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# If God really loved me

by Marlo Schalesky

“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so...” It’s such a simple song. I learned it as a child, and sang it probably a thousand times. I never thought to doubt it, until a few short years ago.

It was my thirty-fifth birthday. Thirty-five is a milestone of sorts, when all the good statistics for pregnancy decrease while the bad ones take a giant leap forward. Of course, I’d always planned to have a house full of children by the time I was thirty-five, so the stats weren’t going to matter. But my plans obviously weren’t the same as God’s.

I would have liked to spend the day huddled in a corner with my tears, but my husband, Ted, planned a small party for me instead. Balloons were attached to the banister, a candle-laden cake sat on the

table, and next to it lay a stack of party hats and whistles. It all looked so cheerful, so bright, so it-doesn’t-matter-that-I’m-thirty-five-and-still-don’t-have-children. The least I could do was swallow my depressing thoughts and pretend to have a good time.

Soon, our friends came.

“Happy birthday, old lady,” Wayne grinned as he stepped through the doorway and deposited a package on the end table. After him, came Sue, Lisa, Sam, and finally my best friend, Lynn.

“How are you doing?” Lynn whispered as she gave me a hug. “I’ve been thinking about you all day.”

“I’m, uh, okay,” I murmured back. “What’s one more year?” I willed my voice to remain steady.

The rest of the party was uneventful. As the evening drew to a close, I gathered up the cake plates and took them into the kitchen. I set them near the sink, then lowered my head.

“Hey, are you okay? What’s up?”

I turned to see Lynn, with her hands full of the remaining cake dishes, behind me.

“I’m thirty-five today,” I answered, as if that should explain everything.

Lynn looked at me for a moment, then set her dishes next to mine. “It’s the baby thing, isn’t it?”

I nodded. “Does God hate me or something?”

Lynn didn’t answer.

A harsh laugh escaped my lips as I walked over and opened the door of the dishwasher. “Ted and I were so stupid,”

## TOP TEN SURVIVAL TIPS

### from fellow travellers on the road of infertility

- Decide your limits (morally, physically, spiritually, financially) before you go for treatment. Put them in writing and share with your doctor. This will help you stick to your limits when the pressure is on. – Julie
- Don't take what others say to heart. People will say the most awful, stupid, hurtful things. Expect it and remember, they are (like all of us) doing the best they can. – Roseanne
- Make sure you understand your insurance coverage and the laws that apply to coverage of fertility treatments. – Michael
- Find support. Your family and friends are important, but they can't replace the value of sharing with other couples who are facing the same fight against infertility. Seek out support groups in your church, community, and on the internet. – Jennifer
- Don't let life pass you by while you are waiting to become a parent. It would be better to cancel plans at the last minute than to let opportunities to enjoy your life and your spouse slip away while you wait. – Robin
- Don't waste time being treated by a gynecologist who claims to specialize in infertility. The only doctors who have the extra years of training in infertility treatments are Reproductive Endocrinologists. Go straight to the specialist. – Sandra
- If you need to stay home from a family gathering, baby shower or even a birthday party, do it. Don't feel guilty. – Janet
- Keep a prayer journal to express your hurt and frustrations. And read good books that will help develop your maturity during this tough time. – Michelle
- Include your husband in the grieving process. Open up to each other regarding the process you each are going through. – Jane
- Consider infertility like other trials we face in life – Know God has allowed it (Job 1:6-12), don't be surprised by it (1 Peter 1:6), and remember that it's working in you an “eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). – Erica

I grumbled. “We kept thinking that God would surely bless us soon. ‘Any month now,’ we’d say, believing that we’d soon be rejoicing and thanking God, and all the doubts, all the pain, would be behind us.” I snorted and shook my head.

Lynn sighed and put another plate in the dishwasher. “I’m so sorry.”

“So am I. I just don’t understand why God won’t bless me.”

Lynn frowned. “I wish I had some answers for you, but I don’t. I know you’ve been faithful. I know you’ve delighted yourself in Him. So why you’re still childless is a mystery to me.”

“Maybe all that stuff about God loving us is really just a bunch of garbage,” I stated.

“You know that’s not true.”

“Do I?”

Silence invaded the kitchen as Lynn turned and looked at me for a long moment. She didn’t say a word. Instead, she looped the dishtowel over the hook then came toward me. Gently, she put her arms around me and drew me close. Eventually, she spoke. “I know it’s hard. Doubts are normal when you’ve been through as much as you have. But one thing I know, God loves you. And I love you too.”

