

The Power of Hope & Prayer in Dark Times

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Hi. My name is Amy Thomas, and today what I want to talk with you about is having hope during very dark times, and trusting in God when maybe He just does not feel close, and you just aren't feeling anything in your prayer life, or not understanding what He's doing with a certain tragedy or pain that you're going through. But before we begin, let's start with a prayer.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Dear Father, sometimes You feel very far away, and sometimes we just do not understand what is going on in our lives or why You would allow it, and it can cause us to slip into despair. And I know that many watching maybe are struggling with finding hope or trusting in Your ways, and I pray today that my story can give them hope, and that they might understand that sometimes we don't fully understand Your ways, and we don't have the big picture like You do, but trusting in You that all will work out for Your good and for our good and for the good of others. And please be with us today as we journey together, and please bless those who are listening. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So what I want to talk with you about today is a story of my own where I felt a lot of despair, and was really losing hope and having a very hard time trusting in God. So I had my oldest daughter when I was pretty young – I was only 22 – and then I had my middle child about 3 and a half years later after her. And both of those pregnancies was fine. My middle child did come early, and we don't know all the reasons why, but she's a healthy, beautiful 13-year-old girl today. But afterwards, I had always envisioned me and my husband having at least 3 children.

But after my second child, I kind of slipped into this kind of... I slipped into this very selfish period of my life. I wasn't, like, overtly selfish, but there was a lot of selfishness going on in the little things that I did and how I thought about life, and I wasn't... In the early parts of our marriage I wasn't Catholic, and so I was contracepting, because in Protestant circles that's just what you do. It's like a rite of passage – you don't even question it. And so I had never really questioned contraception. Well, as things would turn out, it was causing me to be deathly ill, and finally my husband and I were like "We just can't do this anymore," which, thankfully, led us on a journey to NFP and the beauty of our sexuality in the body. But that's another topic for another day.

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Anyway, I was no longer contracepting, and we didn't... because I wasn't Catholic, I hadn't yet explored, you know, cycles, and understanding your fertility and all that. And so we were... we were still in the mindset of "We don't want any other children." At least I was. I think my husband was way more open to life than I was. And so anyway, after I quit using contraception we got pregnant really quickly. I got pregnant. And it's very hard to say this, but I was not thrilled. I thought in my mind "Oh my gosh, I'm going to have to do diaper bags again, and I'm going to have to, you know, lose my body tone," and, you know, I was working at the time, and I just... the thought of giving everything up was just too much for me, and I was very selfish about it. And I feel really guilty for feeling that way, because it was an awful way to think about having a new life growing inside of me, and it's something that I definitely had to ask forgiveness for.

Anyway, as time went on, when I went to my doctors' appointments I just naturally grew to start loving this beautiful life inside of me. And I was at work one day and I could just tell that something wasn't right. And so we went to the doctor, they did an ultrasound – I was about 10 weeks – and the baby's heartbeat was not there. And I... I was so devastated. And I remember looking across the hallway, and there was a very pregnant woman across the hallway waiting to be seen, and we met eyes, and I was so envious of her. Because she was at the end of her pregnancy, she was getting ready to welcome her new baby into the world, and I was walking away losing mine, and it was very hard. And the doctor was not... he was so technical. He was like "Oh, miscarriages are normal, and you can conceive again." And I just didn't want to hear any of that. It sounded like he was reading out of a textbook, and I just wanted to get out of there.

So anyway, that kind of... that was our first miscarriage and, you know, he told me it was normal. But I still felt a lot of heartache, and I ached for that baby. And so, as time went on, I slipped into that selfish mode again – it didn't take too long – but we got pregnant again. We moved to California from Florida, and I had another miscarriage. And I, again, when I got pregnant I wasn't thrilled. It wasn't as bad as before, but that selfishness had just totally crepted inside of me again, and I just settled back into "Oh well, you know, 2 kids. This is good, this is good." It was awful. My kids were 7 and 4 at the time, and I was like "Oh, you know, they're basically grown. They hardly need me." Anyway, after that miscarriage, again I was told it was very normal. I was devastated again, because each time I would get pregnant I still eventually, even though initially I wasn't thrilled, I would come around to loving that child fully, and when I would lose them it was very hard.

Well, after that I lost 6 more babies, and each time it just got harder and harder and harder. No one could tell me why, no doctor would even test me, and I was just... they just kept telling me over and over again "Oh, this is normal. You know, you'll

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conceive again. It will happen soon.” And I just was like “No, this isn’t normal.” One of those miscarriages during those years, my husband was gone – he’s in the military, and he was on a... it’s called a TDY, it means a Temporary... it’s like a temporary deployment sort of. It’s like a business trip for military guys. And this miscarriage was particularly awful, and I couldn’t get myself to the hospital, and I had to call a friend to come get me and get me to the hospital. And she stayed with me the whole time, God love her. She was such a good friend. She missed her son’s play.

Anyway, as she was driving me home I was looking out the window, and I distinctly remember hearing God say to me in my soul “I’m saving you from something.” And I was like “Okay. Okay, what does this mean?” And then I thought “Oh, okay, you know, God’s saving me because maybe if I brought these babies to full term something bad would happen to me or something like that. I don’t know. God’s saving me, so I just probably shouldn’t have any more children. That’s just how it’s going to be.” That’s just kind of how I chalked it up. I didn’t pray on it, and I didn’t ask Him what He meant by that, I just really felt that in my heart.

