

## “He never let go”

Helen Burns

I was born and raised in a wonderful, loving Christian family, going to church and Sunday School and becoming a Christian for myself in my early teens. Never really having been faced with any real challenges to this faith until I went to university, I had quite a rebellion in my first year, experiencing everything to the full and pushing all the boundaries, I think subconsciously really trying to see if being a Christian was necessary for me!



### Jesus Becomes Real and Irreplaceable

It ended after a destructive relationship, depression, alcohol abuse and a borderline eating disorder. I hit rock bottom and bombed out of university at the start of my second year an absolute mess. I **felt suffocated by shame and self-loathing** but found only love, comfort, forgiveness and rehabilitation in my family, and in my relationship with Jesus. Whilst this isn't the focus of my story today, it made me realise that however much I tried to 'go it alone' there was **no fulfillment or real happiness, just emptiness and destruction**. It was a turning point in my life and made me totally convinced that Jesus was not only real but that I was better with Him. It truly made my relationship with Him the most important thing in my life. **It made him absolutely real and utterly irreplaceable.**

Today, twelve years on, I sit here as a happily married mum of the sweetest little 2 year old boy, and 18 weeks pregnant. The last twelve years have been brilliant – full of adventure, excitement, and so many blessings, and certainly nothing as challenging as that time at uni. That was until January of this year.

### Struggling to Conceive

After conceiving our first without much more effort than eye contact (!) and experiencing a straightforward pregnancy and delivery (albeit 5 weeks early!) we decided we'd try for a second early 2016, thinking nothing of it... **nearly a year later and with no positive test to show for it, I started to really worry**. Questions and frustrations filled my head every day and the task of conceiving our second child consumed my every thought. My prayers changed from casual to earnest to urgent and desperate... was there something wrong with me?! Then, on December 14<sup>th</sup> 2016 **I got that positive test result we'd both dreamed of**. I was ecstatic... much more so for how 'hard won' it felt. We could barely keep the smiles of our faces. We told our families almost straight away; we were so excited. I buried myself in all the apps telling me what size they were, what they were growing that week, and even what piece of fruit they resembled in size!! I was on cloud 9. Christmas came and went but a few weeks after, at 6 weeks pregnant, I experienced a little bleeding. I was nervous but read up on it, took advice, and found it wasn't uncommon, so I just took it easy for a few days, prayed about it and it stopped, and the excitement was restored.

### Excitement Turns to Pain and Grief

Three weeks later however I bled again, more seriously. We went to hospital for a scan in the early pregnancy unit and were told that the baby had stopped growing at 6 weeks. **There was no heartbeat**. Those words left us stunned and devastated. My whole world came down around me.

The last year had been consumed by having this precious life and in that instant, it was cruelly ripped away. **The weeks that followed were a mess of pain, grief and anger.** Trips to the hospital as my body tried and failed to recover on its own, and then surgery. I was so angry. Angry at everything... everyone who had more than one child, everyone who was pregnant, even everyone who was happy almost! **And I was angry at God. How could He let this happen?** And after such a battle to conceive in the first place?! It seemed to make it so much worse and my mind raced as to whether we would even be able to conceive again. **I felt empty.** I felt the loss of that child so deeply, to me it didn't matter if they were 6 weeks old or 6 years old.

### **More Hope and Disappointment**

6 weeks or so later I didn't feel quite right. We had just returned from a holiday with friends and just thought it best to take a pregnancy test to make sure. I was staggered to see it come up with a strong positive. **I felt a surge of excitement but was instantly worried** as I knew my body was not behaving like it was pregnant and after the events of January, I was immediately cautious. I rang the early pregnancy unit at the hospital and they asked me to go straight in for a blood test and a scan. The scan showed nothing, but that was not unexpected at this very early stage. The blood test told a very different story.

### **Ectopic Pregnancy**

I was definitely pregnant but because of the scan it was considered a 'PUL' or 'pregnancy of unknown location'. I went back in a lot of times over the following weeks as they tried to get a clearer picture until they concluded it was **most likely an ectopic pregnancy**, but they still couldn't see it. The hormone numbers in my blood weren't going up as fast as they should in a normal pregnancy and so we were faced with the awful decision of taking a drug, a form of chemotherapy, to kill any 'foreign tissue' that was there, or to have surgery to remove the whole tube, assuming they found evidence of an ectopic pregnancy. Once they had decided it was most likely an ectopic, they wanted to move fast in case of rupture, which if left too long can be life threatening. I had gone in alone for what I thought would be just another scan and blood test to end up sobbing down the phone to my husband in the corridor of the hospital, **facing the reality of not only another lost baby, but also the loss of a tube** and that impact on my future fertility as a result. Knowing an ectopic pregnancy was a possible outcome, I had done my research on the drug they were proposing and whilst it is commonly administered, I just didn't feel good about it, and my husband agreed. As absurd as it sounds, and with immense sadness and concern for the consequences, I opted for the surgery.

### **God's Hand on the Surgery**

The following morning I went into surgery. I felt a peace about it, even though I was just so sad about everything at this point. Afterwards, on the ward in recovery, the surgeon came round and explained that they *had* found an ectopic pregnancy close to my ovary (which was obscuring it in the scan) and that **it had already ruptured and I had been bleeding internally.** I was staggered. I hadn't had hardly any pain at all, and that this had happened without me being aware was overwhelming. He explained that **it was fortunate they hadn't waited any longer.** It dawned on me after he had left that, had I opted for the drugs, I would still be bleeding internally and would be in a much worse situation, needing the surgery anyway... I was so grateful that we had felt as strongly as we did that the surgery was the right route (honestly, the surgeon looked at me like I was mad when I said I wanted the surgery rather than the drugs!). After all my anger towards God about everything that had happened that year so far, I knew he had guided both of us in that decision and that it had saved

me from a much worse situation.

### **Pain Replaced by Gratitude and Hope**

At home again facing the reality of trying to have another child, now with only one tube, when we had struggled so much when I still had both, was a lot to deal with, but **I found myself with a new perspective...** one of incredible gratitude for the son I already had, for the incredibly loving and supporting husband who had been a rock throughout, for my family, my home, my church family and all the prayers that had been said for us and our situation, for the knowledge that I would see these two precious little people again. It lifted me up and put my mind on an even keel when it had been so shaky before. I remember my husband commenting a few weeks after the surgery that he had been bracing himself... almost waiting for me to crash and burn like I had in January... but I hadn't! **I found myself burying into the comfort, love and hope in Jesus** rather than being angry with him. He never promised bad things wouldn't happen, but he *did* promise to be there with us through it all. He never let go of me, even when I was so angry at Him.

### **Hope for the Future**

Then came what feels like a miracle. Just 8 weeks after the surgery to remove my tube, **I fell pregnant again!** Having tried without success for almost a year, I had conceived 3 times in 6 months! In hindsight it's obvious to me now that God heard my prayers for another child in those early days when nothing was happening. It didn't happen how I would have chosen, but much like my time at university, **I have come out the other side a changed person for the better.** A person with a deeper gratitude for what He has already blessed me with, with an unfailing hope, and with a deeper love for Him. Have I been worried this time around? Of course I have! It will be a lot easier telling this story when I've got this newborn in my arms, safe and sound! We've had the routine extra scans and tests to make sure everything is normal and progressing well, and I look forward to every appointment knowing that hearing that heartbeat or seeing that little life squiggling around on the scan means everything is still ok. I trust and pray that everything will be ok, but even if it's not, **having this real relationship with Jesus means I know I have an endless strength and comfort to draw upon** when I can't handle things on my own, and *that* is priceless.