

H E A R T
o f a
B I R T H M O M

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A DEVOTIONAL GUIDE *for* BIRTHMOTHERS

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To Mark, who has given my heart an earthly home.

To Jesus, who has given me an eternal one.

FOREWORD



Dear Birthmother,

I'm so glad we have found each other! I remember the first time I connected with another birthmother. It was such a great feeling - one of relief and satisfaction in knowing I wasn't alone.

Because I lived in a maternity home during my pregnancy and a few weeks after relinquishment, I knew there were others who had also endured a secret pregnancy and adoption. But perhaps like some of you, once I got back out into the real world, it became very hush hush. No one talked about it. It was as if it had never happened.

Over time, I found it harder and harder to keep my secret. In defiance of clear instructions to remain silent, and out of a great need that I had to process my grief and loss, I opened my mouth and started talking. I was surprised that instead of judgment, I got support; instead of snide remarks, I got words of encouragement, and instead of affirmation of the labels I had given myself, I got new labels like 'brave', 'hero' and 'loving'.

A lot has changed since that season of my life. I certainly don't have it all together. I am still learning and growing and being transformed. It will take a lifetime to become who God has purposed me to be, but there is no question that my unplanned pregnancy and subsequent adoption were not in vain. I believe the LORD intended to use that period as a turning point in my life. Had I not gotten pregnant, I have no idea where I would be right now. What I do know is that because

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of that hiccup, I was forced to stop in my tracks and make some life altering changes. The most important change came during my time in the maternity home. That is where I met Jesus Christ in a personal way for the first time.

Giving birth to my first child at the age of fifteen forever changed the course of my life, but it has not conquered me. Of course it has not been an easy path, but I would like to believe that I am a better mother than I would have been otherwise. I would like to believe that I am a better wife than I ever thought I could become. And I most certainly believe that I have encountered a very different Jesus than I had ever known before.

During the process of writing this book, I gained a better understanding of the Bible and how it applies to my life. I also learned to experience God in a refreshing new way. Writing this book helped me grow in my faith and helped me further process the loss of my birthdaughter.

I hope this book encourages you wherever you are on your journey. I'd love to hear from you anytime at terri@terrigake.com.

ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND ME



God said, “Abraham!” “Yes?” answered Abraham. “I’m listening.” He said, “Take your dear son Isaac whom you love and go to the land of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I’ll point out to you.” . . . Abraham told his two young servants, “Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I are going over there to worship; then we’ll come back to you.”

—Genesis 22:1-5

AS A BIRTH mother, this is the passage of the Bible I have always claimed as my own. Who else on earth can better understand what Abraham was feeling than a birth mother? We have been at that place and have chosen a different life for our children regardless of the consequences. To this day, I get emotional thinking about what God asked Abraham to do. I am awed by the faith Abraham had in order to follow God’s direction to the letter.

Notice what Abraham says to the servants. He says that he and the boy are going to worship and then “*we* will come back.” God had asked him to sacrifice his one and only son, yet Abraham’s faith was so big that he was sure his son would be returning with him.

When I signed those papers and released my daughter into the care of another, it felt like this passage feels. I had no promise that I would ever see her again. I had no idea what the days ahead would hold. I just did it. In the same way, the Bible says nothing of Abraham’s state

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of mind. We don't hear him complaining. We don't even see him hesitating. What we see is Abraham snapping to attention and doing exactly what God asked of him. God doesn't intervene until that last possible moment. God wanted to know if Abraham was really going to follow through. The Bible says "...he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son." That is when God stopped him—at the last possible moment.

It's interesting that God chooses Abraham for this task instead of Isaac's mother. Obviously, God is preparing him for a higher calling. As a result of meeting this challenge with obedience, God promises to make Abraham's descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. This is a promise that God fulfills throughout the rest of the Bible.

Are you willing to trust God no matter what he asks you to do? Are you willing to follow him despite obstacles and difficulties? Take a minute and reflect on your relationship with God.

A TIME FOR EVERYTHING



There's an opportune time to do things, a right time for everything on the earth:...A right time to cry and another to laugh, a right time to lament and another to cheer...

—Ecclesiastes 3:1,8

D ID YOU KNOW that the loss of a child is near the top of the list of most traumatic life events? Actually, it is number four, under “death of a close family member.” I know you’re thinking *but my child isn’t dead*. Consider this, though. Adoption is a type of loss. Just like a miscarriage. Just like abortion. I know that sounds terrible, but think about it for a minute. The child you have grown attached to and loved and carried to term—only to give to someone else—is gone. Even though you may have regular contact with that child and their family, you are no longer the parent. You don’t have decision-making power over the child anymore.

This is what you are experiencing right now, wherever you are in your journey. You have lost a child not to death or divorce, but to adoption. Although you made the best decision as a parent, given the circumstances, this is still a loss for you. Give yourself some grace if you find yourself not bouncing back right away. Things are never going to be the same as before. I know you may be waiting for life to get back to “normal,” but it never will. You are in the process of establishing a

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new “normal.” I wish I could tell you what it’s supposed to look like, but no one knows.

