

MISS
THE CARRIAGE

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SHANNON GALLATIN

· Foreword by Joni Eareckson Tada ·



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FOREWORD

I have been married for 35 years, but never had a baby. I have never lost a baby. But I understand the overwhelming anguish of deep loss when your most cherished hopes are ripped from your heart. A broken neck did that to me.

One moment, my life was fine; the next, I was instantly paralyzed. I had to wake up the next morning and somehow keep breathing. I had to accept that life would never be the same. I had to learn to live with legs that did not walk

and hands that did not work. That alone taught me much about grief.

It's why my heart goes out to anyone who has experienced a life lost. Especially the gut-wrenching loss of a miscarriage. Or even many miscarriages. For a miscarriage is experiencing loss at the deepest, most profound and personal level. Almost an impossible level, like everything inside you has died.

It's why I am drawn to my good friend, Shannon Gallatin. She understands pain and grief as few do. Through one miscarriage after the next, she has had to choke down loss like gall and vinegar. With a heart so wounded, so tender from constant bruising, honestly, Shannon could write the book on miscarriage. And she has.

But the small book you hold in your hands is not a sad recounting of one deep

disappointment after the next. *Miss the Carriage* is a testimony, a personal journal filled with hope abounding. For when loss devastates your dreams, isn't that what we are all looking for? Shannon's book points you to the hopeful words of the Man of Sorrows acquainted with your grief who softly tells you, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

If you have miscarried a precious baby, there is a blessing to be discovered deep within the bruising. You *can* know comfort. It *is* possible. And over the next few pages, Shannon will take you step-by-step, inviting you to walk with her down the blood-stained path to Calvary. To the cross, a place of death... *and* a place of life filled with peace and joy that is out of this world.

Dutch theologian Geerhardus Vos once wrote, “What the Lord expects from us in seasons [of grief] is not to abandon ourselves to unreasoning sorrow, but trustingly to look sorrow in the face, to scan its features, to search for the help and hope, which, as surely as God is our Father, *must* be there. In such trials, there can be no comfort for us so long as we stand outside weeping. If only we will take the courage to fix our gaze deliberately upon the stern countenance of grief, and enter unafraid into the darkest recesses of our trouble, we shall find the terror gone, because the Lord has been there before us, and, coming out again, has left the place transfigured, making of it by the grace of his resurrection a house of life, the very gate of heaven.” (“Grace and Glory: Sermons Preached in Chapel at Princeton Theological Seminary,” 94-95)

Can the emptiness in your womb become a place transfigured? Unequivocally, yes. I am convinced *Miss the Carriage* will serve as a tremendous encouragement if you have struggled with infertility, miscarried in your first or second trimester, or delivered a stillborn child. Even as I write those words, I shake my head in sadness. When mothers lose babies, the pain is inconceivable.

But you couldn't have come to a better place than this remarkable book. You may think its chapters are too short to carry any real weight, but they are perfectly pithy. So please, don't plow through *Miss the Carriage* too quickly. Read its lessons prayerfully and act on Shannon's counsel intentionally. Next to your Bible, this small read is your best guide in discovering the hope that will carry you through.

So flip the page and get started. Get ready to move beyond the pain, even if just a little. As you do, may God's healing hand rest on you through every chapter.

Joni Eareckson Tada
Joni and Friends International Disability Center
Fall 2017



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DEDICATION

I've yet to read a book or listen to music without noticing the names of people who were honored by the artist due to their hidden influence and valuable support. This small testimonial would never have been written outside the records of heaven without the indescribable love, support, and constant encouragement of the following people.

To my husband, Scott, who has been a constant cheerleader, an echo of God's love and grace,

and the father of our seven children, six of which await us in heaven.

To my mother, who has shouted endless support from my life's bleachers and shared in my most valuable tears of joy and sorrow.

To my dearest friend, Linda, who has had the supernatural ability to push me outside of every writing comfort zone and clapped me over every hurdle in this process.

To my precious friend, Denise, whose meticulous skills of editing are surpassed only by her tenderness and compassion with every correction.

To a beautiful little boy named Toby. I never had the pleasure of meeting him, but his entrance into heaven just days before entering this earth, stirred my heart, surfaced memories, propelled tears, and provoked the birth of this book.

