

# ABOUND

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Discovering Abundance  
in Barren Places

MADISON BRINSON

KW  
KingdomWinds  
PUBLISHING

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS



Foreword	5
Dedication	7
Chapter 1: Transition into the Desert	9
Chapter 2: Shifting Atmospheres with Worship	21
Chapter 3: Grieving with the Good Shepherd and Avoiding Bitterness	31
Chapter 4: A Weapon in the Desert: Hope	43
Chapter 5: Sustenance in the Heat	55
Chapter 6: Dealing with Disappointment,	65
Chapter 7: Thriving in Fire	77
Chapter 8: Renovating Your Mind and Taking Thoughts Captive	89
Chapter 9: Get Mouthy	103
Chapter 10: Walking as an Overcomer	111
Chapter 11: Possessing the Promised Land	125
Abound Cover Story	136



# FOREWORD



The first words of any conversation, sermon, or book are of utmost importance. With great intentionality, the first utterance from the Eternal Word over humans was, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28 NKJV). Those words would become a reality in the lives of Adam and Eve. They also would manifest in an age to come when The Word became flesh in Jesus (John 1:14 NIV). The blessing spoken over the original creation that opened the womb of our ancient mother is the same blessing that brought birth through a virgin and still brings delivery to the barren.

When we seek God, He guides our steps. An unscheduled but divinely orchestrated appointment is what introduced me to Madison Brinson and her husband, Zach. I had no idea of their situation or the courage and faith they had developed while walking through the pain of grief. They walked the pathway toward hope paved by the apostle Paul in Romans 5:3-4, “knowing that suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance character and character, hope. Although many give up on the journey, they did not.

When someone shares their story, they share their life. Jesus demonstrated that the Good News isn’t just words; it is words made flesh. We can teach people what we know, but we reproduce who we are. For this reason, I believe Madison’s story is reproducible in others! The words you are about to read are not only the story of a faith-filled family. They are the words of the original story, programmed into the DNA of the original family. I believe they can become part of your story, the way my words became part of Madison’s.

In this book, Madison Brinson engages with authenticity, inspires with faith, and instructs with wisdom. She demonstrates an experiential faith developed from a relational theology. In her story, you will discover, God not only still speaks, but His words are also life. However, this book is more than a story; it is an invitation. This book invites you to hope to heal, and to her, the Eternal Word says, “Be fruitful and multiply!”

Bob Hazlett, Author

*Think Like Heaven: Change Your Thinking Change Your World*

[www.bobhazlett.org](http://www.bobhazlett.org)



# DEDICATION



To Jesus, the Redeemer of all things and my every hope fulfilled: all glory is yours.

To my babies in heaven whose lives brought glory to Jesus: you had a crown to lay at His feet because you pushed me into Him. Each of your lives was a gift.

To Samuel, my baby on earth: waiting for you taught me how to abide in Jesus more deeply. I am forever changed. May your revelation of His amazing love be ever-increasing.

To Zach: you have been, and continue to be, an unwavering and patient voice of truth in our family. Being in covenant with you is my favorite adventure. “Brinsons shine brightest in hard places.”





# CHAPTER 1



## TRANSITION INTO THE DESERT

“1 in 8: the ratio of women who are journeying through infertility in the United States”<sup>1</sup>

“1 in 10: the ratio of known pregnancies that end in miscarriage”<sup>2</sup>

“1 in 100: the ratio of women who will experience recurrent pregnancy loss” (3 or more miscarriages in their reproductive life cycle)<sup>3</sup>

### Coming Together

Before the dream of a baby, there was Zach. He and I both grew up in upstate South Carolina, smack in between the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains and the warm southern beaches of the Carolina coast. It couldn't have been more perfect for us since mountains have always been my happy place, and he has always been a beachgoer.

We attended the same high school, at overlapping times, and even worked out at the same health club after graduation—but somehow, we missed each other. Our official introduction didn't happen until we were in our mid-twenties. In hindsight we know that meeting a little later in our lives, despite such close proximity, was due to God's kindness and wisdom. We wouldn't have given each other the time of day if we'd met any earlier! To say that we were “polar opposites” is an understatement.

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1 CoFertility. [www.Cofertility.com](https://www.Cofertility.com). “What are the 2020 fertility statistics I need to know about?”. <https://americanpregnancy.org/healthy-pregnancy/pregnancy-complications/signs-of-miscarriage-916/sted> Jan 3rd 2021 by Jeanne Sager. © CoFertility 2020. <https://cofertility.comhttps://cofertility.comhttps://cofertility.com/fertility-statistics-2020/>

2 American Pregnancy Association. [www.AmericanPregnancy.org](https://www.AmericanPregnancy.org). “Signs of Miscarriage”. Posted April 26th, 2020. © 2021.

