**Excerpt: Out of the Depths-Infant/Pregnancy Loss**

**FEELINGS OF GUILT – Brandy Mullins**

In addition to struggling with the length and unpredictable nature of your grief journey, you may also find yourself burdened by the weight of painful emotions that compound your grief, such as guilt or shame. . . .

When we find ourselves in tragic situations, we often look for an explanation. In the case of infant or pregnancy loss, our blame naturally turns inward. Was it something I did? Something I didn’t do that I should have done? While this tendency may not be particularly helpful, it is perfectly natural. Life would be much more bearable if everything, or at least the most important things, were within our control. We see here that, unfortunately, that is often not the case. If you find yourself revisiting choices that you made or thoughts that you had in searching for a cause of your loss, I invite you to give yourself some space from the work of placing blame where none exists. While relinquishing that control is difficult and painful, it can also be freeing.

Guilt and shame can rear their ugly heads in many forms throughout this process. Some people look at their lives and feel guilty that their grief over the loss of their baby is so all- consuming. They may tell themselves how lucky they are to have a loving partner, a fulfilling job, another child, or supportive friends and family and feel that their grief somehow exhibits a lack of gratitude for what they do have. However, acknowledging the profound and all-encompassing nature of your loss in no way discounts the positive aspects of your life. The two are not mutually exclusive. You can recognize that there is good in your life and still be willing to trade it all to have your baby back. Our minds often work to find ways to avoid pain. Telling ourselves to focus on the good is one of those ways. And, let me be clear, focusing on what you have is absolutely fine if you find that helpful. What is not fine is using the good in your life to beat yourself up for how bad you feel.

While it seems incongruous, you may also feel guilty for those moments when you do feel good. Someone tells a funny story, and you hear the unfamiliar sound of your own laugh, or you realize that you have gone an entire morning without crying. You may feel guilty for these experiences, like you are somehow betraying your child. But the human heart is amazing and is capable of holding two extreme and diametrically opposed emotions at the same time. A moment of laughter does not come at the expense of your grief. You don’t have a finite number of feelings; if one appears on the side of joy, it isn’t stolen from the pain of your loss. You can honor and love your child and still appreciate the smell of autumn.

As much as you are able, allow yourself to be present in even the broadest range of your emotions without the added burden of guilt. If you can’t bear to consider the gifts in your life because the loss of your baby fills up the entire screen of your vision, that is okay. If you have a moment when you connect with the joy in the world around you, that is also okay. None of your feelings are intrinsically wrong or bad.

**THE ART OF HEALING A BROKEN HEART – Tiffany Patterson**

*But we have this treasure in clay pots so that the awesome power belongs to God and doesn’t come from us.*

*—2 Corinthians 4:7*

 The heartbreak after pregnancy and infant loss is like no other. There have been times when my heart was so shattered it felt beyond repair, but gradually I experienced my heart mending and healing. I recently learned about the beautiful Japanese art of Kintsugi, in which an artist takes a broken pot and mends it back together with liquid gold. The result is even more beautiful than the original. I think of God’s healing in this way—that somehow our great Divine Artist creates healing by using even our broken pieces to mend us.

Your heart will never look the same after the loss of your baby, and that is not a bad thing. Grief work is heart work, because grief is born out of great love. I believe that in our grief, our hearts are mended back together with the brilliant gold of God’s great love and compassion. God makes something beautiful of our broken hearts. Because of this beautiful and terrible process, we are able to carry and shine more love and compassion in a suffering world.

God can work this healing art in very practical ways through our support system, which may include seeking help from mental health professionals and/or medication that will support you as you grieve. Reaching out for that professional support from licensed providers is a great way to seek and experience God’s healing. Today I invite you to partner with God in the art of healing by seeking the support you need on this journey.

*God of comfort and light, I give my broken heart to you, knowing that you will heal it with your artful hands and make a way for even my scars to provide beauty and healing in this world. Amen.*

**EMPTY SPACE – Tiffany Patterson**

*Jesus’ mother . . . stood near the cross. . . .*

*—John 19:25-27*

Scripture tells us that Jesus’s mother, Mary, witnessed the tragic, terrifying death of her son. What scripture doesn’t tell us is what that terrible experience was like for Mary. But you and I know what it is like to lose a child, and I’m sure Mary could relate to our experience of grief. Artist Michelangelo, in his famous Pietà statue, depicts the grief-stricken Mary cradling the lifeless body of her son. It reminds me of those moments when I held the lifeless body of my infant daughter. Though Mary’s arms are full, they are profoundly empty. For those who have gone through a pregnancy loss, you may know this feeling after seeing no heartbeat on the monitor and going through a D&C procedure. Amid that emptiness, you hold so much love for your baby.

My baby died during Holy Week, on Holy Saturday—a day when the church commemorates the dark time of grief after Jesus’s death and before the Resurrection. It is a day we often are tempted to gloss over in favor of the joy of Easter morning. But it is on this Holy Saturday that I meet a God who is present with us in our grief, who weeps with us in our grief, who makes space for our grief. Even though her story isn’t described in the biblical texts, we know God didn’t skip over Mary’s grief after the death of Jesus.

God’s grieving heart, Mary’s grieving heart—our grieving hearts—ex- press great love. We don’t have to skip from Good Friday to Easter. We are allowed to stay as long as we need to in Holy Saturday, knowing that God meets us there and holds us close in that empty space without our baby.

*Abiding, everlasting God, my arms and womb may feel empty as I hold this grief. I know I can trust you to make space for my grief and give me all the time I need to sit in this Holy Saturday season in my life. Thank you. Amen.*