Lynn held me close as her words settled in my heart. I was not alone. I remembered all the times she had gone down to the altar with me, prayed for me, wept with me. Whatever else I doubted, one thing I knew. Lynn cared. Her care, her concern, showed me God’s love in a tangible way, in a way I couldn’t disregard. She made God real to me there in the kitchen, when my doubts raged hotter than thirty-five birthday

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## ***When A Friend’s Infertile***

Do you know someone praying and hoping for their miracle child, someone dealing with the reality of infertility every day? Below are some suggestions on how you can help.

### **WHAT NOT TO DO**

- Don’t try to make your friend feel better by complaining about your own children or by telling her she’s “lucky” not to have to deal with the stresses of having children. As Proverbs 25:20 (RSV) says, “He who sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on a wound.”
- Don’t offer unsolicited advice on how to get pregnant. Suggestions such as “just relax” or “if you just adopt” are not helpful.
- Don’t give assurances that “God will give you a child.” There are no guarantees that every couple will be able to have children.
- Don’t avoid any mention of children or pregnancy. Your awkwardness will only make your friend feel awkward in return.
- Don’t offer reasons or excuses for God like Job’s friends did. Telling your friend why God may not want her to have children is not only painful, it’s presumptuous.

### **WHAT TO DO**

- Do let your friend know that you’re continuing to pray for her. Your support and caring will let her know she isn’t alone, even in the hardest times.
- Do remember her on special days, such as Mother’s Day. A simple note saying “I know this is a hard day for you – just wanted to let you that you’re in my thoughts and prayers” can mean much.
- Do be sensitive about asking her to be involved in children’s ministries. Some infertile couples find joy in ministering to children, while others find it difficult. The same applies to attending events such as baby showers.
- Do feel free to ask questions. Infertility can be emotionally, physically, as well as financially stressful. Your friend will appreciate you asking how treatments are going and how she’s holding up, rather than if the treatments are “working.”
- Do provide your friend with a safe place for venting her spiritual questions and doubts. It is not unusual for those going through infertility to question God’s love or fairness in the midst of this difficult time. A listening ear is more helpful than pat answers.

*Loved me, from page 13*

candles, when my heart weighed more than a dozen chocolate cakes – God, who suffered and died for me, because He loves me.

Over the next several weeks, I thought about Christ on the cross. For once, I didn't rush past His death to the joy of His resurrection, like I'd always done in the past. Before, I never wanted to contemplate the cross, only the empty tomb. It was the same, I realized, with my infertility. I never wanted to truly face it. Instead, I always tried to rush ahead to the prospect of having a baby. I thought that if I just believed strongly enough, I'd never have to face the hurt, the loss.

But God had forced me to pause, to consider the cost of the cross. The cross meant pain, shame, and suffering. The empty tomb, however, meant joy and fulfillment. But one doesn't come without the other. Suffering, I discovered, is a part

of life. Sorrow is a partner on the path to Christ-like-ness. God's priority is our relationship, knowing Him, His sorrow and suffering as well as His joy. And if that were the case, I could no longer use my happiness as a measure of God's love.

In the years since my thirty-fifth birthday, I've come to accept the idea that sometimes things just don't make sense. The cross didn't make sense to those who watched Jesus die. It was a strange demonstration of love. But in hindsight, we understand the sacrifice, the love that held Christ on the cross.

So, perhaps someday I'll look back on these painful years of infertility and see there, as well, the marks of God's love for me. For now, though, I can only look to the cross and remember, He, too, knows what it means to hurt. I can only look into the eyes of those in whom He lives and see that He loves me.

*Notes published with the article in 2008.*

*Marlo Schalesky is the award winning author of seven books, including her upcoming novel If Tomorrow Never Comes, which explores the topic of infertility in marriage while combining a love story with a surprise ending twist. If Tomorrow Never Comes will be released in March 2009 from Waterbrook-Mulnomah Publishers, a division of Random House. She has also written a nonfiction book on infertility, Empty Womb, Aching Heart, Hope and Help for Those Struggling with Infertility, which released in 2001. For more information about Marlo's books as well as additional tips for surviving the infertility journey, please visit her website at [www.marloschalesky.com](http://www.marloschalesky.com).*

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