

Missiological Theology: Appendix 1

USING THE METHOD OF MODERN CASE LAW “Too Many Wives”

The modern case law draws on the constitution, laws, and precedent cases in making a decision regarding a present case. We will use that method to deal with situations in missions.

1. Phenomenology: [examine the events, participants and issues in the case]

1.1 Time line:

1.2 Characters:

- Tom and Sarah Ward
- first converts including Mugbe
- Amadu
- his wives and children
- nonChristians

1.3 Issues involved:

- polygamy—is it biblical?
- divorce – is it biblical?
- what to do with wives and children?
- witness and evangelistic outreach to the nonChristians?
- what about leadership in the church? What happens to Mugbe?
- who should make the decision on the matter?
- people come as they are. What must change at conversion and what can be dealt with as a matter of discipling?
- are pagan marriages real marriages? Should they be honored?
- should Amadu be admitted on condition he takes a stand against polygamy, noting that he became a polygamist before he became a Christian/
- can a polygamist be a Church leader?

2. Ontology: [drawn from biblical laws, teachings of Christ and N.T. writers, and cases in O.T. and N.T.]

- 2.1 God is a God of love seeking to redeem all humans to himself.
- 2.2 God's ideal is monogamy.
- 2.3 Church leaders should be monogamous.
- 2.4 God accepts sinners as they are, and forgives them.
- 2.5 Divorce is sin and more evil than polygamy.

3. Missiology:

- 3.1 What should we do with Amadu's case right now?
- 3.2 How should we deal with Amadu's situation for the rest of his life?
- 3.3 What issues should the church bring up for discussion and resolution for the future life of the church?

Julia's Gift:
Twelve Stones from the River Jordan

"I have bad news for you," she said. "Your baby is dead." Her voice trailed as she spoke the words with a strained professionalism instilled during her medical school training. A vapor of tears condensed in her eyes as she sat upon the chair next to me and looked at my face, numb and expressionless. "This is not supposed to happen," she sighed.

All I could say was "OK," as I threw my head back and breathed through my next contraction. I scanned the ceiling, over and over, for words to say while my mind waded through the thick clouds of thoughts that raged like a torrent. "I somehow knew even before the onset of labor that I wouldn't be bringing my baby home," I stated with bewilderment at my own acknowledgment. "The crib is still in its box. Warren was going to assemble it after I gave birth," I explained. "It's a small measure of God's grace..." was all I had time to speak before the next contraction came upon me.

Dr. Wong put her arms around me and I realized she was in shock, too. While the statistics of childbirth prove that stillbirths happen, they are harder to accept in the lives of friends and longtime acquaintances. She stared at me earnestly, analyzing my emotional state. Then, as the impact of the sad news for both doctor and patient continued to settle in, she repeated, "But, I just saw you today. I heard the baby's heartbeat myself. I saw the baby move. I don't understand. I just don't understand."

My husband Warren came in to see me after checking on our children who were watching videos in a nearby room for distraction from the unpredicted delivery room events. "Our baby is no longer alive," I explained, searching his face for reassurance. "They couldn't find any sign of a heartbeat or life with the other monitor." His eyes filled with tears and he asked, "What now? Oh, no! How do we tell the kids?"

"I'll tell the kids," I sighed. "But then, I still need to deliver the baby," I sobbed as another contraction that seemed so pointless came like a wave over me. The notion of continuing labor was abhorrent. "Couldn't I just go home?" I wondered silently. Delivering a baby who was already dead was a repulsive, but unavoidable, reality.

My daughter Kristen, thirteen years old and filled with anticipation at being present for the delivery, suspected something had gone awry. As she entered the room, she looked upon my pale face and misty eyes. She used her abilities to decipher nonverbal signals and rapidly processed the situation. Eric was only ten years old- too young to be told such awful news! He came to my bedside in the shadow of his sister and looked to her for an indicator. Both of them were silent, knowing their worst nightmares were being confirmed.

"Hadn't I given this speech one too many times this year?" I queried myself. I was filled with anger and disappointment at having to do a recitation of the same lines I'd used when my son had undergone an unexpected surgery only months before. The cruel irony was that I was going to mend his perception of hospitals by letting him come with his sister to experience the birth of our family's third child. A happy event, I'd concluded, would set the proper tone and put things in perspective. Instead, despite my best motherly intentions, his negativity was about to be compounded by telling him the horrible reality. "Why? Why?" I wanted to scream. My thoughts railed against the seeming injustice of the situation. "Why can't my life just be normal? It's so unfair!"

I looked at my children's faces; their expressions were serious and searching. I began my speech knowing the eerie familiarity of the words and yet the truths which were contained therein. "I don't understand," I began, "why God allows bad things to happen to good people."

