

Wisdom for the Painful Paradoxes of Pregnancy Loss

October is National Infant and Pregnancy Loss Awareness Month, a time set aside by former President Ronald Reagan to recognize families affected by the loss of a child and to advocate and provide resources about topics such as miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, molar pregnancy and stillbirth.

Did you know that 1 in 4 pregnancies end in miscarriage? 1 in 160 pregnancies end in stillbirth. But these aren't just statistics. Behind these numbers are real families. Families who must go home and be greeted with the deafening silence of an already-decorated nursery. Families who receive hospital bills for childbirth that ended with the saddest of circumstances. Families who mourn the loss of their child.

Our immediate reaction is to think of mothers. However, as Scott says, "Pregnancy loss is the story of two people's loss." He further says, I understand that the mother, in this horrific event, goes through more than most people understand, but the father of the lost baby goes through the very same emotions. Plus, we need to take care of our wives at the same time."

Men face this paradox of grieving the loss of their child and trying to support their wife. Unfortunately, this often progresses into a marital battle based on simple misunderstandings. Grief can make even the best of relationships rocky. As women, we must realize that pregnancy loss can affect all of our relationships. Here are five suggestions that can help you and your spouse face this time of grief together.

1) Realize your spouse might not know how to act post-loss.

Often, men don't know how to navigate this grief-stricken journey. Many of them try to guess how we want them to grieve and then follow suit. This often transpires into them thinking we want them to be strong, when really we just want them to hold us and listen. Is your spouse trying to put on a macho front? Tell him what you need. It's okay to speak your needs. Gently say, "I just really need you to sit alongside me while I cry. I need you to listen. I need you to take care of household chores. I need you to_____." Realize he is confused. Instead of making him guess, tell him what you need.

2) Realize your spouse might grieve differently. We must give grace.

Men often do grieve differently than women—especially in the situation of pregnancy loss. Your husband might be angry at God and express his disdain. He might grieve right alongside with you in a period of deep mourning. He might feel no emotional distress. He might grieve privately or alongside you.

You must realize that God made each of us unique. This also manifests into the way we grieve. There is no right or wrong way to process grief. You shouldn't or can't force him to change his intrinsic emotional reaction; however, you can be honest with what you need from him. The most important step we can take is to pour out grace and forgiveness. Give grace that allows him to grieve in his own manner and forgiveness when he inadvertently does something that is hurtful to your heart (and he will). Tell him it hurts, but don't hold a grudge.

3) Realize we must cultivate our marriages even when we are deep in grief.

Our marriages are ordained by God. As we move further away from the point of loss, we must spend energy making investments in our marriage. Even if it is hard to get out of bed, you should make some simple plans to show love to your

husband. Has a friend offered to babysit your other children? Set up a date with your spouse. What is a movie you both enjoy? Watch it. Grab his hand while you are walking. What is something you've always wanted to do together? Create new connections. Express your gratitude when he does something that makes your heart smile. This is a time in our relationships that connections might not naturally occur—we must put in effort.

4) Realize your spouse might be fighting fear.

Many women face critical conditions while going through pregnancy loss. Ectopic pregnancy is one such situation. Internal bleeding can threaten the life of the mother. Spouses not only grieve the loss of a child, but they were faced with the possibility of losing their wife as well. Understand that he might be reluctant to talk about “trying again.” Talk to him about your own fears.

5) Realize communication matters. It is not time for mind-reading.

Do you want him to go to your follow-up exam with you, but when the time comes, he asks, and you say, “Whatever you want to do.” This type of response isn't fair for either of you. You can't expect him to be a mind reader. Remember: He is just as confused as you about how to walk this journey. Gently speak your needs. Make your requests, and realize he might even utter a complaint. Communicate to him that this is important to you.

6) Realize the true bearer of comfort: God. Don't give your spouse more than he was meant to shoulder.

Our heavenly Father is the only one who can bear our pains. We should rely on our spouses but realize they are imperfect. The only true source of comfort is God.

Pregnancy loss is complex and multi-layered. If you feel as if

you need extra support, please do not hesitate to reach out to a counselor or minister. And pray that your marriage will grow stronger in this valley. Seek times to mourn together and times to seek joy together. And set your heart on the knowledge that your child was rooted in your womb but now blooms in heaven.

“And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you” (Eph. 4:32).
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Sarah Philpott, Ph.D., *lives on a cattle farm in the south with her hard-workin’ husband and three small children. Her book, Loved Baby: 31 Devotions Helping You Grieve and Cherish Your Child After Pregnancy Loss, is available at bookstores everywhere. Connect with Sarah at .*