

Krista Dunk

## The Dream Lives

“Fetal demise” was what the radiologist said in her side office after the ultrasound. Stunned, my mind had a hard time processing those words. My mother clasped her hand over her mouth, and I sat silently staring at the doctor’s face. After an explanation of some technicalities and trying to help me gain understanding as to what happened, I quietly gained the understanding of *there is no heartbeat; your baby died*.

“Do you have any more questions?” she asked.

Voice shaking, I said, “Can I see the ultrasound pictures?” Somehow seeing those images would at least prove our baby’s existence. I had to see it with my own eyes. At 12 weeks along in our very first pregnancy, this was not the news I was expecting to hear at this appointment. My husband, Chris, was on a business trip, so my mother had come with me to the ultrasound appointment. The due date would have been on her birthday.

Not knowing what to say, my mother and I trudged to the parking lot. Her tears came as we got to my car. Mine came later, and especially when I had to call Chris to let him know what happened. How do you have a conversation like this over the phone? How do you tell your spouse this kind of news? And what did they mean when they said there was “evidence of a second one” as the radiologist and ultrasound technician were talking? Was it possibly twins?

Earlier this same week, our good friends who had a newborn daughter experienced a tragedy. Their two-month-old suddenly died from a birth defect in her heart that had gone undetected. They were devastated, and we were heartbroken for them. Their daughter’s funeral was two days later. **Loss piled upon loss.** After the funeral, we told them our news, and more tears came.

I was scheduled for a D&C procedure several days later. The same afternoon of my D&C, the four of us left for an eight-day road trip. For most of that first evening, I laid down in the third-row seat of the minivan, in physical and emotional pain, trying to come to terms with what had just happened. Our friends needed to get away from their home with an empty nursery, and Chris and I had the following week off without any travel plans—it was unusual for us to have time off without a trip planned. God knew.

In planning for my ideal life, I’d always thought *gee, 27 seems like the perfect age to become a mother*. We had been married seven years by then and started out our marriage with a *someday* attitude about having children. Finally agreeing it was time, this result was painful. It was also painful for our parents. This would have been their first grandchild.

Waves of loss came over the next days, weeks, and months. The sting of having conversations with people who knew we had been expecting came for a while—family first, then coworkers, friends, and others. As more and more women found out, I was surprised to learn how common miscarriage is. Several women revealed they’d experienced it, too.

At first it seemed appropriate to let the grief show and to talk about it, but as months passed, the loss was internalized. Who would this person have been? What would they have become? It was the loss of a hoped-for child, the loss of a dream, and the feeling of failure, wondering if the miscarriage

was somehow my fault. *What could I have done differently?*

I remember one night not being able to fall asleep, quietly crying and praying, the stress unbearable. Lying in bed, as I cried out to God, I felt a tangible embrace. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before. Suddenly, the spiritual realm we cannot see became a reality. With the embrace, all the anxiety and pain melted away in a moment, replaced by a warm comfort I cannot fully explain. Jesus must have given me a hug, and I desperately needed it.

There was another time on a lunch break at work when I was in my car, crying. I called my sister at her office. Pouring out all of my fears and concerns, she was a source of encouragement and a caring listening ear. I know she was praying for us.

During this time, I sought the Lord more than I ever had before. Mostly **I was looking for answers, hope, help**. My relationship with Him deepened, and a new trust started forming. There was even a time shortly after when a family member was having a difficult time getting pregnant, and I gave them a prophetic word. Sitting on softball bleachers while watching a game, she explained how in-vitro fertilization and other fertility treatments hadn't worked. They were looking for sperm donors and whatever else might result in a pregnancy. She was feeling desperate. In that moment, I just knew something. I said, "No, you won't need to do any of those things. It's going to be Mike. It will work."

She was skeptical, but we talked about it for a few more minutes, then went on to other topics. About two months later, she called me after taking a pregnancy test. "You're never going to believe this. You said it, and it's true—I'm pregnant!" Only God could have given me this information and faith. I was so happy for them! But still sad for us.

Reading my Bible one day, I had a thought. *God has promises for children, right? If He has promises about giving us children and that children are a blessing from Him, I'm going to find all the promises and pray them for us. I will remind Him what He has said and stand on those promises.* I scoured the Bible for any and all verses that mentioned children being a blessing from the Lord—verses like Psalm 127:3-5, Psalm 113:9, and Isaiah 54:13. I read them. I said them. My husband and I discussed them. These verses formed a rock in my spirit that could not be moved. God would bless us with children. He had to. He promised.

With each month passing and not being pregnant, it was still a source of frustration. And my husband's work travel schedule didn't make it any easier! Being gone on strategic weeks was, of course, problematic...

When the baby's due date came and went six months later, something, someone, was missing.