3 PMC US National Library of Medicine National Institute of Health. [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov). Reviews in Obstetrics & Gynecology Spring 2009. © 2009 MedReviews, LLC. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2709325/>

I grew up as a spunky, adventurous Southern Baptist minister's daughter with a prayer warrior mama and the kindest, wisest younger brother a sister could hope for. Many mornings as a kid, I would wake up to see my dad in his chair reading his Bible and my mama in our living room, kneeling on her sheepskin prayer mat with her Bible open in front of her. I recall hearing her prayerful voice through the doors of our home talking to the Lord like He was right there with her. Intercession was a lifestyle for her. I saw the power of that early on.

Preacher's kids from the '80s sometimes had a bad reputation, but for me, church was always a sweet, safe place. For as long as I can remember, I've deeply loved Jesus, and my parents showed me what it was like to daily live life with Him in our home. He'd always felt like my friend. One specific night after bedtime, when I was about five years old, I got up out of my bed, walked to the front door, and attempted to go play outside in the dark. As I grabbed the doorknob, my parents quickly asked what I was doing, and I told them, "Jesus wants me to come out and play."

Being the smart parents they were, they told me to tell Jesus it was past my bedtime and that I could play in the morning. That seemed fine with me, so I headed back to bed. I wasn't trying to pull a fast one; I genuinely wanted to be where I thought Jesus was. That's always been the desire of my heart. I continued to treasure closeness with Jesus as I grew through my school years and into early adulthood. Even during some rough patches resulting from poor decisions, in my early twenties, Jesus was ever faithful to remind me that my identity can only be fulfilled in Him. There is just no one like Him.

Meanwhile, Zach grew up Presbyterian. He was a bit of a wild child with a pure heart and prophetic gifting. He saw in the spirit, even as a young boy, before he ever even knew that it was a gift God gives some people. It stayed with him, even though it would be years before he'd ever hear the word "prophetic." The enemy tried to scare him out of it early on by only highlighting the kingdom of darkness, but years later, Zach found himself around people who helped him recognize that gift and how to press into it to serve Jesus.

In 2011, Zach and I met at a church we'd both recently started attending. The church had just begun to corporately pursue the Holy Spirit and learn what a relationship with Him looked like. It was powerful to be part of what God was doing there and watch so many people begin to meet and

encounter Him together. I began to realize that I could truly co-labor with Jesus on earth as a friend, not just work for him as a servant. As Zach and I learned to hear the Holy Spirit's voice, He began to speak to us about each other before we were ever willing to give the other a second thought.

In a worship service one Monday night, before I knew anything about Zach other than his name, God showed me something about Him. For the first time in my life, I saw a picture in the Spirit. It was like seeing an image with my spirit's eye that was layered over the natural dimension. What I saw wasn't there in the flesh, but it was crystal clear to my spirit. Zach walked into the service, and on this night, as I watched him walk into the room, I saw the word "Authority" glowing in yellow over his head. It was the first time I'd seen something like that. The Lord spoke to my heart and said, "He will be significant in your life." He did not use the word "husband," so I wasn't reading anything extra into it. (A girl has to keep herself out of those "what-if" spirals.) I sought the Lord and asked if He wanted to provide any clarification. He was silent, so I received the word as He spoke it and kept it in my heart. I told the Lord, "I believe you. I just don't know what you mean by 'significant,' so I'm going to wait. You have to do this."

Meanwhile, the Lord began to nudge Zach toward me, but he wasn't the least bit interested (romantic, right?). Three months went by without us speaking any more than a "Hey, how are you?" Zach had half the church telling him he needed to get to know me, but he wasn't having it. In fact, everyone's attempts to connect him with me made him resist the idea even more. Finally, after repeated encouragement from people, having been almost yelled at by his pastor, a few dreams, and one vision later, we had our first date. It was sixteen hours long and included afternoon coffee, processing prophecy, discussing friendship with the Holy Spirit, dinner, praying for healing over an injury, Zach preaching identity to me, a midnight snack, and worshipping into the wee hours of the night. Talk about a way to get a relationship started.

There, on that first date, we quickly realized that we'd stepped into something that God had orchestrated. Soon afterward, Jesus showed us we were also going to have to learn how to make polar opposite personalities bring out the best, instead of the worst, in each other. Yep, you read that right. It was a little rough at first. We were so different that it felt like we spoke different languages and had totally different perspectives. We dated for almost three years as we let Jesus refine our hearts for each other. We didn't really have a butterfly phase in our relationship until after we were married. It was more

of a bulldog phase during our first year of dating. In that first year, the Lord told us, “If you’ll commit to this, I’ll use you as a great team.” He spoke life into our potential, like He always does, and began a never-ending journey of teaching us to walk in selflessness.

We were married in the spring of 2014, and it was the most refining situation that we’d ever stepped into. Before the wedding, one of our friends told us, “If you want to do a lot for Jesus, stay single. If you want to become like Jesus, get married.” It was true! It showed us firsthand that love is a daily resolute and selfless choice, neither a feeling connected to emotion nor a contingency for being treated a certain way.

