

I struggled for several years, in and out of college over a seven year span, to uncover the meaning and purpose of my life and what I was suppose to do with it. The only problem was that I was trying to do this in my own strength aside from God. At the peak of what I considered to be a successful time in my life, God's plan began to reveal itself.

I had waited two years to get into nursing school, but six weeks into school, I discovered that I was pregnant. Overjoyed on one hand and terrified on the other, I tried desperately to finish school and not, yet again, become a quitter. In December of 2004, I had a screening to make sure the baby was okay. At this point, I was only about 16 weeks along. A couple of days later, I received a phone call at work for the nurse informing me the test results were a little abnormal. I was sent to a larger hospital for a more thorough ultrasound. Under the impression that everything would turn out okay, I was ecstatic to see my baby on the screen and watch the lips move and the head wiggle. The technician had been looking at another screen when she said that the doctor would be in to talk to me. I still thought the doctor would say there was nothing wrong, but she didn't. She came in and sat down and began to look at her screen, while I was looking at mine. While I was staring at my baby, the doctor tapped me on the shoulder. I looked over at her and

she was fighting tears. She said that my baby's arms and legs were very short, the abdomen was outside the body, and the brainstem was flat. My insides went numb as I tried to wrap my brain around what she had said.

The doctor then suggested an amniocentesis. My hands were shaking so bad that I could not get my signature on the line of the consent form. I did not even recognize my own handwriting. While the technician was setting up the amniocentesis, the doctor explained that I had the legal right to terminate my pregnancy. Immediately Romans 14:12 ran through my mind. I could not stand before God and tell Him that I killed my baby. With my mom by my side, I grabbed her shirt at the shoulders and pressed my face into her chest while the doctor performed the procedure. The pain was so intense that I started to think of a song to ease my discomfort. The first song that popped into my head was "Jesus loves me". I repeated it a few times until the procedure was over. A few seconds after that I had my first panic attack. I felt like I could not breathe and that my body was on fire. I tried to sit up feeling sick to my stomach, but the doctor quickly ran over with a cold rag and placed it on my forehead.

I walked out of the hospital in a complete daze. I could not even remember where I parked my car. I just knew my child's life, at least the

next few days of it, were in my hands. I had about eight days to decide what to do.

The next day the genetic counselor called and said that my baby's chromosomes were normal and that my baby was a boy. She did not know what was wrong with my son. A second ultrasound on January 20, 2005, put more of the puzzle together. I informed the genetic counselor at that point that I was proceeding with the pregnancy. When the doctor came into the room, the counselor informed her of my decision and the two of them exchanged a smile. It was discovered that my son's ribs did not fully form around his body and that he had extra fingers. He also had water on his brain. At that time, they could not find his feet or legs. His heart did not fully form and his lungs lacked the necessary components to be able to take a breath. The next day was the last day that I could have terminated the pregnancy. The genetic counselor called with news that my son had a rare and fatal condition called short rib polydactyly. At that point I had not thought much about naming the baby because I thought I would miscarry. The next several weeks were quiet. I went to my home doctor every two weeks just to check for a heartbeat. The whole center was becoming aware of my circumstance and began to tell me how much they respected my decision. All

I wanted to do was hide. I didn't feel that I was doing anything all that great. I was still in that self condemnation and punishment mentality. I tried not to cry because I knew God would take care of my baby and that I did not deserve my baby. On February 13, 2005, all of my emotions became too much. I came home from work and went into my room and sat there in the dark pondering suicide. The weight of knowing that I still had until June 12 to carry my baby was just too heavy. I sat in the floor crying and trying to figure out why God had allowed my baby to be so abnormal. I realized that I had no control over my circumstances and felt death was just the best option at that point. My body felt like it weighed a ton as I was sitting there thinking of how I would end my life. It felt like something was holding me down. When I realized that I just couldn't get up off the floor, I looked up at the ceiling sensing a Divine Appointment, I screamed in my mind to God, "What do You want from me?" He answered back immediately with the words, "your heart."