Around the same time frame, I switched jobs—going from working in a state office as an HR admin to working as a sign language interpreter at a local high school. It felt like a risk to make this transition, but one I had been working toward for several years. It was time. And it kept my mind focused on a new season rather than the season of loss. Two months after that, I took a pregnancy test on a Sunday morning. Positive! I put the test stick in my purse and showed it to my mother at church. Our eyes welled up. Chris called his mother that day to give her the good news. She was ecstatic.

Even though the rock of faith had been built, I was excited but cautious. I was nervous, happy, fearful, confident, a little bit sick, and everything all rolled up into one. This child's due date would be in November. At that point, I didn't care if the due date was Christmas Day as long as the pregnancy went well and the baby was healthy. With every appointment, we prayed all was going well, and it was.

At 18 weeks along, we had the first ultrasound. What an amazing day that was! Chris was so excited—the look on his face was precious as we saw our baby actively moving around. I remember the technician saying, “We can’t always tell the sex of the baby, but...oh, wait, I *can* tell. Do you want to know?” Yes, we did. There he was, our son.

I wondered if it was going to be a boy. Several years prior, I’d had a dream in the night. **This dream seemed so real and unusual.** In this dream, I was upstairs in my childhood home (where my mother and step-father still lived at the time). Sitting on the floor, I had a baby girl in my arms, my daughter, and a very young boy, my son, was across the room. My young son was worried, saying, “Mommy, what is this? What are we doing?” like he wasn’t sure what was happening. I told him, “It’s okay, don’t worry. We’re just here.” And that’s all I remember.

As the pregnancy progressed, I made it through the strange cravings for Cheetos and bananas, the hot summer days, and having his little head jammed into my ribs. He was breech, and at some point the doctor was concerned. “We need to do a procedure where we manually try to turn him head down before he gets too big.” This was at about 34 weeks along. We scheduled the procedure for the following week—at 35 weeks. Little did they know that I had a defect in my uterus that would have made turning him impossible.

On the Wednesday of the next week, in the wee hours of the morning, I woke up feeling a small rush of fluid. Honestly, I thought the baby had kicked me and I peed a bit. But somehow it felt different. I got up, went to the bathroom, then went back to bed. That morning, I got to the high school for work at 7:30. Between every single class period that morning, I was in the bathroom. Mind you, that’s not necessarily out of the ordinary for a woman who’s 35 weeks pregnant, but the frequency seemed odd.

At a late-morning break, I talked to one of my coworkers who had three children. “So...how do you know if your water broke?” I figured she would know.

Her eyes got serious. “What?”

“I feel like I have to go to the bathroom all the time today. And I felt something strange in the middle of the night. I’m sure it’s nothing.”

“You need to go and have it checked soon. Right now.”

“Really? He’s not due for five weeks, and I’m sure it’s nothing. I’m fine.”

She insisted I call my doctor’s office. I heeded her advice, and they wanted me to come in, just in case. Their office was only six minutes from the high school. So, I went. I even told the vice principal I’d be back after lunch. Nope.

After the doctor checked, they did find amniotic fluid and I was dilated to three centimeters. “We need you to go over to the hospital right now for a C-section. They will be expecting you.”

*Oh no, Chris is hours away at a work meeting.* My call to him started out, “Hi, where are you now?” He and a coworker sped back to town as fast as they could.

Christian Michael was born with the umbilical cord wrapped around his neck three times and wasn’t breathing. The first noise we heard from him was a series of sneezes, then a cry. During the time after the C-section when they stitch you up, the doctor gave me the first news about some abnormalities in my body. “You only have one ovary that works and no fallopian tube at all on the bad ovary’s side.” *Well, no wonder it takes a while to get pregnant.*

Being a preemie, they allowed Christian to stay in our hospital room intermittently, going between there and the “special care nursery.” The next day, however, he had to take up residence in the nursery—he had developed jaundice. Along with jaundice, he wasn’t able to nurse well yet, they detected a heart murmur, they suspected he had hip dysplasia, his little nose was squished to one side, and one of his toes partially overlapped another.

Through all of those things, I experienced the peace that surpasses all understanding as it says in Philippians 4:7. “He’s going to be just fine,” was my reply to any concerning news. And he was. By the time he left the hospital’s special care nursery unit just 12 days later, his jaundice and heart murmur were gone. A few weeks later, it was confirmed that his hip sockets were fine, too. Eventually, his nose and toes looked perfect. By the time he was eight months old, you’d never know he was a preemie.

Fast forward a couple years, we decided to try for another child. About six months later, I was pregnant. Per my dream, I suspected this baby would be a girl. When I asked two-year-old Christian if he thought he was going to have a baby sister or a baby brother, he answered, “It’s going to be a baby sister.” He was right!