We committed to choose love, even in the moments when one or both of us were acting like less than we were called to be. Even in the midst of hurt, we gave up our right to be justified, defend our position, or be understood, and we chose to do our best to respond with the love of Jesus. The ride has been wild, challenging, painful at times, and amazing, yet so worth it. I would choose our story over and over again, even if we nearly killed each other in the process of getting to the good stuff.

Our heart’s desire was for Jesus to receive His reward from our lives poured out for Him—whatever that looked like. We stayed together and grew through our differences. Our mutual stubbornness helped us, and we both refused to quit—some days out of sheer grit. We don’t have a “prince rides up on a white horse and whisks princess away” story. We actually like ours much better. The Prince of Peace Himself came and whisked us both away with Him. He took opposite strengths and yoked them together. He began teaching us how to accomplish more as a team than we could have ever done individually. We began learning to walk in support of each other’s differences instead of walking in resistance to them.

Throughout our meeting, dating, and engagement, God began teaching us a lot about life in the Kingdom and who we are in Jesus. Although we’re both incredibly thankful for our upbringing, as we began to encounter God in new and deep ways, we realized that an entire third of the Trinity—the Holy Spirit—hadn’t been very well introduced to us. He is such a gift.

We worked through our first two years of marriage and learned firsthand that dying to yourself takes a WHOLE LOT of repeated surrender. In the midst of tense, heated moments, the Holy Spirit would nudge our hearts, and we would choose to lay down anger, self-protection, pride, the need for control, and the need to prove a point and learn to respond like Jesus

would. His path to the cross was paved with bricks of repeated surrender of His own will to the will of the Father. His entire life consisted of numerous decisions to lay down His life to accomplish the Father's purposes. He is our example, and we shouldn't be surprised when we have to learn the same lessons of love and yielding, even in our marriages.

## Stepping into New Terrain

In early 2016, winter melted away and excitement bloomed in the air with a coming change in season. Spring ushered in our second wedding anniversary. We'd been praying and both felt peace about beginning to grow our family. That peace brought a heightened thrill and joy to the thought of becoming parents. The peace of Jesus always brings assurance that He will equip you for the task ahead. We walked forward eagerly anticipating pregnancy and parenthood.

Time marched quickly. Months one and two went by with no pregnancy. Being very early in the journey, my joy was high and my heart expectant. I looked forward to the next month when I was sure I would get pregnant. As months three, four, and five passed, I started to feel the air around my heart getting a little stuffy. This wasn't what I expected this journey to look like. There's that word: "expectation." Just go ahead and lay it down. Every time, lay it down. If we're not careful, expectations can cause us to hold so tightly to a desired outcome that if, and when, that expectation is not met, we fall apart. It's good and normal to desire things, but when a desire becomes an expectation that would rattle us if unmet, it's time to surrender it.

A new discouragement started to advance against me each month when I'd realize I wasn't pregnant. It was a disappointment. At first it was just a slight jab, but as time passed it grew stronger. It knocked the wind out of me at times.

Tears would roll down my cheeks as I'd sit in my bathroom taking in the newly revealed negative result of a pregnancy test confirming that my body was not growing a baby. Through tears, I'd tell myself, *Grieve this moment. Then we'll start another month to hope, believe, and wait.*

Anyone who has been through this journey knows the depth of that disappointment. It is a unique pain when you have high hopes for a child—desiring it so immensely and believing it's a current possibility—only to have it tumble down time and time again following a three-minute test. The repetition of this process is the hard part. Chinese water torture comes

to mind. What started out feeling like a water droplet on your heart has become, over the months, a sledgehammer blow. And what makes that blow feel even more frustrating is that you have no idea when it will cease. There is no sign of an end and no signal to look for that will indicate it's almost over. You just wait, and then start over each month.

I'd give myself a pep talk about how the Father's timing is perfect. I'd remind myself that He had never failed us, but those twinges of disappointment were still there: "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life" (Proverbs 13:12 NIV). I was cyclically feeling the beginning of this verse every month.

I wasn't okay with disappointment and sadness being my heart's response to not getting what I wanted when I wanted it. I took those feelings to the Lord and told Him that I didn't want them to be my reaction to deferred hopes. I believed that He has more for me, even in disappointment. One morning, I knelt on my bathroom floor, held another test that shouted "No," and prayed this prayer:

"Father, I don't like that my response to not being pregnant each month is sadness. I know you offer supernatural joy in You that is not contingent on my circumstances, and I want to take hold of that in this situation. I want my response to always be thankfulness and praise for who You are, whether or not I see a positive test next month."

