

Healed in the womb - Grace's story

Dear Friends.

We thought we would take this opportunity to tell you Grace's story about what God has done for her, and for us this year.

The story begins when I went for an 18 week ultrasound while pregnant with Grace. They found a large cyst in her brain. We were told it was probably not a really serious type (meaning not likely to kill the baby but with unknown consequences to cognitive and physical function), but we would have to wait two weeks for a subsequent ultrasound for a more definite diagnosis. I could not imagine how there could be such a thing as a non-serious cyst in your unborn child's brain - we could see a large black hole there! The doctor was reluctant to be drawn into any real discussion about what it could mean for her, or us, and we started two of the hardest weeks of our lives. We now understood what a "Surely this couldn't really be happening to us" experience felt like. I felt the uncertainty over it all was the hardest thing to bear, but was soon to discover that the certainty was actually worse.

When I got home from the ultrasound I grabbed my Bible, desperate for some comfort in a way that you can only do when you really come face to face with how little control you have over life. I opened it at random and came to Acts ch20 v7. The words that leapt out of the page at me were where Paul raises a young man from the dead. Was this the comfort that God wanted to give me? That God might want me to put my faith on the line and pray for healing was almost as scary as contemplating the cyst. This would mean that I would have to take my faith in God to a whole new level. Not to just read the Bible and understand that God has healed in the past, but that He really is real and can heal now. But the alternative was too awful to contemplate.

We turned to our Christian family for help. We had close friends praying for us, bible study and prayer groups praying for us, we attended the healing service at St Andrews Cathedral in Sydney and we were regulars at the restoration service at our current church Springwood Baptist Church. It was the mother of a close friend who confirmed we should be praying for healing. She said "I have prayed and King Hezekiah has come to me. He turned to the wall and cried and asked God for healing and God healed him, this baby will be all right." I was so grateful to her for this encouragement to help me get through the awful unknown of the next two weeks, and to help me on the path of asking for healing.

The giants of the Old Testament came to me. Abraham and Sarah had a child when it was impossible. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Sarah asked and I asked that too. "Nothing can separate us from the love of God" I read and was grateful. I read and re-read about ordinary people being able to ask mountains to throw themselves into the sea if they had faith and did not doubt, people being healed and raised from the dead. God is the same, yesterday, today and forever, so does that mean miracles could happen now? We still didn't really know what

we needed to be praying for at this stage, God is merciful and let it unfold gradually for us. However, over that two weeks we became determined we needed to pray for healing.

When the two weeks were up we returned for a repeat ultrasound to see if we could get some clarification. On that day I was reminded from Deuteronomy "The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you: he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid, do not be discouraged" and I clung to those words.

As they started the scan this time there was no need for talking. We could all see it there, a cyst in the brain that was not only still there, but had grown. We were told that they now believed that our baby did have a really serious cyst, a variant of the Dandy Walker cyst. The cyst was now protruding into the brain under the cerebellum. The favourable things were that there were no other physical abnormalities and no structures in the brain were currently being affected. We were told however, that it was only a matter of time with the cyst's apparent rate of growth.

This is a very rare abnormality, only one in thirty thousand babies. How did this growth of the cyst and a more definitive diagnosis fit in with our conviction that she would be healed? It seems that God wanted to teach us more.

Things moved very quickly from then. A second opinion the following day confirmed that there was definitely a cyst and it was most likely to be a Dandy-Walker variant. We were told that although very unlikely, the best we could really hope for was that the brain would keep growing and that the cyst would remain the same size, it would not shrink or go away.

Amniocentesis confirmed that the baby was genetically 100% sound. Some comfort, but these cysts rarely, if ever, have a genetic origin. As we went from one cold doctors' room to another we were introduced to the cold hard facts of medical science as a place often without hope and unfortunately nowadays without even compassion. Termination was offered to us, or alternatively follow-up with referrals to various support services for families with children with developmental problems.

