

Little One Lost: Living with Early Infant Loss, by Glenda Mathes, 2012, Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 144 pages, \$10.00.

“A *biblical mindset* is planted in God’s Word, nurtured by continual prayer, and pruned by God’s providence. It is also progressively renewed by God’s Word (Rom. 12:2) and re-formed to Christ’s image (2 Cor. 3:18)” (p. 12, emphasis original). Glenda Mathes summarizes her perspective in those words from the preface of this greatly needed and most helpful book. An author, editor, poet, and blogger, she skillfully knits her story and those of others together with clear explanations of passages of Scripture that bear on the grief involved in the loss of an infant.

“The unfulfilled anticipation of new life lost before birth—like a tender bud pinched by an early frost—is what makes the loss of a pre-term infant so piercing. Yet society often minimizes such loss. We live in an abortion-accepting society that has hardened its collective heart to the loss of prenatal life” she writes. However, she continues: “Even the loss of the littlest one is the loss of a real person. Each child is unique, created in God’s image. Such a loss rips a hole in the parent’s heart and leaves an aching void” (p. 17).

The third chapter, “Knit Together” (knitting is a theme that runs through the book) gives a superb overview of the way in which the Bible treats even little ones, before and after birth, as valuable persons, made in his image. The book moves on to give the stories (first names only) of grief surrounding the loss of little ones. Each story is wrapped in material unfolding the hope and comfort that the Scriptures give.

The 27 short chapters (three to five pages each) move quickly (I read the entire book the evening I received my copy), but they flow much deeper than a casual glance reveals. Mrs. Mathes deals, as one would expect, with difficult decisions and with the mother’s grief. But then she includes the grief of the father and of other children in the family, as well as the church and the broader community. She provides helpful suggestions of what not to say to a grieving parent, as well as advice on what and how to speak comfort and to provide it in concrete ways. She deals frankly and gently with grief that is compounded by abuse or by sinful actions of the part of parents, but always points to the forgiveness that Christ offers. She touches on childlessness and adoption.

“Covenantal Comfort” is summarized in Chapter 15, but also underlies the whole book. The excellent chapter on “Confessional Comfort” might have been strengthened by at least a footnote indicating that the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms share a similar view of God’s covenantal faithfulness as do the Three Forms of Unity, the confessions in Mrs. Mathes’ church, the comfort of which she beautifully unfolds.

The book recognizes the complex natures of grief and guilt. Mrs. Mathes warns against secular counseling which “will fail to bring the comfort of God’s forgiveness into the equation” (p. 105). She appropriately cautions against some forms of Christian counseling which may be “too simplistic, blaming personal sin for every emotional problem and urging the sufferer to search for a specific sin at the root of each problem”

(p. 105). She keeps pointing the reader to the comprehensive forgiveness found in Jesus Christ.

The only place I found myself differing from the book was an emphasis in the difficult and very real problem of a sufferer's, even a Christian sufferer's, anger towards God. I share the author's concern, expressed through the words of a Christian counselor whom she quotes, that Christians deal gently and patiently with such sufferers. I am thankful to share in the goal of helping grieving persons "come to a place where they see God's providence, accept it, and still believe that it is good" (p. 119), but question, however, whether the expression in the same paragraph "that God is big enough to handle their anger" is fully biblical or pastorally helpful.

Do not let this one reservation deter you from buying and using the book. Every pastor ought to have a copy. Elders and deacons, as they come alongside grieving members, ought to read the book. Purchase a copy for your church library, and encourage members to read it. Keep copies on hand to give to grieving parents to read when they get to the point of being ready to do so. The local hospital at which I do some chaplaincy work does well in supporting families dealing with perinatal loss. I purchased a copy of *Little One Lost* to add to the collection of books on the topic.

The target readership of this book is apparently the covenant community. Mrs. Mathes, however, points so clearly to Christ as the source of comfort that this sensitively written book may be an appropriate gift to a griever who does not yet know the Lord. "No matter how traumatic the loss, no matter how much or how little it is grieved, believers have hope of a glorious future. We look to that future with hope that is firmly based on God's sure promises for a future free from pain and sorrow. Our future existence will not be as vague spirits floating in the clouds. When Christ returns, we—and our covenant children—will be reunited with our original bodies, glorified in a way far beyond our imaginings. God the Father sent His Son to atone for all our sins. He sends His Spirit to comfort us in our sorrows. . . . He holds before us the hope of an existence free from grief and full of joy" (pp. 134-135).

The book may be ordered from:
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