am in complete darkness. I know you are there, but I can't see you and I can't find you, so I need you to come find me."



Love comes at a cost and that cost is grief and we will grieve to the depth of our love. Suffering is what makes us uniquely human, and what brings us into communion with God and with one another. To deny the holy work of suffering and the accompaniment needed is to deny communion with the One who made us and the essential interconnectedness of our humanity.

Sometimes I hear people who have gone through extremely hard periods of suffering say, "I went through this but I didn't let it break me." But I say: *break*. Let suffering break you wide open. Feel it all and let it hurt. When we grieve, we can offer and join our suffering to Christ. He receives it, redeems it, and brings us closer to Him through it.

As Catholic women, suffering the loss of a child, and the deep grief that follows, provides us a unique peek into the window of Our Lady's suffering heart. In those moments, we can find communion with her in a very special way. We can join our suffering with hers, ask for her help, strength and comfort, and provide some comfort to her heart, too. She has been given to us as a beautiful example of not only how to suffer well, but also as the perfect embodiment of suffering and accompaniment. There we find her, at the foot of the cross with her beloved child as He is dying, completely vulnerable in her grief.

In those moments, she perfectly embodies the theology of the heart. She stays. She mourns. She bears witness. She doesn't flee like the others or offer solutions or theological truths to sweep the suffering aside as quickly as possible. Rather, she enters into the suffering, with the one who suffers, and makes her life a gift.

Just as it would be inconceivable to pass Mary at the foot of the cross in deep grief and tell her not to be sad because this is "God's will for her life," so, too, must we tread gently on the grieving heart of a mother whose child has passed, no matter the age or stage of life. An invitation to the holy and beautiful work of accompaniment is present whenever we encounter those in deep suffering and grief. It is during these times that we can call on the Veronica inside all of us, and wipe the face of Jesus.

We can't take the suffering away; we need not.

Our mission is a higher one; to enter into communion, as Mary did, with the one who suffers and make our life a gift, too. It is through this profound communion with one another, where suffering is allowed to be expressed and shared, that we begin to heal.

Cry with our dear sisters who have experienced the loss of a child, if that is what they need, or just be a steady, silent presence. Bring their family a meal. If they have other children, offer to watch them so they can have some time to grieve. And don't forget the fathers. Although their grief may be expressed differently than that of mothers, the grief of fathers who have lost a child runs very deep. They are often suffering in silence, wanting to be the "strong one," but in need of consolation, too.

As mothers, we have known and nurtured these precious lives from their very moment of existence, and in the case of miscarriage and early infant loss, until the very moment of their passing. We have held them in life and death. What a holy and sacred task God has entrusted to women. Ultimately, our primary job as parents is to get our children to Heaven. Well, we did that didn't we? It just happened much sooner than any of us desired.

During this month of infant loss, as we remember and grieve our precious ones, let us remind ourselves of what we know for sure. The communion of saints is real. It's not just something we profess at mass on Sundays. Our children are very much alive, they are not dead, and only a thin veil separates us. Remember them, talk about them and ask for their powerful intercession for your family. Do not be afraid to name and feel your grief, because it means you know how to love, and the loving is always worth it.

We are their mothers for all eternity and earthly death cannot take that away. My prayers for a big family were answered and I look forward to the day when, in His infinite mercy, I hear the chorus of three sweet littles welcoming me home.

*St. Veronica,
St. Zaylie,
St. Chiara,
Pray for us.*