The first few months when I pressed into this response, it didn't come effortlessly. I had to co-labor with Jesus to get my heart rooted in this response when the disappointment of repeatedly deferred motherhood came. If I was called to co-labor with Christ to produce the kingdom in my life, I'd have to intentionally put in some effort. No one could do it for me. I had to choose to partner with Him and practice. *I couldn't sit and beg for my life to show fruit that I hadn't worked with Him to cultivate.*

*I couldn't sit and beg for my life to show fruit that I hadn't worked with Him to cultivate.*

In the days leading up to a test, I would actively prepare my heart. I would soak our situation in worship. I'd thank Him for His goodness towards my family and for the strength of His joy. I worked with Jesus to change my heart's focus from longing for an outcome to focusing on the goodness of God.

In the following weeks, my bathroom floor prayer was answered, and my perspective began to shift. I saw that I could have the exact same response to two opposite outcomes—positive or negative tests—because of *who He is* in me and for me, not because of what my life looks like.

I began to focus less on pregnancy and more on letting the Father refine my heart. My desire to have a baby was wonderful, God-given, and still strong, but I needed to take that desire down from its pedestal and replace it with the joy of a relationship with Jesus. My eyes needed to remain fixed on Jesus, not on having a child.

Discouragement would still try to knock on my heart's door through a negative test, but I would choose to look it in the eye and deny it a place of entry. I'd begin to worship Jesus in the presence of discouragement. When I saw disappointment coming, it was my cue to worship. Worship became my automatic response to disappointment's knocks.

Did you know that's one of the best ways to handle the Enemy? He flees when you make Him watch you worship Jesus when he expects to watch you fall into despair instead. When he tries to deliver a blow and realizes that all it did was push you into Jesus, and cause His name to be lifted up, it drives him nuts. The Enemy loves attention, and oftentimes, we give him more than we should! He wants us focused on his efforts to steal, kill, and destroy, so that we forget what we have access to in Jesus.

Jesus is the one worthy of our attention. Even when the Devil is throwing himself in front of us, launching darts and arrows, trying to get our attention, turn your eyes to Jesus and worship Him. Let your perspective be lifted up to remember and declare that the Enemy is already defeated in the situation you're facing.

You live from victory, not towards it. It's already settled. Victory is yours in every circumstance. Jesus died to give us the fullness of the kingdom of heaven in every area of life. You have to believe that, and connect with it in your heart. Knowing that truth deep in your core eradicates hopelessness and despair and lifts your perspective to heaven's viewpoint.

### **Praise in Your Prison**

In this season, I learned the power of worship in the presence of our enemies from Paul and Silas in Acts 16:23-40. These two men of God had just been beaten and thrown into prison for their faith. Paul and Silas knew

the powerful truth of the gospel and were so passionate to see people set free that they shared it with all their might, knowing it would cost them their freedom and possibly even their lives. When they were arrested, they weren't just thrown in jail, they were placed in the "inner cell" (Acts 16:24 NIV).

Let's look at that place. Do you know how bad the "inner cell" is? It's the absolute worst cell in the prison facility. The innermost cell, in the center of the prison, was the most difficult to access or escape from. It was the place with the least amount of light—or possibly no light at all—likely with no windows even near it. You might not have had any idea what time of day it was or even if days were passing. Can you imagine what that would do to a person mentally? This "inner cell" contained the stench of all the imprisoned and beaten flesh with no ventilation (Acts 16:24 NIV) In the darkness and stench, Paul and Silas were shackled to the cold (likely stone) floor.

In the natural, there was absolutely no way of escape. With no idea as to when, how, or even if they would get out, they sat imprisoned together. This is a circumstance where many would become panicked or give in to despair or anger. But look at the example Paul and Silas give us in their response to being thrown into this situation: "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25 NIV). Their response to being put into the worst cell was not to worry, create an escape strategy, or get angry at injustice. It was to praise. They knew that the key to keeping their hearts at peace was to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus.

It says they were singing hymns so loudly that the other prisoners could hear them. They were neither mumbling nor whispering their praises. They weren't concerned about what anybody thought. They were singing them boldly with all the breath they had. In the stench, in the dark, in the pain, and in the shackles, they praised.

We are called to do the same. Any time our circumstances make us feel like we've been put in a prison, praise is our best response. In fact, it is possible for our genuine response to become praise by fixing our eyes on Jesus. Our bold praise in prison not only shifts our hearts from earthly circumstances to heaven, but it encourages others imprisoned around us. Heaven is pulled down when Jesus is lifted up. What happened next is proof of that.

As Paul and Silas unapologetically declared the praises of Jesus into the



atmosphere, “Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose” (Acts 16:26 NIV). Their praises moved heaven and created a shaking so violent that the foundation of the very thing holding them captive was rattled loose and doors locked before them were thrown open.

That is the effect of praise: it breaks chains and opens locked doors. And it wasn’t merely Paul and Silas’ chains and doors that were loosened but *everyone’s* around them! Praise rattles and shifts the atmosphere for you and for those around you. Praise brings freedom from any “inner cell” you find yourself in: hopelessness, fear, anxiety, worry, confusion, pain, rejection, betrayal, insecurity, or loss. Those chains are shaken to the point of breaking as Jesus’ name is lifted up and heaven comes. No chain of bondage can hold in the presence of God. Even the jailers were so amazed by the power and love of God—through Paul and Silas—that they opened their hearts to hear the gospel and gave their lives to Jesus.