Shortly after my daughter was born, my family moved. In reading my old journals, I was looking for what got me through those first days, weeks, and months. Time is so linear it just keeps on going no matter what. That can be reassuring and frustrating all at the same time. What I found was that life kept me going. Getting up, working, going to school, having friends, having family...that’s what kept me going. Those days were long and seemingly endless. I cried night after night. The hole in my heart was still raw and very real. But just like we have to get back on a bicycle after falling off, I had to keep living. I had to keep putting one foot in front of the other. Sure, I would have good days and depressing days, but I kept going.

The hard part for you may be *how* to keep going. Maybe your whole life has been uprooted by your pregnancy. I don’t know what your circumstances are. What I can encourage you to do is to make right choices as you are establishing your new “normal.” These are foundational choices you are making, no matter what your age and stage in life. Find a church in your area that offers a support group or a Bible study that interests you. Find a counselor in your area that specializes in grief. Lean on friends and family members who really want to be there for you. They may not understand what you are going through, but let them help you. Tell them how you feel. Ask them for help. They love you and want to help you; they just may not know how.

Take a minute and write in your journal. Has this been a good day? An average day? A hard day? Think about what contributed to the kind of day you have had. Being able to identify the things that make you take a nose dive is one step in regaining control over your life.

TAKING GOD AT HIS WORD



Then we set out from Horeb and headed for the Amorite hill country, going through that huge and frightening wilderness that you've had more than an eye-ful of by now... There I told you, "You've made it to the Amorite hill country that GOD, our God, is giving us. Look, GOD...has placed this land as a gift before you. Go ahead and take it now. GOD...promised it to you. Don't be afraid. Don't lose heart."

—Deuteronomy 1:19-21

THE SLAVES THAT used to live in Egypt had been freed. God had done miraculous things to free them from a mean-spirited Pharaoh. He took them to a new place, literally a new country, where they could live and worship God however they wanted. They would truly be free. God had promised it.

But when they got to this "promised land," they saw giant people and were afraid. Instead of reaching the Promised Land in the short time God had told them it would take, these people took forty years to arrive. Why? Because they didn't trust God at his word.

They finally arrived, but God was so angry at this group of people for not believing him that he waited until an entire generation died out before letting them into their promised country.

We can do things our way, or we can do things God's way. Now, God's way doesn't always make sense to us. In fact, in my life it rarely makes sense. In my limited vision, I can only see what is in front of me.

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But God sees the whole picture. He sees the end from the beginning. We don't see it because we are only on this earth for a blip of time. God is eternal. If we are truly going to trust him and follow him, we have to be willing to do things his way. Even when it doesn't make sense. *Especially when it doesn't make sense.* Our faith is our beliefs put into action. We do that by trusting God more than we trust ourselves and our limited vision.

Take a minute now and write in your journal. What's going on in your life right now that requires you to trust God? Is he telling you to do something that doesn't make sense to you? Pray right now for the courage and faith to follow him even when it seems crazy.

ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT



I don't know about you, but I'm running hard for the finish line. I'm giving it everything I've got. No sloppy living for me! I'm staying alert and in top condition. I'm not going to get caught napping...

—1 Corinthians 9:26-27

I LOVE WORKING out. I'm a jazzerciser, actually. I love it so much. The loud music, the dancing, the camaraderie...it's my own little piece of paradise in the world. I get up and leave the house before anyone else gets up, just so I can enjoy a few minutes to myself at the start of each day. Every day for one hour, I tune out the worries and the pressures in my life so that all that matters is the next step or song.

Although I have to make myself take a day off, I don't always feel very peppy. Some days I wake up before my alarm goes off. Other days I hit the snooze button once or twice. Some days I can do high impact, but on other days I have to take it down a notch. The reason I keep going is the end result. I know in the end I will feel better, look better, sleep better, and have a better attitude with those around me. I don't always feel like working out, but I go anyway.

Working out when I don't feel like it is taking mastery over my feelings. You are in control of you, no matter how you *feel*. You will have up days and down days. That's normal. But instead of making decisions based on how you feel, make decisions based on the big picture. Where do you want to be in five years, ten years? Physical fitness is important.

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So are other considerations like: What kind of job do you want to have? What kind of student do you want to be? What kind of person do you want to be? It all starts *today* with good habits and discipline.

I know it may seem very dark right now. The hole of depression can be deep and can take on many forms. Maybe you feel unmotivated. Maybe you are sad. Do something to move yourself out of where you are and toward a healthier direction. Talk to somebody. Write in your journal. Go to church. Make a list of steps. Maybe you can only change one thing today. That's okay. Do that and build on it for tomorrow.

Take a minute right now to reflect on where you are, where you want to be, and how you can get there. For healthy people, *feelings* are the caboose of the train. The two cars in front of the train are *fact* and *faith*. Instead of being ruled by feelings, these people stick to the facts of their situation and rely on their faith to help them stand strong in the storm. Does this describe you? How might you benefit if you put fact and faith before your feelings? Ask God to help you see it all more clearly.