"Our baby isn't alive... anymore." I explained. Their eyes brimmed with sadness and then shaking, shimmering tears spilled over the lashes which tried in vain to blink the hurt away. "We do know that God loves us and for some reason, He decided it would be best to take our baby up to heaven instead of having us bring the baby home. God has a plan and God knows what is best." I said, reassuring myself as I spoke.

I could tell they were worried about me as their glances fixed momentarily upon the variety of monitors noisily recording my labor signs. I tried to comfort them by stating simply and quietly, "I still need to stay here to deliver the baby, but it would be best for you to get some rest. Grammy and Poppy are coming to take you home with them. Daddy will join you after the baby is born."

I hugged them both and told them how much I love them. Neither of them wanted to look at me. They were fighting tears since they knew the baby would not come home to live with us. With each contraction, now stronger and more frequent, the monitors pulsed into action. Ideas flashed across the screen of my mind. How confused the kids must be, I thought. How angry they must feel! How disappointed they are. Oh, what have I done? How young they are to deal with the death of someone they'd planned to care for and love. Why the need to endure this at their ages? God, where are You?

My parents entered the room and through their tears, they exclaimed their profound heartbrokenness. "I'm so depressed," my mom stated. Her sad eyes were stained red from crying. "I'm just so sorry," was all my dad could say, looking down at my belly. Knowing the grisly task I still had ahead of me and how the emotional turmoil would be compounded with every minute the kids were in the delivery room, I asked my parents to take the children home with them. Warren said he would retrieve the kids in the morning. I thanked them for coming to the hospital and for watching Kristen and Eric for us. I regretted deep within my heart that I would not be able to field the questions about life and death that were sure to arise from the kids in the hours to follow. I worried about the confusion and chaos my parents were thrust into, a situation that they, like the rest of us, had been completely unprepared to face.

As my children left for their grandparents' home, I looked at my husband and the emotions he and I had pent up for our children's benefit suddenly burst forth like a downpour from the blackest of storm clouds. We sobbed, holding onto one another for strength and love. His eyes showed agony as he watched my belly tighten with each contraction. I knew he was reflecting back to the moment when I told him I was expecting again and how unexpected that news had been! His joy at anticipating another child was profound. He had always wanted three children. The delivery of our third child, however, would not be the way he wanted things to be.

Dr. Wong returned and inquired if I wanted an epidural to ease the pain and pitocin to speed up the delivery. I consented because I wanted the delivery over with as soon as possible. It seemed so incredibly pointless, giving birth to death. "You'll be wanting to think about whether you'd like to hold the baby," Dr. Wong stated sympathetically. This was the first of many decisions I'd never anticipated making when I'd begun a very normal labor earlier that evening.

After she was born, I cradled Julia Marie. Her face was sweet and peaceful, lovely to behold. There was no sense of any trauma or distress, only a reflection of a gentle departure. I kissed her little face and desperately tried to etch the image of her into my mind. The time together would be too short. It was an ephemeral moment to be treasured like the beauty of a seashell sunrise, the clarity of a perfectly colored rainbow, the glimmer of silvery morning dew, or the golden glory of a magnificent sunset. I was determined to make the memories clear and firm; detailed enough to last the lifetime I would have to live beyond hers.

Warren held her, too. He cried as he paced the room with her gently bundled in his arms. "I pictured myself walking with you at home," he explained to her. "I imagined us together at night when you wouldn't sleep, quieting your cries, changing your diaper." His voice faded. Gazing upon her lifeless body, his hopes were shattered. The dreams he had for her were being folded and put away in the manner that summer clothes get packed up for the harsh winter to come. All of his present thoughts were cast forth into an uncertain future. Julia was a third child for us like no other, touching his life with a gentle love, intense in beauty, though short in earthly duration.

The nurses on staff took several photos of Julia, clipped a lock of her soft, brown hair, and impressed her tiny footprints in ink on a card. These alone would be ours to bring home. An empty womb and empty arms! A mind filled with a whirlwind of thoughts, confusion, and fears. I'd said goodbye to her, yet, with

that parting, there was a quiet undercurrent of peace that God was still in control. He knew what lay ahead and with His gentle hand guiding me, I'd crossed the River Jordan.

"Tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood and to carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight." (Joshua 4:3)

In the days that followed, God answered my petitions for greater understanding and insight. I had so many questions in need of answers. Where is God when bad things happen? Where was God in the delivery room? Why did He not act to prevent her death? Why me? Am I somehow to blame? Why did He give me an unexpected pregnancy only to take her unexpectedly from me? What did the future hold? What lessons were in store for me?

I knew I could not go back in time and wash away the events with my tears. No utterances of pain could drown the noisy machinery of a mind actively churning to reason through the unexplainable. I was being made to suffer for a purpose I didn't understand. But I wanted to know. I longed to have answers about tomorrow but knew the future is God's alone. I needed to have peace for today, to reconcile my emptiness, to silence my worries. I couldn't go back and yet, I knew it was impossible to move forward without going back into the river of tears. I needed to retrieve my twelve stones to set as a memorial in this place I must stay tonight and hereafter. These twelve stones are Julia's gift to me.