That is what happens when we have heaven’s response to trials instead of the world’s response of anxiousness, fear, or despair. When the world sees a response to pain that actually brings peace and hope, they’ll long to open their hearts to experience it for themselves. Who doesn’t want peace? Who doesn’t want hope? Jesus is the only way to truly have these gifts, and the world can see that truth the more we put the power of Jesus on display in our lives.

## Shifting Perspectives in Prison

I realized that I was entering a different terrain than I ever expected to walk in as we tried to grow our family. As I recognized this shift, I made “praise in prison” a practice. As I did, my heart realigned back into order: Jesus at the center with all other desires falling around Him. I’d found that to be the key to staying rooted in peace and denying discouragement a place of influence. Even good, preferential desires and plans for children, spouses, financial freedom, ministry effectiveness, healing, or reconciled marriages can occupy a place in our hearts they aren’t meant for, if they become what we focus on most. Only Jesus is worthy of that throne.

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*What we focus our attention on fuels our hope and perspective.*

*What we focus our attention on fuels our hope and perspective.* We can focus on the prison, or we can focus on Jesus. If there is anything in your

heart that needs to be rearranged, don't let another moment go by without tending to it. Tell Jesus. He's not upset by it. He is thrilled that you see it and want to recenter your heart on Him. He desires to be with you more than you'll ever comprehend.

When you see Him for who He truly is and feel His love for you, you'll never want to have anything else at the center of your life. You'll lay everything down to take hold of Him. I wish I had words to describe it—to lock eyes with the King of kings and let His fiery gaze connect with the deepest part of you. It penetrates every hidden crevice of our hearts and fills every inch with overwhelming love and holy awe. There is no one like Him. Every other desire pales in comparison to the longing for more of Him. He really is that wonderful.

If you're having difficulty knowing where to start to get a revelation of His heart for you, I recommend Jenn Johnson's Spontaneous song, "Everything to You." This is one I listen to anytime I need to recenter my perspective around His heart for me and my heart for Him. Let this truth wash over you. Hear the voice of the Father sing this over you and woo you right into His arms. He is the great and relentless lover of your soul. You mean everything to Him. He knit you together and holds you together still, even in the situation you're facing. He has not forgotten you—He never could. He fiercely loves you.

Sit with that truth long enough to become undone by His love. Once you're there, love on Him. Pour your heart out to Him. Let it be a two-way connection descending from Heaven and returning from your heart to His throne. Don't hide anything. Let His love touch every place you were scared to show Him. There is nothing we will ever experience that is as powerful, freeing, and transforming as His love. Don't even read another page of this book until you meet with Him. He's waiting for you.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Was there a time in your life when the enemy tried to put you in a prison cell of disappointment, hope deferred, or anxiety? Take a moment to practice worshipping over that circumstance. Look it directly in the face, and lift Jesus higher than that situation in your heart.





## CHAPTER 2



# SHIFTING ATMOSPHERES WITH WORSHIP

## Heat Waves

With my new perspective of “praise in prison,” I journeyed forward into months six and seven still hoping to conceive. And I can honestly say that my heart was being made new. I didn’t feel the sadness like I used to. The scorching sand of the circumstances under my feet didn’t give me blisters anymore, and it wasn’t because I’d become calloused. It was because I’d learned how to put on shoes of peace in worship that shielded my heart from being burned. I still longed for a positive test, but I didn’t fall apart when it wasn’t there. I settled into the truth that it was okay to deeply long for something, as long as that desire didn’t cause me to put my contentment in something other than Jesus. The joy of the Lord had become my strength.

One late October morning, during month seven, I was in my bathroom holding an unused pregnancy test in my hand. I said “Jesus, no matter what this is about to say, I love you. You are so good to me.” I said it with a smile on my face and tears in my eyes, not because of any result, but because of where I saw He had taken my heart. I was different from the times when I’d been here before. No matter the result, I would take the test with complete peace. “Thank you, Jesus, for bringing me here,” I whispered.

I took the test, and as it sat on my bathroom counter a pink, positive sign slowly transpired into view. I slumped to the floor. One hand was over my face, and the other rested on my belly. All that I could repeatedly say was, “Oh Jesus! Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you.” It was a precious gift but no longer the prize of my heart.

Telling Zach was my second favorite part of that morning. It was such a joy to celebrate together. It occurred at a wild time for us because he was leaving for Florida, in four days, for a six-week training school. We would be apart for almost the entire first trimester, but I didn’t mind. I was beyond thrilled with the gift of pregnancy! Plus, he would miss what can be some of the moodiest parts of pregnancy, so it was very convenient for both of us.

We decided to tell our immediate family and closest friends before he left, since we wouldn't have another opportunity to share the news until my second trimester. It was so much fun to share with them! We were beyond grateful for the new adventures the Lord was giving us in multiple areas of our lives.