There is little research into the condition, but what is available is very discouraging. Ranges of mental and physical disability were discussed, including the fact that our baby may never walk or feed itself. We were shocked to discover that most babies didn't make it to birth, predominantly because they were terminated, others died and those that did make it didn't do well. Over this process our baby was slowly dehumanised.

As we now better understood the implications of the condition and read and re-read the numerous reports supporting the diagnosis and offering no hope for our child we realised that if anything was going to improve the outcome for our baby, there would be absolutely no doubt that it was God that was doing it. The more hopeless the medical world told us it was, the more we and those supporting us in prayer prayed for healing. We were prepared to accept whatever God was

going to do in this situation and bring up the baby as best we could knowing God would be there for us. However, we felt really strongly that we should be praying for healing.

We had never really understood the power of prayer before this time in our lives even after years of being Christians. Prayer makes a difference. God wants us to pray whether he answers in the way we hope or not. There are only two parables in the bible where Jesus speaks about prayer, both of them are about persistence. The man who keeps knocking on the door of a friend asking for bread and the widow that wouldn't give up asking for justice from the judge; we wanted to be as persistent as that man, as relentless as that widow. We held onto Romans ch5 vs3 to 4 over that time "We rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character and character hope." We were challenged to "be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for us in Christ Jesus." We had been taken to our lowest depths, completely humbled before God. We came to realise that God truly loves us in the middle of our suffering, not because of our suffering but despite our suffering. He really does love us whatever comes our way and there is more to life than the here and now.

And God was incredibly gracious and loving, he completely healed our baby.

At twenty-eight weeks the cyst appeared smaller than the previous ultrasound, By my 30-week scan the cyst was completely gone. The ultrasound technician was stunned and blurted out "I expected to see a huge cyst in this baby's brain by now". Three doctors looked for it unsuccessfully. One who hadn't seen us before said "If I didn't know your history I would have said this is a completely normal scan", which it was - God had healed our unborn baby.

Since being born Grace has had two further scans with no sign of any cyst, she has been completely healed. Thank you God, you are the same yesterday, today and forever, you can perform incredible miracles here and now.

We have had people say "oh well the equipment sometimes picks things up wrongly" or "maybe it just went away". We had a diagnosis, a second opinion, and 8 ultrasounds over a 10 week period showing a growing cyst. There was no doubt by either us or the doctors and ultrasound technicians that the cyst was there. As for it "just going away" it certainly did that against what the medical profession believed would happen. No explanation was offered by the doctors. They just said they were really happy for us.

We should mention that the journey did not end then as Grace was born nearly 2 months early and spent 40 days in hospital, but that is another story, we are sure this is enough to digest for now.

So how do we feel about all this and do we have any idea why it happened? Well we named our baby Grace because we truly believe that she is only with us by the grace of God and we always want to be reminded of how generous and

loving God is. I struggle to put into words the joy and relief we felt when God healed her and what a blessing she is in our lives. We are mindful that God doesn't always answer prayers in this way and many people have a different outcome to us. It is not through anything we have done as we know that many of them have a more powerful faith than ours, but we are positive that God loves them and their babies as much as He does ours. We don't know why God intervenes favourably sometimes and not others, but we do know that God loves us whatever life brings to us, and that pain is a part of life and sometimes we need it to help us turn to him. It certainly helped us turn to God and we have never felt so close to him or as sure of our faith as in the middle of our suffering. We have been completely humbled and now our lives have changed.

Did it happen so that we would have the courage to tell you, or remind you, of how real and loving God is? Maybe, and I hope this story has done just that. Does God want us to help others who tread this terrible path with an unborn child? I hope so and we pray that God will show us how we can do that. Is Grace destined for something amazing in her life? We hope so; we hope that it will be an especially close relationship with Him. Or is it that Grace is simply an unearned gift? We know so, as all God's gifts are.

We hope you are encouraged by our story and have a wonderful Christmas and will experience the real peace and blessings of God this year.

Love Nicola, Eric, Erin and Grace.
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