- I. Many Are the Plans in a Man's Heart, But It's the Lord's Purpose That Prevails
- II. The Rock on Which I Rest
- III. Children are a Gift From God: On Loan, But Never Owned
- IV. Time is Short: Eternity is Forever
- V. Suffering is a Means to Know God Better
- VI. An Intimate Window on the Heart of a Loving God
- VII. Teach Me Thy Ways
- VIII. The Love of A Heart Overflowing
- IX. A Body at Work
- X. Oh, Powerful Prayer
- XI. The Light in Me
- XII. Lift Me on Wings of Eagles

"Many Are the Plans in a Man's Heart, But It's the Lord's Purpose That Prevails" (Proverbs 19:21)

The verse above topped our Christmas newsletter for the year and it is chilling how prophetic it seems in retrospect. The Christmas newsletter was sent promptly after Thanksgiving so friends who are annual correspondents would have time to adjust to the surprise of our good news prior to receiving a birth announcement. Oh, how we'd extensively planned so many things of a temporal nature. I'd done all of the Christmas shopping early. The presents were mailed to relatives promptly and the ones for our children were long ago labeled and hidden at our house. I'd purchased and packed a new outfit to wear at the hospital. I'd prepared myself for having visitors come to congratulate me on our baby. We'd formulated how we were going to let friends and acquaintances know if it was a boy or a girl. Warren decided not to bring the camera to the hospital, anticipating that he'd return in the morning to take pictures. We'd prepared bags for the kids with activities to occupy their attention during the labor and delivery time. We

practiced a trip to the hospital and we'd even speculated on how long I might be in labor so we could plan accordingly. The one thing we hadn't planned on was the Lord's Plan. His will being Julia's departure never crossed our minds until the moment we learned she was gone. We'd planned a human plan, yet His had superseded our own. This rock from the River Jordan might have been a stumbling block, but instead it provided a foundation and the grace to accept the will of the Almighty. He has a plan and Julia's death was somehow part of it.

The Rock on Which I Rest

"He said, 'The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer; my God is my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation.'" (2 Samuel 22:2-3a)

God has a plan for me, to prosper me, and to refine me. God's all encompassing provision and eternal faithfulness to His promise form the bedrock of my faith. Several pillars stand on that solid rock. One pillar is that God loves me and will not give me more than I can bear. Another pillar proclaims that as we share in the Messiah's sufferings, so we grow to understand the ways of God. That God is the Creator and is omniscient means He doesn't make mistakes. That His will is accomplished through and in spite of us forms a fourth pillar. God is the Rock on which I can find rest. I am safely sheltered from the storms of life among these pillars of faith, clinging to His Word for a lifeline. He shields my heart from depths of agony.

*"He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters."
(2 Samuel 22: 17)*

In the weeks that followed, He extended His tender mercies as a balm to my wound. My grief at the loss of my daughter was gradually receiving the healing power of His Word. The lesson of the stone numbered 2 is the understanding that I can always lean and count on God. It was not a case of forgetting my loss but humbly submitting my parental authority to His greater authority. I can rest knowing she is with her loving Father and she was received with His tender hands.

Children are a Gift from God: On Loan, But Never Owned

"You are the children of the Lord your God." (Deuteronomy 14:1a)

Julia was created as a gift from God. She was a gift to be enjoyed for the nine months of pregnancy and given back to Him, her Rightful Owner, her Creator. People were concerned because I was not angry with God over our loss. Somehow, it isn't good to have peace in the midst of grief, they reasoned. Perhaps I was "in denial", they thought. Through the miracles of God's sufficient grace and mercy, I've been able to see that God simply had her on loan to me. I was able to enjoy her, grow her, feel her movement, speak to her, sing to her, and dream of her. He loaned her to me with the explicit understanding that someday He wanted her back. While that day came too soon for me, His plan was that she should never dwell among us, but only with Him. When He reached down and stopped her heart, my time with her was through. I can have peace, however, in the knowledge that she was sent ahead of me to a Promised Land beyond my River Jordan. There she will wait for me, mirroring my anticipation of her arrival. It's a strange twist, it seems, to have my daughter awaiting my death in much the same way as I had looked forward to her birth. The reunion will be beautiful. Of this, I am certain since the stone numbered 3 reminds me that I am only on loan, too.

Time is Short: Eternity is Forever

Patience is a virtue slowly acquired. It's a sign of maturity and reflects an understanding of the nature of time. This issue arose as friends expressed concern that I would feel robbed of time with Julia. It's an understandable reaction. The most difficult aspect of her death is the inability to share the life we would have had together as mother and daughter. In our world of instant gratification, waiting to hold your child and speak to her of your love might seem a cruel separation. Through abundant grace and blessing, I'm

being allowed to see time from God's perspective. The time here on earth is short. It is the pre-game show, the warm-up act. It's a dim reflection, a foretaste of the abundant life that awaits us in heaven, and just a tiny hint of future glory.

"Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance..."

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."
(Psalm 16: 5-6, 9-11)

Can I wait until my eternity with Julia begins? Being assured of my salvation, I try to say "I'll be patient." Heaven's eternity, promises of a blessed life together, plenty of time to love and be loved will be ours when my days on earth are through. Sure, I can cry, or I can *choose* to be joyful. Will the vast ocean of forever miss the tiny tears of today? Looking to the immensity of the future age helps me to endure the present time. Julia's fourth stone of remembrance is the importance of fixing my eyes upon the hope I have in the Lord my God. I do not have to grieve in abandonment in the temporary life here because time is short and eternity is long.

Suffering is a Means to Know God Better

How can God be so cruel as to strip a child from her mother? This was a question posed to me by a woman whose baby died shortly after birth. If it's God's plan to create and reclaim, as I believe, then the logical questions she needed answered were "Is this misery infliction the trait of a loving God? Was it God's will to take your baby and cause your grief?" These petitions were thought provoking. Whenever I'm confronted by conflicting views of God, I try to find examples in the Scripture to reconcile the different views. To the world's way of thinking, yes, it's cruel to take babies from their mothers. To man's reasoning, creation for the purpose of destruction appears incredibly fruitless. When the Word doesn't match with the world's ways, it's time to reexamine the assumptions we make. God must take a different approach, I concluded.

"Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God." (Isaiah 52: 9-10)

In a strange way, God's glory is shown brightest in the bleakest of moments. In a room with no hint of light, a single candle draws the eye and soothes the soul. Suffering a loss is a way God draws us closer to Him and it can be a means of growth toward godly character in us. God desires intimacy with His children, with those who have been reclaimed like Julia- and also with those who are still on loan like me. Even in my state of ruin, I can sing joyfully because the Lord comforts and redeems me.

"Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised and we esteemed him not." (Isaiah 53: 1-3)

Tender shoots we are, too, blinded sometimes by the events of our lives. The light that shocks a seedling as it emerges from the darkness of the earth is the same light that causes it to grow. As we seek Him and His perspective, He illuminates our lives and shows the world His strength in our weaknesses. We see His faithfulness in our lives, we grow more aware of God and how His ways differ from our own. For God, is it cruel to send a baby ahead of her mother to sit in glory at the feet of her Heavenly Father?

"Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand."

After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many and he will bear their iniquities.” (Isaiah 53: 10-11)

God does allow people to suffer. This is, however, **not** for our harm but for our growth. Not to damage us, but to make us stronger and enable us to prosper. He doesn't leave us alone during our suffering and He delivers us out from under it. This can be in the midst of our lives or accomplished through death. His glory shines when he delivers us. One cannot be delivered, rescued, or saved unless one is first made to suffer, to require a lifeline, or to realize one is utterly lost without Him. A fifth stone for remembering Julia is the deeper understanding that suffering was necessary to deliver me from pride at my own self-reliance. My own efforts were insufficient to keep her here with me. I'd been lost in myself, overconfident in my own abilities and piling up good works, but now I'm finding my way back home.

An Intimate Window on the Heart of a Loving God

In some respects, it's the opposite of cruel and is, in an eternal and strange kind of way, a privilege to be allowed to suffer the loss of a child. If one believes that our time here is for our formative purposes and to glorify God, the loss of a child allows identification with the heart of God.

“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”
(Isaiah 53:4-6)

Only by losing a child of one's own can a person begin to know, even in a dim worldly sense, the anguish of God as He caused his Servant to suffer. A child preceding you in death puts the world's ways upside down. It defies the natural order. It makes no sense. So many people who have lost children have a difficult time putting their grief behind them. Any loss requires reconciliation. Loss of children, however, requires reconciliation of the inconceivable.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

To me, this is clear. God wouldn't be God if we could figure Him out. He allows suffering for our good and that concept is completely foreign to us. To us, good should be good and bad should be bad. That's what makes sense from a human perspective. Friends have told me that I'm living through every mother's worst nightmare. And I've agreed with them. It is, by far, the hardest thing I've ever encountered. Acceptance of this type of loss requires faith and trust that there is something more beyond the horizon than what we see.

Fortunately, this intimate window on God's world and into God's heart is not for everyone. Not all have the trust of God for this testing or the strength of belief yet to endure it. I can see how the road of preparation for this was laid with painful miles of rocky terrain earlier that year. Passing through previous difficulties strengthened me for my time in the fire. The Refiner's fire is hot and for those of sufficiently steeled faith, it cleanses and purifies. My fledgling faith is stronger now than ever before and I credit the infliction of pain for bringing it about.