The six weeks that we were apart flew by, and I felt amazing! I was convinced that I had the best pregnancy in the world. Sure, I had your typical first trimester symptoms: breakouts, food aversions, and fatigue, but it was all pretty mild compared to some of the horror stories I'd heard. I was so happy to be this baby's mama. It was absolutely amazing to me how immense a mama's love and sense of protection can be for a life that she's never met face-to-face.

I was ready to throw myself headfirst into mothering this sweet life. I'd sit on the floor and pray over the room that would become the nursery. I wrote prayers for Baby Brinson in my journal. I started a journal that we would give him/her one day containing the words we heard the Father speak over their life. I even went ahead and ordered my favorite Dr. Seuss books to have on hand because surely our kid would be a baby genius reading fresh from the womb. I'm a planner and researcher by nature, so by the time Zach returned from Florida, two weeks before Christmas, I was fully prepared with Excel files to report on my top choices for a crib, Pack 'n Play, stroller, and car seat. I'd also enrolled us in childbirth classes and ordered and mailed our Christmas card pregnancy announcements. I was ready to do all of the baby preparation. We were especially excited to enjoy the Christmas season celebrating our growing family.

A few days after Zach got home, we had our twelve-week obstetric appointment. I was giddy to finally be together and take this step in our pregnancy. When we arrived at the doctor's office, we were escorted back to the exam room. Our doctor sat down, and we discussed how healthy I'd been and all the things I'd done to ensure that I was giving our baby its very best start in life. She told me, "You can't get more healthy than you are, honey!" I beamed. And with excitement, I put on that awkward gown and laid back on the table for the ultrasound. She slathered jelly on my belly (Yes, I was ready for that jelly!) and pulled out the ultrasound wand. She put it over my womb, and we all looked at the ultrasound screen with eager excitement.

In that moment, we realized that the season we were in was not the one we

had expected. She looked, probed, listened, and searched, but something was missing. We saw our little bean, but the doctor couldn't find a heartbeat. We watched the screen for what felt like ages as she tried different angles. At one point, I realized that I had been holding my breath, so I quickly took a deep breath and said, from my heart to the baby's, "Beat, you little heart! In Jesus' name!" The heartbeat didn't come.

She gently and graciously told me that I'd had a "missed miscarriage." My body showed absolutely no signs of miscarriage, and my hormones had remained high for a pregnancy. I was feeling the symptoms of pregnancy, but there was no longer life in the baby.

Zach put his hand on mine as they began to explain the situation, but we both were in shock. I don't think we heard many of her words after that. They wanted to send us for a second ultrasound, on a stronger machine, to confirm things at their affiliated practice. We agreed, but they couldn't get us scheduled until the day after the next. We had thirty-six hours to wait with this news.

On our ride home, there was dead silence and tearstained faces. I can't begin to articulate the way it makes your heart feel when the wind of excitement, that had been growing for weeks, is completely and unexpectedly knocked out of you. The little life I'd fervently prayed for, and thought I'd been given, had been snatched away. It felt devastating.

When we got home, I told Zach that I wanted some time by myself to spend with Jesus. I sat in my car and listened to worship music. I sobbed. And I sang.

### **Change the Atmosphere**

Grief flooded my heart. I cried out, asking Jesus to wrap me in His presence. I worshipped, and as I sang, suddenly my spirit rose up, and heaven's perspective came into my mind: The doctor's report is not the last report. Jesus is greater. As I prayed, I began to feel a boldness rise up in me in the midst of what appeared as tragedy. There, in my car, I determined that the enemy would have absolutely no foothold in my heart through this news. I knew that he was prowling around this situation looking for a place where he could get in, and I was not having it! My heart is the dwelling place of Jesus, and the Enemy was not gaining access.

I declared out loud, "Satan, you do not get one inch of victory in my heart

in this!” (I don’t advise always yelling at the Devil, but it just came out). Then, I immediately shifted my attention to Jesus, saying, “Jesus, you have overcome and made me an overcomer. I love you. You are always good; you are always faithful; you are ‘close to the brokenhearted;’ you have ‘plans to prosper’ our family that bring us ‘hope and a future,’” (Psalm 34:18 Jeremiah 29:11 NIV).

I realized then that the lesson I’d learned in praising Jesus, in the midst of negative pregnancy tests, was the same lesson that would help sustain me in grief today: I would choose to worship when tempted to feel frustrated and hopeless. I actively turned my eyes to Jesus, and the condition of my heart began to shift.

I continued to see, even more deeply, the brilliance of how God designed worship to function. It’s true—worship is completely about Him, but there is a powerful benefit for us when we choose to worship. It keeps our eyes fixed on him. Did you know that, as we ”worship in the Spirit and in truth,” we literally shift atmospheres (John 4:24 NIV)? As we engage our spirit and declare the truth of who God is, our heart tangibly shifts from heavy to light. Let me explain.