To a gifted pastor's wife named Angela. Thank you for all of your work and input for the cover design and photo for a complete stranger.

To my dear friend, Joni Eareckson Tada, who spent years mentoring me in the school of suffering and affliction through her many books and teachings, but now allows me the privilege of personal fellowship with her and her renowned pain pals.

And in everything I ever put my hands to, may Jesus, who has written this life story, receive all the praise and glory for anything honorable and good. I take full credit for all the mistakes and humanity.



PROLOGUE

Dear Reader,

After I had my first miscarriage, the last thing I wanted to do was dwell on the reality of what happened. If someone would have handed me a book on the topic, it would have found a convenient resting place behind bigger books on my bookshelf or a cozy corner of the trash can. I understand if you are tempted to do the same.

But in case you've come to the place where you need to hear you've not lost your mind, that someone else understands, that your emotional upheaval is not lifelong and your mourning is not terminal, then I pray this small compilation helps in some way. Years ago, I had asked my closest friends, family, and people I respected in the ministry if they knew of anything I could read that was similar to what I was walking through. There was such a loneliness to the pain I felt that I wanted some kind of companionship that can be found in another person's testimony. The only recommendations I was given were books on suffering with a slight reference to a musician's wife who had miscarried five children. The thought of swimming through two hundred pages of someone else's grief and repetitious loss was too daunting for me.

Then four years later, a precious friend of mine asked me if I could write an email to someone she knew who had tragically lost a baby. When I learned of her particular circumstances, I felt I had no words to give. I knew the Bible said to “comfort one another with the comfort” we had received, but it seemed arrogant to even insinuate that I could relate to her tragedy. I had only learned to “weep with those who wept” and wrap my lanky arms around broken mothers who craved to have their own arms filled with a baby.

Despite feeling inept, I poured my heart out in prayer for a woman I had never met, and then walked backwards in my thoughts to recount painful past memories.

My fingers began to type as quickly as my eyes began to leak and thirty minutes later, I gave birth to an email I never knew was inside

me. As I sent it for my friend to review first, I prayed that what I shared wouldn't add any more pain to this woman's life. I admit to you that I feel the same way with this booklet in your hands. It is not meant to add any additional grief, and I apologize wherever my own testimony may interfere with the main message that is meant to break through.

I recognize that every story is different and how we deal with loss and pain is uniquely our own. But I learned in a deeper way, though no one else will ever truly understand what you are going through, there is a heavenly Father who listens to every heartbeat within you. From the moment He began to knit YOU together in your mother's womb, His main pursuit has been your heart; His main concern is who enthrones it; and His main desire is to take precious care of it for eternity. Though you may

have lots of questions, lists of disappointments, and a soul that seems shattered beyond repair, there is a Shepherd who longs to heal, mend, restore, and comfort the deepest places of who you are.

I pray you have a greater revelation of His goodness and love through this testimony that I am finally able to share.

With much love and prayers for you,
Shannon

A vintage baby carriage with a curved canopy, sitting on a lawn in front of a garden with trees and a fence. The image is faded and serves as a background for the chapter title.

CHAPTER ONE

RAINBOWS TO RAINDROPS

My first babysitting job came when I was nine years old, shortly after my parents were divorced. A single mom who lived down the street from me was desperate for someone to occupy her kindergartener a couple of hours after school until she got home from work. To a wise third-grader like myself, fifty cents a week was well worth my playtime.

When the school year was over, I retired from my lucrative career, but with a

newly-planted desire to have my own children one day. That desire rapidly grew whenever I heard words like “You have such a way with kids!” or “Look, the children just flock to you.” Then came the compliment, “One day, you’re going to be a great mom,” and my desire suddenly became a goal.

Whether I went to church, visited a neighbor, or perused the mall, I could easily be found with a baby in the nursery, donning puppets in a playroom, or making faces at little eyes hiding behind a parent’s knees. In the midst of my own painful childhood, their innocence and harmlessness was like a magnet to my vulnerability. Everything about them brought joy and smiles.