With nowhere else to turn, I turned to the only Refuge I know for peace. God knows our hearts and the maximum weight of burdens our frail shoulders can carry. He planned for my time in the fire. The suffering would be in measure to what would produce refining and not a bit more than I could bear with His help and direction. God's ways of showing favor, of testing and refining one's belief, of bringing us to His loving arms, of granting glimpses of the divine in the midst of our worldly blindness are not the ways of man. This was Julia's sixth gift to me. I received a rare and beautiful view of the immensity of God's love.

Teach Me Thy Ways

How can you think these strange things, my visitors must have thought? People began asking me how I can have peace about Julia's death. She was your daughter, they insisted. Do you not feel the pain enough yet, they inquired? They reminded me of my empty arms, empty crib, empty womb, and empty car seat. Aren't you angry, they asked? A special gift has been given to me, though. It's grace to accept God as sovereign, His knowledge as complete, and His ways as perfect.

"Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long." (Psalm 25:4-5)

Closeness with God and willingness to submit to His authority allows Him to do a glorious work of love in us. I can see how He might use a little girl who never breathed a breath outside of her mother to impact the lives of countless people... the lost sheep He is so desirous of finding. It's been beautiful to witness the lengths to which God will go to reclaim His own. Even so far as shifting His sights from protecting the ninety-nine to rescue the one who is lost. Julia and I are numbered among the ninety-nine.

Many people have given up a belief in God. "Crack babies" being born, murders by the minute, the Holocaust, AIDS- all of these seem to distance God from us. Where is God when these types of things happen? It's understandable that God might appear distant or irrelevant since He didn't seem to notice these injustices. It seems reasonable to doubt His abilities since He did nothing to prevent them from occurring. It might even seem possible to question if there is a God at all.

From man's perspective all of those are reasonable and logical thoughts. Faith, sometimes, requires letting go of reason as the primary solution. Trust requires risking the illogical answer when our own constructs don't match. Some people attempt to fit God into a human box. When they find He doesn't fit, they conclude He must not exist. If He did exist, He'd have prevented the bad things from happening.

To those who have given up hope, God sends a clear message through people like Julia and me. Just because we don't have the answers doesn't mean God doesn't have them. Regardless of how much sense or insanity a situation presents, God knows the whole story. "Crack babies" can be born and turn many other people from drug use. Murders can alarm the public enough to reclaim the streets. Atrocities of the Holocaust prevented the destruction of all the Jewish people by lifting other nations to rise to Israel's defense. AIDS is awakening a new morality and will hopefully save others from similar destructive behaviors. Somehow in God's economy, this works.

What does Julia's death do in God's economy? My suffering can help others to reclaim their peace in the midst of adversity or perhaps some will achieve a saving faith in God. There is no altruism here. I didn't give my daughter up willingly. I wouldn't have been able to bear it. Instead, I would have been selfish and disobedient. Because I would have fallen short of the self-inflicted suffering necessary to help others, He took Julia without my permission.

"So I went down to the potter's house and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping in the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping as it seemed best to him.

"Then the word of the Lord came to me: 'O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?' declares the Lord. 'Like clay in the hand of the potter so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.' (Jeremiah 18:3-6)

I am the clay and have no right to complain. He is God and I am not. Therefore, my only recourse is to manage through it and make Julia's life as meaningful as possible from my vantage point. I am being

remade into a vessel for a different use than before. I'm no longer a mother anticipating an infant. I'm a jar of tears for watering God's garden. My tears are worth it if something beautiful grows from them. I must keep in mind that Julia has been remade, too. She has been remade into a spiritual entity from an earthly one.

Anthem For Julia 1-5-99 by Cynthia Strull

When did you leave us?
Were you startled by the sudden, fierce beauty
Of the angel who, in solemn glory,
Swept you to his breast?
Did he pause in his ascent
To let you see
my face?
I am searching, sifting
Through heartbeats of time—
How did I lose the moment of your flight?

O tiny daughter,
Sorrow drapes about me like a silken garment.
I am lost in its fold.
I long for you.
But you, tiny traveler
Are safely home.
Face to face with God's Mystery,
you know Him even as you are fully known.
Rich in mercy, the Lamb holds us both.

One day, angels will summon me
And I, too, will see His face
And be filled with joy inexpressible.
Will I see you, my daughter
As a tiny babe—
Kiss your dimpled hands
Breathe deeply your downy
fragrance?
Will I hold you to my breast
singing wordless songs of love?

Or shall I meet a little girl?
Sparkling eyes, joyful grin---
Will you clatter to me, legs gangly and strong
til we embrace at last?
Laughing through our tears
--forever friends?

Perhaps, on that day,
My eyes will scan with wonder
The heavenly throng
And I will see you standing tall and slim,
Your face radiant,
Your eyes serene and wise...
Glorified countenance of utter beauty.
I will know you.
Our reunion will be sweet
My daughter, of that I am certain.