There is a spiritual realm that is usually invisible to the natural eye, but it is everywhere and often behind the “feeling” of a room or conversation. It’s the realm where the spiritual beings and forces—both evil and holy—are at work. Paul teaches us about it in Ephesians: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil *in the heavenly realms*,” (Ephesians 6:12 NIV, Emphasis Mine). [Clarification: This is not the heaven where God dwells. That is the “third heaven” that Paul refers to in the book of Corinthians. (2 Corinthians 12:1-4 NIV). Demons can’t dwell or operate there.]

When we feel confused, anxious, or any other negative emotion caused by the Enemy, that “feeling” is often a result of what is actually taking place or ruling in the spiritual realm. People are never the enemy, but they can be influenced by the Enemy if they allow it. The Enemy is always trying to gain control of our minds through chaos, anxiety, fear, confusion, and despair. If we feel those things, I can promise you that he is behind them. Those things are not associated with the Kingdom of Heaven.

As we grow in spiritual discernment, we learn to notice what is happening in the spiritual realm and to identify who is behind what we are seeing



and feeling in the natural realm. It is very important for believers to learn to identify the source of their “feelings.” It’s how we make informed and strategic decisions about what actions to take to release the Kingdom around us.

Worship is a surefire way to change atmospheres. We don’t have to agree with the enemy’s atmosphere or allow it to stay. We have the authority to resist it, and we’re actually called to change it: “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the Devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7 NIV). That’s a promise. We need to practice actively submitting our minds to God’s truth and resisting the Enemy to make him flee. Worship is a powerful way to do that.

Here are a few examples of real-life scenarios where you could see this shift: If you walked into a conversation with someone and immediately felt tension, you’d get to ask the Lord what was happening and how He would like to bring peace and release His kingdom. If you ran into a friend who started venting about a stressful situation, you could ask the Lord what His perspective was over them and share it to help them return to rest and peace in their spirit. If you suddenly felt overwhelmed with anxiety about a situation in your life, you could choose to worship until it dissipates. That is referred to as shifting atmospheres.

I, personally, saw the power of shifting atmospheres. When we received the devastating news that there was no longer life in our baby, through tears, I began to declare everything the Lord brought to my mind and spirit that spoke His truth over the situation. I wasn’t denying my pain, but as I chose to worship the Lord I felt His tangible peace permeate the car. The sadness and grief were still there, but there was also immense peace.

Worship ushers in heaven’s atmosphere, even in the most painful places. It aligns our hearts and perspectives with heaven’s. As we worship, our focus shifts from earthly circumstances to the things above. Worship draws on heaven because heaven always comes where Jesus is magnified. Angels are also drawn to places where Jesus is glorified. They love it, and the Enemy hates it.

### **Waiting on our Knees**

As I denied the Enemy a foothold in my heart, faith swelled and gave me another realization. We were still awaiting a second ultrasound, and this wasn’t over until it was over! I wouldn’t throw my hands in the air and give

up on this little life, if there was one ounce of hope that it could be restored. I had been given the gift of being this baby's mama, and I would fight for her life—in prayer and in faith and with all that I had—until we knew, without a doubt, that her life wasn't going to be revived.

I went back inside and sat down with Zach. I told him, "I don't want to be insensitive to any of your feelings or to how you're grieving right now, but I have to tell you what I'm believing and expecting." "I am not accepting death, until we know that there is absolutely no chance of life. The Lord is the God of miracles, and He can restore a heartbeat to a lifeless baby in my womb. That is what I'm praying for and believing. This baby has a destiny, and this world will be blessed because of her life. I have to declare that she will live, in Jesus' name!"

Zach said he was feeling the same way, so we entered into the next day-and-a-half standing together in faith and contending for a miracle. We weren't in denial of the ultrasound results, but our God is the giver of life and the resurrector of dead things. We were standing in faith for a miracle. We messaged our prayer warrior friends, let them know what we were believing for, and asked them to join us in a bold prayer for the restoration of a perfectly healthy life. Whatever the reason this baby stopped growing, no matter the medical explanation, Jesus could restore life and make things whole.

Over the next thirty-six hours, Zach and I flexed our faith muscles with all our strength. It was exhausting but worth it. The second day of waiting was the hardest for me to handle. It was such a strange place: My "mama's heart" wanted to begin grieving, but my spirit wanted to delay grieving and stand for a miracle. That day had huge ups and downs for me. I'd love to say that I was a rock of unwavering faith the entire day, but I had several moments where I shifted into grief. One moment I would be praying boldly and declaring in faith, "Thank you, Lord, that you are the giver of life, and you can resurrect this baby in me. The first report isn't the last report. In Jesus' name, baby Brinson, LIVE!" The next moment I would be sobbing, "God, I just want my baby back."

Despite the ups and downs, I felt massive grace over me that day. I didn't feel weak in the moments when I wanted to cry. I didn't feel like I was failing in faith for the miracle. I was letting grief express itself. I didn't try to push it back or stifle it. I simply refused to lay down underneath it. I let it be released however necessary, and then I rallied again.