Well, a couple of years went by after that, and my husband deployed. And right before he deployed I got pregnant. Usually you have a post-deployment baby, we had a pre-deployment baby. And while my husband was deployed, that was the eighth child that we lost, and that was so hard. And I was... I was at the point where I just couldn’t stand it anymore. This was just so hard. I’m like “God, where are You? Why do I keep losing these children? We are good parents. What is going on?” And, you know, I didn’t have my husband there because he was deployed. And, I mean, I did have the support of my family, which was wonderful, but I didn’t have him there to grieve with, and it was extremely difficult. And I just... I didn’t feel God in prayer, I was barely praying about it anyway. I just was devastated. And I ached for each one of these kids, and I wanted them so badly, and it was just so hard.

Well, when my husband came back from deployment we moved to Virginia, and we were talking about “Are we going to try again?” And I told him, I said “If we try again, we need to pray first. We’ve got to do something different, this just isn’t working. Us just getting pregnant and hoping for the best.” And so we both decided we would pray together and pray on our own, and so we did that, and what we decided was we should try again. And oh my gosh, I was so nervous and anxious. And I did get pregnant, but this time, once I looked at the pregnancy strip, I ran to my husband I was happy. And I was just full of joy, and we hugged each other, and it was so different than the times before. And I felt that selfishness had gone out of me.

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Anyway, because I would lose all my babies before 15 weeks, I was just so nervous that I immediately got in to see a doctor and everything. Well, one night – I was, you know, maybe 8 weeks along and everything was going good, I was still extremely nervous – my husband came to me right before bed, and he had been praying about this baby, and I had been praying about this baby. And always before, I knew that if I had a little boy I wanted to name him Tristan. I love that name. My husband came to me and he said “I’ve got to talk to you about something.” I was like “Okay.” And he’s like “How stuck on the name Tristan are you?” I was like “Well, it’s what I’ve basically had picked out for a very long time.” And he said “Well I’ve been praying, and I really think that this baby needs to be named Jeremiah.” And I was like “Okay, well what... what do you... what’s going on?” He’s like “Well I’ve been praying, and I told God, you know, that I’m just so worried about you and the baby, and that all is going to be okay. And I distinctly heard 3 things: ‘Everything is going to be okay. This baby will be a boy. His name will be Jeremiah, and I will make him great.’” I guess that’s 4 things. And I was like “Okay.”

So we never find out the sex of our baby, so we were going to have to wait until delivery day to find out, but I’m really big on names and the meanings of them. So I didn’t know what the name Jeremiah meant, I never even considered. So I went and I looked it up, and the name Jeremiah, which neither my husband or I knew, means “God will make him great.” And I said “This baby will be named Jeremiah.” And, through God’s grace, we welcomed our baby boy, Jeremiah, on May 4th, 2014. And I know now what I felt in my heart when God said to me “I am saving you from something.” I know now exactly what that meant. He was saving me from myself, from my selfishness. I was not ready to receive the gift of these children. And I don’t think God took these children from me because I was being selfish. Something is wrong with my body, and I wasn’t able to carry these children, but God was using this as a way to strip me of that selfishness, and to basically fall on my knees and come to Him.

And I want to tell you that sometimes our tragedies are where God can do the best work inside of our lives. I needed to be stripped of that selfishness. My children needed a better mother. And to my children that I’ve lost, you know, I’ve never met them, and we’ve lost 10 in all. I’ve never met them, but they’ve made me a better mother, and for that I’m grateful. I have 10 saints in heaven that I can call on at any time to watch over their mom, watch over their siblings. But it could have been so easy in that moment to completely and utterly slip into despair, and there were times when I did, and I lost hope and then I would regain it.

And no matter what you’re going through, no matter what tragedy or pain that there is in your life, it can be easy to slip into despair. And we may not feel that

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God is there – I sure did not feel like God was there in those dark times and, whatever your situation is, you may not feel it either – but I can tell you that there is a reason. And what I learned through this was, and the other tragedies that have happened in my life, is that sometimes I think God is far away, seems far away – He's always there, but He seems far away – because we need to go after Him. I think if He always just felt supremely close, we might take it for granted and not seek Him with everything that we've got. And losing these children brought me to my knees over it, and I was like "God, I do not understand what You're doing." And I still don't understand why I had to lose 10 children. You know, I'll find out someday, and I'll get to meet my kids. And sometimes we won't always understand why we have to go through something, but that doesn't mean that we can't heal from it. And I just want to encourage you to don't give up hope. And even if God feels far, far away, still seek Him in prayer. Still go after Him.

You know, Mother Teresa, Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta, she often said that she just didn't feel God. But yet she still went after His heart and went to do His will in the world, and what great and wonderful things she did. And she didn't always understand. I mean, she had to look at the most horrific conditions that people had to live in, the unloved, and be like "Where is God in the midst of all of this?" But she trusted, and she had hope, and she kept pursuing even during dark times.

And so I want to encourage you as well. Don't give up hope. If I had given up hope and given over to despair, I wouldn't have a rambunctious 4-year-old today. And just trust that sometimes our tragedies, if we allow God, He can use them for great good. And I know that through the tragedy of losing my children, my 10 children, God snuffed out a lot of selfishness in me and He made me a better mother. My kids, my 10 saints in heaven, my earthly children, and God all made me a better mother, and I'm grateful for that. So let's end in a prayer.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Dear God, sometimes You do feel far away, and I pray that those listening today just trust in what You're doing. And I pray that they open themselves up to You, even if they can't feel You near, to do amazing and good things in their lives. Sometimes the tragedies in our lives can be the best place to strip us of bad vices and unhealthy habits, and really drop us to our knees and bring us closer to You if we allow that to happen and open ourselves up to what You can do. Sometimes not even understanding why we're going through it and why You would allow it, but trusting that You can create good out of bad situations. I pray for all of those listening, and I hope that they strive to have hope in You and to trust in You. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.