For now, the hope of heaven steadies me...
His Word quenches my thirst,
Binds my wound.
The Spirit intercedes for me
In groanings too deep for words.
Though I am crushed
He is with me.
Beloved, our hearts still sing
He is worthy!
His love binds us for eternity.
Look at the palms of His hands—
Our names are written there with yours.

‘When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as He has determined and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another, and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies, but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another... The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.’ (1Corinthians 15: 37-40, 42b-44)

As I worked through my inability to reason my way through things, I asked facetiously about the meaning of life and a friend from Tennessee wrote: “Don’t you remember? It’s to glorify God and worship Him forever and ever.” Amen!

With the unchangeable reality of death, I could focus on the past and be bitter or I choose to press forward to make things better. Can my grief benefit others? While my grief itself cannot, but my reaction to the despair can. The beauty of hope is all I can offer. I will be allowed to powerfully witness His faithfulness only to the extent I believe in this hope and live my life accordingly. A seventh stone is a renewed eagerness to know God’s ways and not trust on my own judgment. Teach me, Lord. I’m willing to learn.

“It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.” (Psalm 119: 71)

The Love of A Heart Overflowing

“Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.” (Psalm 107: 8-9)

The outpouring of love and friendship during this time of suffering has been beyond my imagining. One cannot be a recipient of such an overflow of affection without gaining an appreciation of its impact. Never before have I been so aware of the power and wonder of love. I have always considered myself as outside of the cliques and crowds and circles of closeness that many of my acquaintances enjoy. I confided the news in a handful of people and requested the spreading of the account of our tragedy. Mainly I’d asked for prayers. The few written announcements of Julia’s stillbirth we sent out returned to us as a miracle of actions reminding me of the feeding of five thousand with basketfuls left over.

“And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness and sin.’” (Exodus 34:6-7a)

Abounding love is what I witnessed in the weeks following Julia’s death. Maintaining love to thousands is what was accomplished through interactions among family, friends, and acquaintances. One guest arrived at the door as a 9:45 evening drop-by visitor. Truthfully, I barely knew her and could count our previous “small talk” conversations on one hand. Entering my kitchen, she sat in the chair opposite me and stammered, “I haven’t been able to stop thinking about *it* since I heard. I’ve been thinking about *it* all day. I didn’t know what to do. And I had to do something! So I brought ham, because, well... because, well... because my mother would have brought ham!”

The look of laughter and surprise on my face must have made her wonder about me. Here in a time of grief, I was able to find tremendous joy in her gift of love and what ended up being a Christmas dinner of ham for our family. My heart was spilling over with love and I clutched her hands and thanked God for her and her mother.

A friend from far away said she’d been thinking about our situation at Christmas time and wondered aloud to her extended family “back home” what our holiday must have been like. Discussions of life and death; of grief and joy; of hope and despair; and of love both expressed and silent dominated their family’s celebration. After the holidays, we shared our stories. She told me about conversations rich in thankfulness, shared times that were deeply spiritual in nature, and a focus aside from presents under a tree

for parents and children alike. She was surprised to hear me say it was the most sincerely meaningful holiday I'd ever had. I told her I'd never realized how many people still cared about others. Julia helped to change my view and an eighth stone worth remembering is how much love is still a part of so many lives.

A Body at Work

Hundreds of cards, calls, not to mention bouquets, breads, cookies, chicken, and also ham arrived as varied expressions of concern and comfort. As I spoke with my guests, some previously scheduled and others who simply decided to stop by, I found that wanted to send love back in greater proportions than I'd received. Given the generosity extended in my direction this was a challenge!

I'm remembering a retired gentleman who knows us most clearly as four faces in a pew in the back of church. He offered to pay for the service for Julia even though he hardly knows us. We didn't need to accept his offer, but the kindness he showed was a memorable love offering. How could one return love of that magnitude? Such unselfish love! It was a debt that cannot be repaid because ounce for ounce, the purity of heart was matchless.

As people came to greet me, many of them prayed that I would be willing to let others grieve alongside me. This became a recurring theme that I found curious. I began to wonder if I was rejecting overtures from friends and just didn't know it. Finally, one woman I respect immensely explained this situation I didn't understand. "Can-do' people give to others all the time out of instinct and never seem to require help from friends. Your friends want to reciprocate in your time of need. It's not often that 'can-do' people seem to need help so we want to take the opportunity while we see it. I pray God will give you the grace to permit it."

This is what makes a community function. Reciprocity of giving and receiving is much better than a one-way street. Love and generosity swelled within me as I wanted to mirror for others the gracious treatment I was having bestowed upon me. My cup was filled to the point of overflowing. It seemed to spill in all directions- to friends, to family, to total strangers, to the elderly, to babies. I've never felt such an uncontrollable urge to love people.

