



“Baby Grace”

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Grace’s parents (who do not wish to be named) were delighted to conceive Grace after two years of trying. But their joy turned to sorrow when the 20-week scan discovered serious defects. An amniocentesis confirmed that Grace suffered from “Edward syndrome”, a lethal chromosomal disorder, and doctors advised abortion. Strengthened by their strong Christian faith, the couple decided to continue with the pregnancy and give Grace a chance. Sadly, Grace was stillborn.

Written by Grace’s mother

After two years of marriage, my husband and I were wondering whether it was the stress of my hectic teaching job that was preventing me from conceiving. Then we went to USA for 2½ months for my husband’s job assignment, and after we came back, were overjoyed to discover I was pregnant. I began to prepare for my baby’s arrival.

Then I went for my detailed scan during the fifth month of my pregnancy. The scan showed several defects—she had a cyst in her head and a hole in her heart. Her last finger was short of one phalanx and she had only one umbilical artery (the artery which transports food to the foetus) instead of two. Our gynaecologist immediately asked for an amniocentesis test, which had to be taken another day. During the course of this time, we prayed to God that He would heal our baby and that all would be well.

But the amniocentesis test confirmed our greatest fears. It confirmed that she suffered from a rare chromosome disorder—she had one extra chromosome in her 18th chromosome pair (she had three instead of two). This disorder is called “Edward

Syndrome” or Trisomy 18. The gynaecologist advised us that this is fatal—our baby was not likely to survive long. She might be stillborn, or survive a few days, a few weeks, or a few months, but most likely less than two years after birth. She would have problems drinking milk (from sucking difficulties) and might have problems breathing because of the hole in her heart. She was also expected to be mentally retarded. In any case, our gynaecologist advised that we abort her, but graciously left the choice to us. We knew of her abnormality on a Wednesday, and by the following Monday we had to make a choice on whether to abort her (as I was nearing the last date at which we could legally have an abortion). We were quite shattered and unprepared for this. We called our baby Grace after we knew of her condition.

My husband and I were thrown into great turmoil and confusion. We simply didn’t know what to do. That night, a couple from our church visited us, and they encouraged us to see beyond the present. If we were to keep Grace, she would be grateful to us even if she did not survive. Of course we would have to be prepared to be drained in all aspects (emotionally, financially, etc) if we were to keep her, and to be in and out of hospital all the time. And we had to realise that, whatever decision we were to make, we never blamed each other, but stuck through everything together. We were grateful for this couple’s care and advice.

Many friends helped us by talking and praying, and we also felt pressure from some of the elders in our family to abort the baby and to start anew. But by Saturday, I knew that I wanted to keep my baby—I did not think that I had the right to take her life into my own hands. I felt that this baby was a gift from God, and that only God, as the author of life, had the right to take away her life. My husband differed in his opinion, as he felt that this medical condition did not allow any hope—he worried that he would not be able to cope with Grace’s demands after she was born.

I did not argue with my husband, but felt that I should leave it to God—if He wanted us to keep baby Grace, He had to change my husband’s mind. We prayed at MacRitchie Reservoir that afternoon and spoke to our former pastor at church the following morning. A passage from the Bible (Lamentations 3:31–33) changed my husband’s mind:

“For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though He brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is His unfailing love. For He does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.”

The days of pregnancy that followed were not easy. I often doubted whether we had made the right decision, and whether we knew exactly what we were in for. The thought of caring for Grace after she was born was very scary. What if she couldn’t drink milk? What if in the middle of the night she turned blue? What if...? Once into the third trimester of my pregnancy, when Grace was getting heavier and I was suffering from backaches, I started to complain, “Why did I keep Grace to add suffering to myself? After all she is not going to survive for long...”. But my faith in God sustained me, and I felt that God would not give me anything that I couldn’t cope with, that He had His reasons for giving me Grace, and that Grace was His best gift to me.

We still held onto hope—we met with parents of a baby whose term was marred with an abnormality but who was miraculously born normal. So we sought prayers from church pastors who had miraculously healed others, hoping that God would perform a miracle in Grace's life.

The final weeks were very difficult—at 40 weeks there was still no sign of labour, so at 42 weeks I had to be induced in hospital. Grace was delivered naturally. But she was stillborn. The midwife handed her to me in my delivery bed. It was so gratifying to hold her in my arms, after our long wait. She was so pretty, and looked completely “normal”.

When she was taken away, and I returned to the ward, the truth dawned on me. My baby was gone. The loss overwhelmed me. I had cared and “suffered” for her for 9½ months—why didn't she say “thank you”, why didn't she respond at all? I was angry and sad, and felt as though injustice had been done to me. I cried and cried. My parents and friends came to console me. It was so difficult to be in the hospital seeing other people with happy faces welcoming their newborn babies—while we had to face death in the delivery wards, where one assumes new life begins. The midwives seemed surprised by our decision but they were professional enough to empathise with our situation.

We arranged for her cremation two days later. At the crematorium, the hall was fully packed with church friends, colleagues and relatives who came to support us. We are grateful to them for their support in our time of need. A service was held and our close friend wrote a letter on behalf of Grace to us, thanking us for keeping her. The letter was so comforting to us, for we could at least hear words of gratitude “from Grace” and be able to hear “her voice”. It was a memorable day in our lives.

We have placed Grace's ashes in a Christian memorial, next to a church. Today, we proudly show Grace's photograph to our three other children and introduce their eldest sister to them. On the anniversary of her birth and death we have brought the younger children to pay their respects to her. None of this would have been possible if we had aborted her. Keeping her is the best decision that we have made in our lives.

Grace is always close to my heart. No other children could replace her. Oh how I miss her! I long to hold and hug her again. But I am comforted that I'll be able to do so when I see her in heaven again. In heaven we will meet.

This is the letter written from Grace to her parents by a close friend:

Dearest Mummy and Daddy,

It was not too long ago when you were so happy to learn that I was coming into the world. You gave me such a lovely name too and made many exciting plans for my arrival.

When I was about 20 weeks old, kicking inside Mummy's tummy, both of you heard the shocking news that I had serious problems. The doctors quickly confirmed the diagnosis and advised you to terminate my life. You wouldn't have known it but I waited with bated breath for my life hung in balance. I kept wondering what both of you would do.

Mummy, Daddy, it must have been a most difficult decision for both of you to make. I'm sure there were many nights and days of agony for you two.

Mummy, I can't thank you enough for not taking my life into your own hands. Daddy, thank you too, for standing firmly by Mummy. You both chose to allow God's will to prevail and continued to nurture me inside you. Over the months, I've enjoyed every moment that you've cared for me, loved and cherished me even though I couldn't be the perfect baby that every Mummy and Daddy should have. I've enjoyed listening to your voices as you sang and talked to me.

I'm very sad that I cannot be the beautiful, bouncy baby that you both dreamed of but I would like to know that I have been a much loved and privileged baby. God in His sovereign will has chosen to take me to heaven.

Mummy and Daddy, in the short nine and a half months of my life, you have made it possible for me to have a full life. Thank you. Till we meet again...

Your loving daughter, Grace