

Antenatal bleeding / Naomi's Struggle to Have Children

Storyteller: Betty was 8 months pregnant with her second baby. She already had a boy and she was really hoping for a girl! One morning she was washing, when she noticed that she was bleeding just a little bit. She didn't have any pain, so she didn't worry about it. But the next day, there was some more blood. Her sister Vera was visiting, so Betty told her that she was bleeding down there. Vera said, 'Is your bag packed? You're going to the hospital. Now!'

Carol: Hello, and welcome to Women of Hope. I'm Carol...

Tammy: And I'm Tammy...

Naomi: Hi, I'm Naomi. Thanks for having us with you today.

Tammy: Have you ever had a baby, or seen a baby being born? Isn't it wonderful to see a new life coming into the world? I worked at our Pregnancy Crisis Centre for many years, so I know that things can go wrong. But really, most babies are born safely in spite of the risks. I've had three myself! Today we want to find out why Betty needed to go to hospital in such a hurry. We'll be hearing about a very important sign that something is wrong...bleeding from the vagina in the second half of pregnancy...the second 20 weeks. It's fairly common and happens in about one pregnancy in every 20. And it's *always* dangerous. So let's hear some more of Betty's story .

Storyteller: Straight away, Vera called their neighbor to look after Betty's little boy, and packed a bag for her to go to the hospital. Betty didn't want to go, because she had no pain and it wasn't time for the baby yet. 'Listen,' said Vera. 'My friend started bleeding at 7 months. She didn't know it was dangerous, and stayed at home. Then she started bleeding a lot and died before she could get to a hospital. Let's go!'

Now Betty was happy to go to hospital quickly! She was embarrassed because she didn't *feel* sick, but the staff at the hospital told her that she did the right thing. They didn't *feel* inside; that could make it worse! They looked with an instrument, and it turned out that she had a very low *placenta* that was blocking the baby's way out. The doctor quickly did a caesarian operation - to get the baby out through her belly before she bled any more. The baby was small, because she was born early but she was saved...a beautiful little girl! And Betty was still healthy and recovered quickly, too!

Later, Betty asked the doctor what had happened. He answered that whenever a woman starts to bleed when she's pregnant, it's always a dangerous sign, and she must act quickly!

He explained, 'When a baby begins to grow and develop inside the mother, it gets its food through the umbilical cord from the placenta. The placenta sticks to the inside wall of the mother's uterus and has lots of mother's blood in it. The baby's blood goes through the placenta and absorbs everything the baby needs from the mother's blood. That placenta will stay stuck to the uterus until after the baby's born, and then follow the baby out. Then the mother's uterus can squeeze and cramp down small and

stop the bleeding. But sometimes the placenta comes unstuck before the baby's born. That leaves a large bleeding area and the mother will bleed to death if the baby and placenta don't come out immediately and let the uterus cramp down.'

Betty asked, 'What might make the placenta come unstuck?' The doctor told her: 'There are some things that make it a bit more likely to happen - like smoking...drinking alcohol...diabetes...and high blood pressure. When you're pregnant you really shouldn't smoke or drink at all, and you should always get treatment for diabetes and high blood pressure.'

Then the doctor told her another possible reason for the bleeding... It could be caused by a blow to the belly. The placenta can begin to come unstuck and start bleeding inside if the mother is hit hard in her stomach, perhaps in a car accident, or if she falls down. 'But I didn't have any kind of accident' said Betty, 'so I wonder what happened?'

'Well,' said the doctor, 'there are other causes of bleeding, and any of them could be dangerous. Sometimes, a woman who is seven or eight months pregnant will begin bleeding but not have any pain at all, just like you did. This might mean that her uterus is getting ready for birth soon, but the placenta has stuck onto the uterus wall very low down and it's blocking the baby's way out! Your baby would not have been able to be born because of that placenta blocking the way. But you would probably have bled to death before then!' 'Oh,' said Betty, and turned pale.

The doctor continued, 'Your sister was quite right; any woman who bleeds in the last few months of pregnancy must go *immediately* to a hospital before she gets weak and pale, and before the baby dies inside her. If the placenta is low, the doctor will deliver her baby by an operation through her belly because the baby cannot get out the normal way. That's what we did for you.'

Betty looked very thoughtful. 'So you saved my life, and my baby. Thank you.' The doctor added, 'And you should thank Vera. She knew bleeding was dangerous, and she knew what to do. *She* helped save your life too.'

