

6 Ways to Survive the Grief of Childlessness

In a time of loss and lament, here's how I found spiritual solace.

[Chelsea Patterson Sobolik](#)

When I was 19, a doctor said words I hoped never to hear: “You won’t ever be able to carry your own child.” I was too stunned to cry; all I felt was numbness. It took a few days for the shock to turn into myriad emotions—sadness, frustration grief, shame, anger, and loneliness. As I processed my diagnosis, my mind was assaulted by self-doubt and lies from the enemy. I thought, “If I can’t even fulfill the basic duties of a woman, what good am I?”

Childlessness touches the lives of many women and the precious people who love them. Infertility alone affects approximately [12 percent of the US population](#)—that’s over one in ten couples. According to estimates, [roughly 15 to 20 percent](#) of all pregnancies in the US will end in miscarriage. The risk of miscarriage in known pregnancies under 12 weeks is one in five. This data doesn’t encompass couples who have lost children to illness or accidents, nor does it take into consideration single women who desire to be mothers.

Even though I have experienced only one of the forms that childlessness can take, I’m well acquainted with the grief of being unable to have a biological child. For women like me who want to be mothers, childlessness contradicts what we know about the created order of the world. We have godly desires to parent. Our physical composition tells of this truth. We have breasts to feed a newborn; we have a uterus to grow a fetus. Our bodies were intentionally designed to fulfill God’s mandate to “be fruitful and multiply.”

However, the fall continues to taint; things aren’t the way God originally designed them to be. Women who can’t bear children often choose redemptive alternatives—fostering, adoption, godparenting, and other modes of motherhood. Even in an ideal world, though, the greatest role of a woman is not necessarily to be a mother, but rather to glorify God with our whole lives in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.

In the midst of childlessness, then, I and others like me can find truth and solace in several strongholds:

1. Cling to God’s promises.

Grasping the promises of God has been the single most important thing I’ve done in walking through suffering. I’ve found it most helpful to memorize Scripture verses that tell me who God is and what he’ll do for me, like Psalm 34, which says, “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Ps. 34:18).

Hide God’s Word in your heart, so when you encounter a particularly difficult situation, you’ll already be armed with truth and be able to quickly recall God’s promises. Write down the verses on note cards and keep them close at all times. Ask close friends to remind you of them. Do whatever it takes to fill your mind and heart with them. Corrie ten Boom is credited with saying,

“Gather the riches of God’s promises. Nobody can take away from you those texts from the Bible which you have learned by heart.”

2. Read books about suffering.

In the early years of this journey, since I couldn’t find a book on the topic of childlessness, I devoured almost every book I could find on the topic of suffering. I knew that running away from intense suffering wouldn’t ultimately alleviate it, so I decided to study it instead. As I read other people’s experiences of intense suffering, I found it encouraging to be reminded that I wasn’t the first person in history to ever experience difficulty, and I wasn’t going to be the last. Even if their sorrow didn’t look exactly like mine, it comforted me to know that God understands the pain of people throughout the millennia and is present with us through it all.

Some of the books that have informed my journey include *A Sacred Sorrow* by Michael Card, *A Grief Observed* by C. S. Lewis, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering* by Tim Keller, and *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God* by John Piper.

3. Resist the temptation to despair.

Many of you may be feeling isolated and alone as you walk through this trial. But it’s there—in one of the darkest pits—that we truly begin to discover God in a deeper way. In the old hymn, “How Firm a Foundation, Ye Saints of the Lord” the author writes of God’s protective power: “That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, I’ll never, no, never, no never forsake.”

If you are God’s child, all of hell is laboring against you and tempting you to shift your eyes away from the Lord. The ultimate temptation is to walk away, throw up your hands, and say, “This is too much. I can’t do it. I don’t want to do it.” Keep wrestling, keep fighting, keep grieving, but do it all with the Lord. Walking through this sacred sorrow is the fight of a lifetime. The battle for belief, the fight for faith, and the war for true womanhood will be paramount to your relationship with the Lord.

4. Surround yourself with a strong community.

As I’ve walked through my toughest days, one of the most valuable things has been having tenderhearted friends and family walk with me.

In your own journey, look for someone who will interact with you from a place of tenderness and compassion. Find someone who will love you in the midst of tears and pain, someone who is comfortable with difficult and unanswered questions. Reach out to your church community; ask your pastor to connect you with other men and women. I’ve found the most helpful companions are those who have experienced deep sorrow themselves. Perhaps one of God’s sweetest blessings to us on this side of eternity is community. We need each other—especially in trying seasons.

In *A Sacred Sorrow*, Michael Card writes, “If you and I are to know one another in a deep way, we must not only share our hurts, anger, and disappointments with each other (which we often

do), we must also lament them together before the God who hears and is moved by our tears. Only then does our sharing become truly redemptive in character.”

5. Read encouraging Bible stories.

The Bible is filled with the language of lament. Our spiritual forefathers were well acquainted with grief, death, pain, and sorrow. They knew what it meant to cry out, to wrestle, and to bring their raw and unfiltered pain to the Lord. David, Hagar, Jeremiah, Job, Elizabeth, and Jesus are a few of the classic examples. Each journeyed on a road paved with sorrow. It’s interesting to note that none of them knew they would be held up throughout the ages as examples of how to suffer well. They never imagined their stories would be recorded in the Holy Scriptures, and except for Jesus, they certainly weren’t placed there because of their perfection. In the [words](#) of pastor and author Tim Keller, “Job never saw why he suffered, but he saw God and that was enough.”

6. Meditate on the Psalms.

Perhaps one of the most important words in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word *hesed*, which does not have a direct correlation in English but is often translated as “lovingkindness, loyalty, mercy, or steadfast love” and describes God’s love for us. The word has a distant connection with the Arabic word *hashada*, which means “come together for aid,” but the English Bible translation I most appreciate is the word *loyalty*. Nowhere is God’s loyal love on greater display than in Psalms.

Again and again, the psalmists ask God for redemption, aid, protection, and forgiveness. Their entreaties crescendo in Psalm 136 with 26 verses that are filled with the refrain “His love endures forever.”

Along with the chosen people of Israel, you can take comfort in God’s promise. God views you with a loyal, everlasting love that will never run out no matter how many times you come to him with your tears, disappointment, and pain. The Lord will be faithful to you in the desert.

When you’ve walked through childlessness—whether for a season or a lifetime—your heart will never be the same. But with great suffering on earth, there is great support from heaven. Four of the sweetest words ever spoken by God are “I am with you.”

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This adapted excerpt was taken from Patterson Sobolik’s recently released book, [Longing for Motherhood: Holding On to Hope in the Midst of Childlessness](#)(©2018). Published by [Moody Publishers](#). Used by permission.