I began to sense over the next few weeks that God was showing me the difference between punishment and discipline. I relied heavily on "Beth Moore" studies each week to get me through. I had always attended church, but I fought the temptation to stay at home and hide. One of those Sundays,

I was listening to my pastor and in the middle of his sermon, I had the clear thought that I am in a lion's den. At that point I knew that I had to name my son Daniel. I slowly began to read "Purpose Driven Life". I began to look at Daniel's life, not one less day, but like each day was one more gift. Daniel moved so much and began to kick, even though his feet could not be found, I had a sense they were there. I could feel them. I have several memories of his movements. One particular night while my mom and I were walking the neighborhood, she asked me how I was holding together. I thought back a few years ago to a specific vision that I had seen. I had been in the house alone on the couch asleep when I heard a noise and tried to wake up, but I realized that I could not move. My eyes were closed but I could see the room. My heart was about to pound out of my chest when I felt little fingers touch the inside of my knee. I strained to look down, but I couldn't see anything there. I could just feel a warm hand and a gentle spirit telling me not to be afraid. Then I looked over my shoulder and saw the brightest circle of light with an angel standing inside. The light around the angel radiated. It was like looking up at the sun but it didn't hurt. You could see blonde wavy hair, wings with what looked like individual feathers on them, and the outline of a gown, but you could not see the face. It was blurred. It leaned forward

and said, "I'm still here". Then it disappeared and I came to. It wasn't until my mom asked how I was doing that I put the two together that God showed me my son years before I ever saw him and that my son is safe and loved. It is almost too much to think about. Woe is me for believing God for so little and trying to put limits on Him.

The last week of April, I was starting to emotionally breakdown. A lady that I was conversing with said that if I just prayed hard enough the God would heal my baby. I thought to myself as she was talking, she would not give me a chance to say anything, that God would heal my baby whether or not he lived. I knew the time was coming. I began to cry out again to God that I was tired of carrying my baby, that I wanted my baby to be normal, and I was ready to have this over. On April 27, I laid in the bed with a pain in my side that I just assumed was indigestion. The pain intensified for a few hours and then stopped. I went to sleep about 7am and slept until 12pm. I went to the doctor an hour later as scheduled feeling sluggish. I sat down and the nurse, who was my home town nurse, began to take my blood pressure. She sighed and said that it was 150/90. It had never been high before and I knew the time had come. After repeated checks, my blood pressure went up to 170/120 and the decision was made to admit me to the

hospital. I could hear my son's strong heartbeat as I tried to grasp the end. I was transferred to the large hospital by ambulance to deliver there. An army of medical personnel introduced themselves and several doctors did more ultrasounds to determine delivery. I cannot explain the mixed emotions I was feeling at that moment. More joy than anything else. The next morning, labor was induced. I had no pain all day long until the last hour. Two epidurals and an hour of back labor later, my son began to come out. I could see the doctor pick up his feet, since he was about six weeks early he was born breach. His feet were dangling. When he did come out, the doctor hurried over with him to make sure he had passed. I remember being so happy to see his legs dangle because I wasn't sure if he really had them. I looked at my mother with tears in my eyes and I said to her that he was home now. I could not wait to hold him. He was perfect in my eyes and so fragile. My joy overwhelmed me. I felt like God had rewarded me for a job well done.

The next morning, I held him for the last time. After handing him back to the nurse, the pain in my side came back. I explained to the doctor what I was feeling. A couple hours later my nurse came in and said something to my mother and my mother put her head in her hands. The nurse asked her if she wanted the chaplain. I was dying. I had HELLP syndrome and my liver was

about to rupture and there was nothing they could do. My liver count then was at 900, and my family was called back to the hospital. My blood only had a few thousand platelets and it was difficult to get blood out. My arm looked like a burn victim. Another test revealed the count was 1200, the normal was 20. I heard and saw the doctor say that there was nothing they could do. I then thought maybe God was going to let me go with my son. I was scared of dying physically and how it would feel, but anxious to see the face of God. My family walked in one by one stunned. I was fine a few hours earlier. I said the Lord's Prayer. I looked over at my mother and asked God to leave me here for her sake.

They rolled me down to ICU and I thought I was going to die. I just kept waiting for my body to start gasping for breath and fighting sleep. I had a blood pressure cuff that took a reading every fifteen minutes, so I couldn't sleep. My pastor came in and read some scriptures in my ear and asked if the church could pray for me since it was about 3am Sunday morning at this time. The moment the church was praying about 10am, the doctor came in and said that my body was turning around. The next day I was rolled out of ICU. I went home a few days later. The following Sunday was Mother's Day.

I will never be able to fully express the joy that I have of being Daniel's mom and knowing that he brought me back to God. I cannot comprehend a God that would weave such a web as to give me such a precious gift. And I cannot grip God's unconditional love and grace when I certainly did not deserve or go after it. It's unimaginable to know that God came for me and never let go.

April 29, 2005, God gave me the unexpected opportunity to participate in a walk for life event on what would have been Daniel's first birthday. I cried that night thinking I'll never be able to move on, and that I never got to tell my son that I love him. God gently whispered to my heart, "He knows". God has allowed me time to mourn, but I am sensing a start to the healing process.