"May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you." (1 Thessalonians 3:12)

This was one of the most beautiful stones I could imagine. The memory from stone number 9 was the wonder of love and intense compassion I felt toward other people as an outward expression of the love I'd received. Julia brought love into my life in a way I have never known. After looking through the hundreds of cards we've received; experiencing hundreds of hugs at home, in the car, in the aisles of the grocery store, and elsewhere; and crying millions of tears, I realized for the first time that I've had true friends all along. I was unaware of the people whose lives I'd touched, how they'd changed me, how this body called a community was filled with people who were all intertwined. I was unappreciative of my need for others until Julia showed me the way and the meaning of love.

Oh, Powerful Prayer

During that time, people who were previous strangers told me of miscarriages, still births, losses of children, siblings, and spouses. Others told me of injuries, birth defects, painful divorces, separations, family troubles, and pets running away. All of these were people hurt by events in their lives. Many of them were weeping and sharing these intimate details in an effort to relate to our experience or maybe they just needed to process their grief some more. I shared how God was helping me through the difficult days by honoring so many prayers. My prayers of thanks were Post-it notes compared to the encyclopedia of prayers being offered on our behalf. Friends, co-workers, teachers and students at our children's school, church members, and others whom we didn't even know lifted prayers to God for our healing.

I attended a "Religions of the World" class on the spur of the moment and to my surprise, there was a woman whose face was familiar, although I couldn't recall from where I knew her. When each class member spoke briefly about why he was attending, I mentioned my daughter Julia and how her death presented opportunities for healing other people's hurting hearts. The woman whose identity was a mystery came up to me and said her prayer group had been praying for our family at the request of a mutual acquaintance. I smiled knowing that God had brought prayer from unlikely places to keep our family lifted. God created a new relationship in the process.

At one point, our house seemed so full of comfort that I mused about guardian angels standing shoulder to shoulder in every room of our house. The devil, I noted, must have been relegated to taunt the coffeemaker, the microwave, and the toaster since all three appliances went kaput on the same day. The prayers continued and the microwave recovered. The coffeemaker- well, we never liked it anyway and so we bought a new one. The devil was still in our toaster when my husband returned from the grocery store.

"You'll never guess what happened!" he exclaimed. "I decided to buy this toaster since the other one isn't working. When I got to the checkout, the price didn't match the register so they said I would have to get it for free!" Those guardian angels must be cheering, I thought, as Warren and I hugged, overjoyed that God even provided a toaster! We just tossed the devil out of our house, trapped in our old one. Perhaps it was just coincidence about the toaster. I choose to believe that coincidence happens only because God has decided not to make His involvement obvious. God's provision was over and above and beyond our hopes. God abounds in love and faithfulness. He answers our prayers even down to the dinky details of appliances. These examples of provision served as gentle reminders, winks from God, to help us recall He was carrying us in our grief. He was carrying us because we were first brought before Him by the power of prayer.

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:4-6)

A tenth stone reminds me that prayer can accomplish great things.

"Praise awaits you, O God, in Zion; to you our vows will be fulfilled. O you who hear prayer, to you all men will come. When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions. Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple." (Psalm 65:1-4.)

The Light in Me

The eleventh stone is one I'm beginning to see- yet the full measure of its size and worth will not be immediately known. As I'm now a vessel of tears being used to water God's garden, I'm finding seeds everywhere. Hurting hearts, ill and wounded, lonely and depressed people- all in desperate need of sunshine to warm their souls. I'm a little light.

Among the most difficult tasks of reconciling this kind of grief is telling people who have not heard. They want to share your excitement and the happiness of a new life. In the process of tapping into your joy, they find they've inadvertently pierced your heart. They feel guilt and embarrassment. They kick themselves for having asked.

I have a special heart for these people- the eager friends, the joy seekers, the willing sharers of good news. My emotions quickly go to reassure them. I understand how self-condemnation can be far worse than being condemned by others. I've spent more years than I'd care to recall in bondage to insecurity and participating in enthusiastic self-flagellation. Because I've been delivered from under intense perfectionism and have been on God's "individualized and personalized pride reduction program", I know how others who are still shackled to good works feel. To a "good-works-aholic," there are few things

worse than displaying imperfection in full sight of others. Therefore, I wanted to do my best to minimize others' discomfort and shield them from awkward moments.

He manages the photocopy center where I've done so much business. I knew he'd eventually ask me if I'd had a boy or a girl. I went into the store to buy a few things and braced myself before entering. I'd probably have to answer the inevitable question. To my surprise, he wasn't there. I immediately prayed that it wasn't a recurrence of his cancer. I made a gentle inquiry with the young man on duty. "Pneumonia," he answered. "It's hit him bad. He's been out for weeks." I'd been out of circulation for a couple of weeks myself, so I didn't know.

I went home and wrote a note to him. It was a letter of encouragement and cheer. I told him how much we all missed him and how we hoped he would be back soon. I told him about Julia (so he'd know) and teased him about needing to arm-wrestle for the title of who'd had the harder winter, him or me. I poked fun at being stronger than I look and told him to hurry back so he didn't have to learn it for himself. I prayed over the note before sending it off.