The woman in the bed next to Betty was listening. She said, 'In my village people think a woman who has lost a baby is dirty or cursed. So if there's a problem during pregnancy, a mother hopes that the problem will go away or that people will not find out. Then they collapse and get taken to hospital but sometimes they die because they waited too long to get help.'

The doctor nodded, 'Yes, that's sad, because it's not true at all! A woman who bleeds or loses a baby is *not* cursed, she does *not* have a bad spirit, and she should *not* be punished and kept apart from others for weeks. It's not her fault at all, and nothing bad will happen to people who are near her. She can cook food for her family and other people...she can sit with other people...she can travel...she can work...she can live normally. She will be sad already; there's no reason to treat her badly!

Thank God that your sister helped you get to the hospital quickly, and now you have a beautiful, healthy baby. So please tell your friends; any bleeding during pregnancy is dangerous, and if they bleed after the middle of pregnancy, they *must* come to the clinic *immediately!*'

'Yes, we certainly will!' said Betty and Vera together. 'And thank you for everything you have done for me, doctor!' added Betty happily.

Tammy: The doctor said that if a mother has any pain in the stomach after an accident, she must go to the hospital *immediately*, so the doctor can stop her bleeding inside. He said that sometimes rest and medicine can stop the bleeding before the placenta peels off the uterus wall, and there's a good chance of saving the baby. Even if she's not bleeding or in pain, she *must* go to her health worker or clinic if she's had some kind of accident...so they can keep watch for a few hours and make sure everything's ok.'

Carol: And remember, she *must* go, even if she has bleeding and no pain. If there's no ambulance or car to take her, she can be carried, or walk if she's not too weak. She must get there as soon as possible.

Naomi: I'm so glad Betty's story ended with a healthy baby. It doesn't always, as I know.

Tammy: You're right Naomi, and we'll talk about that. For some of us, it's easy to get pregnant and have a child. But many women have trouble getting pregnant, and others have miscarriages.

Carol: Naomi's joining us at Women of Hope to tell us about many things she's learned during her life. She's worked in Nepal for many years. We wanted Naomi to tell us about her experiences because besides being married and having three wonderful sons, but she has also had some very hard times. How did your journey of being a mother begin Naomi?

Naomi: I was 25, and my husband Darren and I were working in India. One day, I was cooking some rice, I looked down at my arms...I stared at the curve in my elbows. I tried to imagine filling up the curve with a warm bundle of milk smelling baby. Suddenly I *longed* for a child. I read somewhere that women can wake up one day and suddenly realise that their arms are empty. That certainly happened to me.

Tammy: So, once you knew you wanted a baby, did you get pregnant right away?

Naomi: No, I didn't. And I realised that, like most women, I had little control over this part of my life. I shed tears. Every month I was disappointed. I wondered, 'will it ever happen?'

Tammy: I think most of us know what it's like to wait for something we really want, don't we? It's very hard and it's easy to get depressed about it. Did you feel that way?

Naomi: Yes I did. When you decide to start a family and then find it doesn't happen, you seem to see pregnant women and baby animals everywhere! They remind you of what you don't have.

Carol: So what happened next?

Naomi: Nothing! We started thinking about adopting a child. Then on the 27th of June 1994 we were praying. Darren, my husband, was convinced that God spoke to him. He felt God say, 'You will have a son this time next year. You will name him Daniel and he will be a man of prayer.'

When Darren told me this, I didn't know what to think. Was he just imagining it? I was tired of hoping and then being disappointed. Then one night I couldn't sleep. I went and sat on our flat concrete roof. It was a full moon. The stars were bright. And yet I was sad. I poured my heart out to God in prayer. The tears came. Time passed and slowly the tears changed. They changed to peace. In my heart I said, 'Whatever happens, I know that I belong to God.' The confusion had gone. God's peace had come. So I would wait... On June 27th 1995 I gave birth to our first child, a son. Exactly one year to the day since Darren felt that God spoke to him...the exact day! We called him Stephen Daniel.

Tammy: What a fantastic answer to your prayers.

Carol: Exactly one year. I love how God works. So you and Darren were parents at last and were able to care for this new baby. Was it easy to get pregnant with your other children after this?

Naomi: No it wasn't. On Christmas Day 1996 we discovered that I was pregnant with our second child. We were so happy. In late March we went to have our 18 week ultrasound of the baby. We went happily, looking forward to seeing a picture of the baby up close. I'll never forget the look on the doctor's face that day. He turned slowly from the screen and said, 'I'm afraid I have some very bad news for you. The baby has died.'