That night I processed the day with Zach, and he confirmed that he'd felt very similar. Throughout the day, we'd received many texts from our friends who'd been praying, declaring life, and encouraging us. Knowing that we weren't contending alone immensely ministered to us. There were people holding our arms up in prayer like Aaron did for Moses as the Israelites fought the Amalekites. They continued to win the battle by the power of God, as long as Moses kept the staff of God raised in his hands (Exodus 17:10-13). When his arms grew tired, Aaron stood beside him and kept his arms lifted. Similarly, when we were exhausted, our friends interceded for us. My parents came over that night to pray with us in person. It brought peace to sit and simply listen to someone else pray in faith over the situation. In those moments, I didn't have to rally; rather, I could let someone else's faith carry the prayers while I took a deep breath.

At the end of that day, my last prayer was this: "Lord, I've given you everything I have for this. I've given you all the faith that I have. Please take what I've given you and multiply it. You can take five loaves and two fish and feed 5,000 people, so I know you can take what I've given you and make a baby live." We'd done all we could. The rest was out of our hands. Zach and I were able to go to bed that night with more peace in our hearts than we'd felt in the last twenty-four hours.

## **A Choice**

That Wednesday morning, I woke up and prepared for the second ultrasound. As I stood in my bathroom, putting on makeup, I worshipped to the song "Miracles" by Jesus Culture. I began declaring the words with my hands raised in the air and tears streaming down my face.

I'm a big fan of transparency, so I'm going to be real here. I wanted to be a flaming beacon of faith that was ready to run headfirst into that doctor's appointment, but in my heart, I didn't want to go at all. I would love to say that, from the moment my eyes opened that morning, I was confident that we were about to see a miracle; however, my heart was in my stomach while getting ready.

When I went downstairs to grab some breakfast, Zach asked me how I was feeling. I couldn't even speak before bursting into tears again. "I don't want to do this," I said. He hugged me and spoke strength over me, and I rallied for our baby once more. As we drove to the appointment, we prayed together, rejoiced in miracles, and recalled testimonies in scripture of restored lives. We entered that doctor's office united in faith and ready to

receive the report. We'd given this baby all we had, and we could confidently rest in that. She was so loved. I laid on the exam room table while the nurse conducted the second ultrasound.

The outcome had not changed. After contending in prayer, after rallying, and after believing God for the miraculous, the result remained: There was still no heartbeat.

I was tempted to grasp for understanding about why this had transpired the way it did. Why did we miscarry in the first place? Why did we not see a miracle? There in the exam room, when we'd received the news that the outcome we'd hoped for hadn't come, we had a choice to make: Would we question God, ourselves, and our measure of faith, or would we choose to remain in peace? We knew that neither God nor our faith needed questioning. We knew God's goodness, and we knew that we had given this our all in faith and prayer. There was nothing more that we could have done to change the outcome.

Bill Johnson says, "If you want to have the peace that surpasses understanding, sometimes you have to give up your right to understand." Take a second and read that again. It is powerful. It takes great trust to not feel the need to ask "Why?" and to find peace in the unknown. We want to walk in that great trust. As I pressed in to actively choose trust in the middle of confusion, I had to let that truth penetrate my heart. I chose to stop asking "Why?" when the Father didn't share an answer. I knew it wasn't wrong to ask God, "Why?" I just knew it was wrong to require an answer in order to be okay. If He didn't feel the need to provide understanding, then I must not need it.

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*If He didn't feel the need to provide understanding, then I must not need it.*

Our family did not grow in number on earth, but it certainly grew in faith and unity. Knowing we'd pleased the Father by pressing in together for the miraculous brought a comfort in grief that only the pleasure of God washing over you can release. Believing mightily for a miracle pushed me further into Jesus and His peace that surpasses understanding.

Much like King David, when he found that the life of the child he had with Bathsheba had been lost, we responded by entering the presence of Jesus: "David noticed that his attendants were whispering among themselves, and he realized the child was dead. 'Is the child dead?' he asked. 'Yes,' they replied, 'he is dead.' Then David got up from the ground. After he had

washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, *he went into the house of the LORD, and worshiped.*” (2 Samuel 12:19-20 NIV, Emphasis Mine). David knew the power of worship. He discovered that worship provides peace in the midst of tragedy because it puts you in the Lord’s presence. I could let grief push me into confusion and despair, or I could let grief push me into Jesus. There, in His presence, we could rest and receive peace while we began to grieve.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Can you recall a time where you’ve shifted an atmosphere through praise and worship? Is there any area in your life where you may need to do that now? Take a moment to worship over that place and see what happens.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Have you been stuck asking “Why?” at any point in your life? Perhaps you’ve asked this question in the midst of loss, disappointment, heartbreak, or unexpected pain? If so, write that circumstance or situation below.