At the ultrasound, there she was, little sister. While pregnant with her, I remember how she would be still most of the night, but as soon as the first voices spoke in the morning, she was immediately active and alert. She was due in December. In September, we were in the middle of building a new house. We put the house we had been living in up for sale, and it sold in one day. So, technically, we were homeless! We moved into my mother and step-father’s large house, taking over the upstairs area.

One October day, just after he turned three, Christian had a preschool pumpkin patch trip. Moving his booster seat into our truck, I felt the familiar small rush of fluid and had a sinking feeling. *I am only 32 weeks pregnant; this can’t be happening again.* We went on the field trip, and later that day, Christian and I went out to an early dinner with my mom and sister. I hadn’t felt more fluid leaking, but I did start to feel crampy. After confessing my suspicion to them, off I went to the hospital. My mother took Christian home, and my sister accompanied me. It was confirmed—I was in labor again and my water had a slow leak.

This time, doctors were worried about the baby’s lungs. “At 32 weeks, they may not be developed enough yet. We need to stop your labor for as long as possible and give her more time.” This was easier said than done. On top of that, they would not allow her to be born at this hospital—the hospital in our town—at this early stage. They did not have the advanced neonatal equipment in case she needed it. I was sent by ambulance to a larger hospital 40 minutes away, where I spent four days laying in a bed, trying not to move, and being given shots to mature her lungs. Chris was splitting his time at home with Christian, working on a couple projects at the new house that had to be completed, and with me at the hospital. The baby was head down, so they were going to allow me to deliver her naturally, especially since she was going to be small.

After four days, I was sick as a dog because of the shots and the baby started showing signs of distress. She was lethargic and not responding to stimuli.

“You need a C-section as soon as possible. You will not be able to have a natural birth. It can’t wait.”

Chris made it to the hospital just in time, and this time my sister was able to come into the C-section room, too. The doctor asked what the baby’s name would be, and we said, “Karissa.” As they

worked to remove her, she started crying before she was even out which they said was very unusual. “It’s a girl” was confirmed, and I remember my husband crying and saying, “She’s still a girl!” which makes me smile even now. They whisked her away to the NIC unit, and he followed. My sister stayed with me as they worked to finish up.

After the C-section, this doctor gave me the second bit of news about my fertility issues. “You only have half a uterus. Every baby you’ll ever have will be a preemie. They’ll get to a certain size and not fit anymore.” That’s when we decided two healthy children, a boy and a girl, was enough.

She also gave me another diagnosis: necrotic fat scar tissue, most likely from the previous C-section, had formed in my abdomen and was looped around some of my intestines. Eventually, it would have pinched them off, which could potentially lead to death. She performed a surgical procedure to remove it, then stitched everything back up. Recovery for me this time was difficult.

Karissa Promise looked like a little doll with velvety hair. According to the NIC unit nurses, they had never seen a baby born at 32 weeks with absolutely nothing wrong with them. She never even had jaundice. She was just small, so she had to stay in the hospital for 17 days until she gained a little weight.

Looking back on all of this, I can see God’s hand working in so many ways, in so many details. From dreams, to a week’s leave from work with no plan to go anywhere. Not trying to turn my son while in the womb, and all of his post-birth issues being resolved. Then the second C-section process, catching my intestinal problem, Karissa’s surprise perfection, and more. And had that first pregnancy been twins, they wouldn’t have made it. God worked it all out—every little piece.

A couple months later, it hit me—I was sitting in the upstairs room of my childhood home with a baby girl in my arms and a young son. We lived there until Karissa was five months old and our new house was completed. The dream became reality.

Despite my abnormalities and our broken hearts because of the loss of our first baby, there was still hope. With trust in God and His plan, I believe we should continue to hope for good to come even after disappointments, loss, and experiencing things we may not understand.

Today, my children are 21 and 18. We are so thankful for them, and I carry this story in my heart as a testimony of a great work God has done. **When we look closely, we can spot God at work in our life’s story—in big shifts and tiny details.**

As a final note, after a conference three years ago, I was talking with a friend named Magnus who is a prophet. He asked about my children, and I told him about Christian and Karissa. He started prophesying about my family and two kids, sharing what he saw God saying. He paused and then said, “Was there a third?” It hit my heart hard, as it still sometimes does. “Yes, there was a baby that we lost.”

My mouth dropped when he said, “It’s a daughter,” and he went on to explain how she’s with the Lord and prays for our family and can’t wait to see us. Even as I type this, it brings up deep emotions. When I got home, I told my husband and kids about this. Karissa decided her sister needed a name and gave her one. So, her name is Karrah. Karrah, we can’t wait to see you either, and we know you are safe in His arms until then.

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when desire is fulfilled, it is a tree of life.” —Proverbs

