

The Lord your God is in your midst,
a mighty one who will save;
he will rejoice over you with gladness;
he will quiet you by his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing. (Zephaniah 3:1)

I grew up in a Christian home. At times, I cringe with the unoriginal sentiment of that phrase. It can be so trite and cliché. But it is true, it is a blessing, and I have few complaints and zero trauma from my childhood. My parents loved me with all the love they could muster, and my church was a welcoming place where I enjoyed spending my time in AWANA Clubs and Sunday School, and later in youth group, bell choir, and cantatas. Every Christian opportunity was afforded to me. I went through all the motions, said all the right things. I was firm in my beliefs. I was a solid Christian. But later I would come to realize that my foundation was hovering just skin deep. I had fooled the church. I had fooled myself. And that foundation would come crashing down.

When I was a freshman in high school, one of my teachers had our class write letters to our future selves. The plan was to hide the letters in the ceiling of the school and open them 4 years later at high school graduation. I remember that letter. For some reason, I wrote these very words: "One thing I would never do is have an abortion. How could anyone kill a living baby? That would be crazy." And crazy it was... those words would come back to haunt me in a few short years.

When I was 16 years old, I met a boy named Luke. He was also a Christian and I knew him very distantly through various religious circles. I was Baptist; he was Pentecostal. I was prudish; he was bold. Opposites are said to attract, and they

did.

Although we were both Christians and raised in solid Christian homes, our physical relationship progressed quickly and was not God honoring. We both chose to walk away from the Lord.

I found out I was pregnant on my 18th birthday. Luke and I were in shock. We both were terrified of what our “upstanding Christian” families would say or think. The fear was paralyzing. My teenage mind was so focused on the present. I was so afraid. I felt as if I had no other option.

I was good friends with an older girl who had also gotten pregnant a year or two prior to me. She ended up leaving our church because our pastor was going to require her to stand up in front of the church and confess her sin publicly before the congregation. I couldn't think of anything else. I couldn't think into the future. I just know what we did was wrong, and we would ruin the reputations of so many people. I didn't think about the baby. I didn't think about Christ. I thought about myself.

The memories from the day I had an abortion are so raw and so consuming. The shame, guilt, and filthiness I felt was more painful than anything I've ever experienced. It was then that I created such an impenetrable wall within my soul, in the hopes that nothing could ever get out, and no one would ever get in. I had played the role of Christian perfection well, but inside the lies, my heart had crumbled. I was a mess. I had taken my eyes off Christ. And I was reaping the physical, emotional, and spiritual consequences. I went through depression and denial and finally completely shut down. And Luke and I never talked about it again.

We ended up getting married 2 years after that terrible day. We entered our marriage very young, broken, and overwhelmed with our silent burden.

Five years into our marriage, I discovered that Luke had been hiding a consuming addiction to meth. He had been addicted for two years while on pastoral staff at a church and was on the verge of suicide and death. After contemplating divorce, I chose to see our marriage through. We attended some rehab couples counseling together, and we were brought to our knees in reconciliation and repentance for the sins of our past. The effects of the abortion that we stuffed so deep for so long had manifested itself in Luke's addiction.

Over the next ten years we embarked on a grueling journey of discovery together.

You see I thought my sin was too big. Abortion was THE sin the church never spoke about. We talk about pornography and homosexuality and support groups for recovering addicts and hurting marriages. But abortion. That is too much. That is too evil. That is the unspeakable sin. That's the sin the church doesn't know what to do with. But I finally got to a place where I realized that I didn't see the death of Jesus as enough for my sin. How dare I. The Savior who came to save the whole world wasn't good enough for me? That was the wake up call I needed to surrender.

The darkness of sin in my life was miraculously transformed into light through public confession, repentance, services offered through Pregnancy Resources, and an overall intervention and presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives.

I was weary from carrying my burdens alone; from holding my sin close to my heart so no one would know. So no one would get close. But Jesus lovingly broke me. My pride, my self-righteousness, living a life so everyone would think I had it all together. But my life was not put together. It was messy and hard and sometimes I just wanted to cry my guts out because I didn't understand. But I trusted God. He was holding me. He was carrying me through the darkest times. During the past 5 years, I've experienced more of Jesus in my life than ever before. He is so good and so loving and so, so beautiful. His faithfulness brought me to a place where I had to surrender everything to him, and that's the only reason I can stand before you today.

Although I consider myself fully forgiven, healed, and set free, once in a while the past can rear its ugly head. I have asked myself WHY more times than I can count. Why would I have an abortion? I was saved. I knew all the right answers to all the Christian questions. I was the ideal member of our church. Why would I do this evil thing? In hopes of figuring all this out I would try to connect a random event to the abortion or maybe it was a flawed relationship dynamic or the influence of my peers... something, anything to answer that tormenting question of why.

To which I can now answer with desperate assurance. I had an abortion because I didn't see Christ as enough. I didn't recognize the extraordinary power of the Gospel. I didn't see my need for a Savior because I didn't see myself as a sinner. I had "asked Jesus into my heart" to be the dutiful Christian child. But my heart was far from Him. My faith was not my own.

My current job is Children's Director for an evangelical church

in the Quad Cities, and my eyes are wide open as I peer into the future of these beautiful little ones. A prayer for faith, is my prayer that precedes all others with urgency. Prayers for this next generation to be so moved by the gospel, to see their need for a Savior, to weep over their sin with godly sorrow, and to stand firm on their own faith so they will glorify God and do amazing things for His kingdom.

And I know God can use even this to bring glory to Himself and help the countless other women in the church who have made life shattering decisions like mine. Every time I talk about my story, at least one woman will come up to me afterwards or send me a private message, just to let me know that she is me. And I pray for healing for her as well. The first step is to tell someone. Sin can fester and grow into a massive wall of thorns in the dark. The light of Christ is the only power that can redeem our sin.

Through my healing process, I now know it's ok to think about my baby, how old she would be, the many missed milestones. And it's ok to be sad sometimes. But I'm no longer full of guilt and condemnation because Christ has paid it all. And I know my baby is in heaven worshipping the One True God, and I can't wait for that joyous meeting someday.

I realize the ramifications of my sin. They are far reaching, but I trust God can use even the darkest places of my soul for His glory. God has forgiven me with amazing grace and mercy. He has reconciled a marriage the world had thought was lost – 21 years of marriage this year. God has delivered my husband from a shattering addiction. And he has inconceivably blessed us with an amazing family. God has worked miracle upon miracle of restoration and healing in our lives. I am now able to

tell my story with the hope that it will help just one person.
And that would be enough.

Should I end with reading my poem I wrote for the memorial service?