The doctor went on to explain the cause of death.

I kept silent. I don't even remember Darren saying anything. We just kept holding hands tightly. The hospital staff asked us what we wanted to do. We *wanted* to go home. We wanted to pretend that this had not happened.

We chose to have a normal delivery and I was given some medicines to start labour. They didn't work; I would have to have an operation. That meant I would never see the baby's face. I remember being given some sleeping medicine and at that exact moment some words of a song came into my mind, 'strength for today, hope for tomorrow.' Just those six words over and over again. They seemed to fill every little space in my brain and in my heart.

Carol: Our God is wonderful! He can bring the words from a song, or encouraging words from a friend into our mind to help us in hard times. They remind us of what is true. Sometimes He uses words from the Bible too. It's one of the ways God can show he loves us.

Naomi: God was holding me close. He was reminding me that he was my strength. He was reminding me that he would help me through this day, and I would still be there. I would still be his. And tomorrow, he would be there too, my 'hope for tomorrow.'

I felt empty. For days I dreamt that the baby was still there. But I would wake up and there was nothing inside me. I cried a lot during that first day in hospital. I couldn't find any words. I was simply too sad to talk. We had spent the last three months talking about the baby and how it would fit into our family. We had hopes and dreams for it.

Carol: You *needed* to grieve for your baby didn't you? Of course there were tears and sadness.

Naomi: We did grieve. We received so many letters and words of comfort during that time. These words would pass through my mind as I moved through each day. I began to feel thankful that I had known our child. Our pastor and a friend came to our home to help us grieve. We named the baby Maili and we sang and read the Bible together. We seemed to be able to move on. *Very slowly.*

Tammy: You're with Women of Hope, and we've been hearing from Naomi, about how she lost her second baby. So, Naomi, your life went on. You were planning to go back to Nepal and you discovered you were pregnant again.

Naomi: Yes. We were stunned. We cancelled the plane tickets and planned to stay in Australia. But the following week, I miscarried the baby at eight weeks. More trips to the hospital. More doctors. More needles. And this happened *three more times*. I became pregnant again, and then had a miscarriage... You might think I would be used to it by now. But I wasn't. Each time, I cried and cried. Each time I hung onto God again and he held me.

Stephen was nearly 5 when I discovered that I was pregnant again, for the seventh time. Our new friends were really excited. I tried to calm them down. 'No no no,' I said, 'you don't understand. I've had a few problems. The baby may not live.' I was trying to pretend that if I didn't expect the baby to live, then I might not be so sad if it died.

But just before lunch on the fifteenth of September, our second son arrived. He was alive and he was perfect. He was small and blonde and gorgeous. We named him Christopher. He fitted on the palm of Darren's hand. We were so thankful. We watched our boys with happy hearts. I wrapped up my baby in the blue rug and filled up the curve in my elbow again. He fitted perfectly.

Christopher was nine months old when I became pregnant for the eighth time. The doctors had worked out what caused the problems for my other babies. But at 37 weeks I was told the baby had stopped growing and so they needed to start the labour by giving me medicine. The next day Jeremy was born. He was gorgeous. His round eyes peeped out at us from the folds of the blue rug. We stared and we cuddled.

During these years I began to write down all the things that God was teaching me. They were all about him and his love for me; He was in control and I learned to trust him. There was nothing I could not face with God. Everything in my life happens for two reasons: to give God more glory and to make me more like him.

We all go through difficult times. In some of them God feels distant. Absent. Our prayers seem to bounce off the ceiling. 'Are you really there God?' I would wonder. Then during other hard times, we are aware of an incredible sense of being carried, of being loved and comforted. But God is there with me all the time. He hurts as I hurt. I don't understand his ways and his plans, but I do understand his

love. His love is what I hold on to. His love holds me.

Carol: Naomi, thank you so much for sharing your story. I'm sure many women will understand your hard times, and maybe they will understand how God carried you through them.

Tammy: I hope you were encouraged as you listened to Naomi's story. She's a special woman...

Naomi: No, I'm an ordinary woman, but I have a wonderful God, and I pray that you will know his love, as I have. His strength for today, his hope for tomorrow. God bless you, my friend.

Tammy: Maybe you have a story to share. We would love to hear from you. You can write to us in care of this station or at TWR Women of Hope.... The address: TWRWomenofHope.org. We do hope you will be with us again. Have a great week filled with God's blessings.

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