At some point during my teen years, a brilliant plan emerged to have sixteen children of my own as well as run an orphanage. I read an

article in a magazine about a family of that size and memorized how they put together meals, did laundry, and cared for one another. The picture of their joy developed a photograph of possibility in my own heart, and I set out to prepare for that day the only way I could. I bought kids meals from fast-food restaurants so I could collect the free toys inside. By the time I graduated high school, I had eaten enough Happy Meals to weigh five hundred pounds, build a playhouse with the boxes, and fill ten plastic storage bins with the toys and trinkets I had collected. It was a start.

But like most young people, I didn't realize the fallacy of the oft-quoted slogan, "You can do anything, if you put your mind to it." My mind had no control over the fact that I wouldn't fall in love and marry Scott until I was in my thirties. My strong will had nothing

to do with avoiding infertility and barrenness. Sheer determination couldn't change the diagnosis that came from a doctor's lips after a milieu of tests and exams.

As my husband and I sat quiet in a near polar vortex, white office in the hospital, I thought it ironic that the walls held no pictures, the table held no magazines, and I held little hope of filling my arms with life. As kind and compassionate as the doctor was, no one can prepare a crib-craving heart for the words, "Shannon, I'm afraid you will never have children on your own, and even with our help, you and Scott will still need a miracle."

It rocked us both...hard. But only for a while because my husband and I had a strong relationship with the Lord. We heartily believed in a big God who laughs in the face of impossibilities and can create life just as easily

as He created the galaxies. “He made me for children,” I would think to myself. “He’s just going to do a miracle by making me the mother of a small village for His glory.” So we chose to walk the medical path as long as we had peace, and the attic became a holding place of hope with all my toy box investments safe and secure.

Then every sermon I heard, every devotional I read, all seemed to announce, “Here comes the first addition to the family you’ve waited for.” We even chose the name Zachariah William Gallatin to be the name of our first-born. “Zachariah” meant “the LORD remembers His promise” and “William” was after my father-in-law. We started to joke about our little “Zack attack” that would wreak havoc on our arthritic bodies, and if our first child was a

girl, she best be a tomboy and like the stuffed basketball we already bought.

As fertility procedures happened and time passed, we nearly doubled the national sales for pregnancy tests. I learned that hormones are barbarous roller coasters that make Disney's Space Mountain seem like a speed bump. I also had acquired the art of mourning every time a dipstick shouted the digital readout "NEGATIVE" in complete defiance of my family dream.

At one point, the doctors had loaded my body with so much Clomid®, I produced enough eggs to birth half the amount of kids I wanted in a single shot. My mood swings had Richter scale measurements and were best described by one fertility nurse as "estrogen rage." "Honey, if you can get through this," she continued, "then menopause will seem like a

hiccup in comparison.” Since I was trying to start a family at thirty-four, in my mind, menopause didn’t seem that far away. I laughed on the outside, but inside, nothing seemed funny anymore.

The days of waiting to see if I was pregnant crawled. There is a promise in Isaiah 26:3 (ESV) that says, “You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.” Well, I certainly trusted the Lord, but keeping my mind on Him looked more like mental gymnastics than a fixed focus.

One Sunday morning, about two days before another scheduled blood test, cramps came on suddenly during church. The pain was unlike anything I had ever known, and I ran to the restroom. Thirty minutes later, pale and covered in sweat, I found my mother-in-law, a retired nurse, and told her what happened. I

knew I needed to get home and asked her if she could let Scott know. He was a youth pastor at the time, and I didn't want to interfere with his ministering to others.

As I neared the exit door, my mother-in-law stopped me and said, "Shannon, this isn't your period. You are having a miscarriage." Her words hit my gut like a sledgehammer, and all color around me began to turn gray.

I braced myself against the wall, got my bearings, and ran to my car. As I shut the door, I started talking out loud to the Lord. "This can't be, Jesus. You gave us a name. Rainbows of hope. You never break Your promises. No, no, no..." and though my words trailed off, my heart kept echoing as the evidence ignored me the rest of the day.

Somewhere in my heart, grief spoke,
“Those promises were about the raindrops that
make a rainbow...not a Zachariah.”

Little did I know, that over the coming
years, my own heartbeats would feel like pain-
ful contractions every time I saw a stroller,
heard a child giggle, or smelled baby powder.

But the Lord knew...

*“I can never escape from your Spirit! I can
never get away from your presence! If I go up
to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the
grave, you are there.”* Psalm 139:7-8 (NLT)