He promptly wrote back and told me how it lifted his spirits to see that I wanted to encourage him even as I must have needed some soothing of my own. I saw him the other day and we talked for quite a while. Truthfully, I didn't have any photocopying that needed to be done. I was just wondering if he was back yet. I was overjoyed to see him, glad that pneumonia didn't keep him down, or worse, claim another victim. We talked about tough winters (but we weren't referring to the weather) and how inner strength keeps us stable even in the darkest times.

I had a similar phone conversation with a good friend whose medical condition has been determined to be beyond help. "It's a matter of time," she said, "before it'll claim me. But I've concluded that it will be OK. Julia did it and she was just a baby." This little one of mine truly has touched people, directly and indirectly.

Going through parallel difficulties builds a bond of friendship. With one little umbrella shared between two of us, we can walk a rough road in the pouring rain for a mile or two. I had the umbrella and he had the hands free to open it. I had the candle and she encouraged me to bring the light out to the front so we could both see. I like being an umbrella, a light, and an encourager. It gives me a sense of purpose and a joy unspeakable. Julia reminds me of the importance of the light in me.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. I have taken an oath and confirmed it that I will follow your righteous laws. I have suffered much, preserve my life, O Lord, according to your word... Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end. (Psalm 119:105-107, 111-112)

Lift Me on Wings of Eagles

'Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.' (Isaiah 40: 28-31)

Even as the words I've spoken over the weeks have lifted others, lighting their lives with a gentle hope, so the words have also raised me. God's Word that I've used in discussions, often paraphrased since I'm pretty weak at memorizing verses, strengthened me. I'd stumbled my way through the awkward days of trail blazing. I'd used His word to uphold me in public even as I'd fallen apart in the privacy of my bedroom. I'd held my emotions back in the presence of my children and let them cascade forth when I was alone. Friends told me I need a support group. I had one. I was the only patient with the three best Counselors one could engage. The teacher/pupil ratio was perfectly suited to the intense learning I

required. I could continue to walk this walk of maturing faith and not be faint. Maybe soon, I'll be running again without growing weary.

Julia's twelfth stone of remembrance is that I have been lifted on wings of eagles. I've been carried out of the valley of the shadow of death, across the River Jordan, and to a land He has promised, flowing with milk and honey.

"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession." (Exodus 19: 4-5a)

A treasured possession. That sounds good to me.

Warren and I went to visit Julia's grave again the other day. The deep snow we'd received shortly after Julia's burial was melting away. Her grave was visible again for the first time. Warren and I retrieved the flowers that had adorned her tiny little casket. The flowers looked dead now that the cold temperatures were no longer preserving their appearance. It was odd weather for early February. The sun was warm and the breeze was gentle.

I looked at her grave, remembering how she looked the last time I saw her. Reflecting back to the funeral home, I remembered how I'd commented that she looked like she was pouting. This was a different look than at the hospital. We had placed items from Kristen and Eric alongside Julia in her casket. I had mused that Julia was fussy because she was already home in spirit and we were dragging this thing out for her earthly body. Of course, we had no choice because of the Christmas holiday, but it seemed to be an exceptionally long road from the delivery room at the hospital, to funeral home, and finally, to the section of the cemetery devoted to the "holy innocent."

"I think she's just ready to be at rest, at home," my husband had said before we had left the funeral home that cold December evening. At rest. At home. Those sounded so wonderful.

It's been an arduous path to a place I can find peace, to rest in reconciliation, to be at home with the knowledge I have a third child who is different. I'm not through with grief- it'll be a lifetime in healing this wound. During one of the most difficult weeks- one where I got tired of hearing how good I was being and wished I had a baby at home instead of a pity party being thrown in my honor- I confided my frustration. I needed to vent this irritation and I did to several people I admire. They were ones I was confident wouldn't judge me for my feelings. One of these loving friends, Elaine, described for me a winter of despair following the loss of her first husband. She understood my feelings and told me she had similar emotions during her winter but awoke one day, realized it was suddenly springtime, and she found was over the hardest part. I told her when it was suddenly spring I would let her know.

Julia's grave looked empty with the dead flowers gone. Empty was not the way it should be. After all, she'd provided a gift of twelve wonderful memories. I went home and made a new silk floral arrangement for her for Valentine's Day. It was a gift of love to my little girl. Warren and I delivered it the following day. Pink tulips, lavender sweetpeas, golden daffodils, and a burst of forsythia sprang from the center of the silk arrangement. It was still brisk outside. I knew snow would probably return, after all, it was February. As I climbed into the car for us to drive away, Warren pointed to the arrangement and remarked "It looks like spring." I smiled and said, "Yes, it suddenly seems like spring, doesn't it?"