

Miscarriage: A Grief Misunderstood

Interview with Adelle Wiencke

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Miscarriage is a common and yet often hidden experience for a lot of women. It can be hard to understand the rollercoaster of emotions that comes with both pregnancy and infant loss. For Adelle, three miscarriages were enough to leave her wondering if her dreams of a big family would ever become a reality. Today, on *Messages of Hope*, Adelle shares where she found hope in the midst of all that pain

Jo: So welcome, Adelle. Tell us about your journey as a parent.

Adelle: So, we got married in July of 2012. I was 31, and I suppose my biggest dreams in my life at that point that were non-negotiable were to get married and have children. So, we gave ourselves a couple of months of just being married before we started trying for babies, and I conceived really quickly, and it was pretty awesome.

Then we went for the 11-week scan, and there was no heartbeat, and I remember the doctor said, "Oh, maybe we've got the dates wrong." I said, "No, we haven't. They're right. It's gone." So that was really painful, and we were really shocked, so surprised that it had happened.

And then we tried again and conceived really quickly, and once again, we thought, "Wow, how blessed are we?" But we went for a weekend away over Easter to the Blue Mountains, and it was the Sunday evening and I started to miscarry. So there we were again.

Once again, we just waited until the right time to try again, and it probably took a couple months longer, but we conceived again, and we thought, "This is it." But then at the 12-week scan, combined with the blood test that they do to get a probability of trisomy occurring in the baby, we scored just above the normal level, so just above 300%, or probability of one in 300, of having a baby with trisomy. I remember doctors talking to me and saying, "You're gonna be fine. One in 300 chance, it'll be fine." We arrived for that appointment, the doctor said that just as we sat down for the scan, and then I remember she flinched and I knew something wasn't okay.

And then things just flipped around really fast. She said, "this condition is usually terminal." We were told that 70% of babies with that condition pass away during childbirth so it was likely that he would go to full term and then pass away when he was being born. And we found ourselves just grappling like desperately, "Oh, could

it just be this? Are you sure? Could it just be this one issue that he could be operated on for?" And she didn't think so, but she was allowing me to have some hope.

So she discussed options with us, and we left the room, and read some information they'd given us. I went out and vomited in the hospital garden and then we went back in for the amniocentesis, and during that, like my body just started to shudder. I was so hurt and upset and scared and angry. Although the anger wasn't really primary then, it was more fear and hurt. But I remember without a doubt, there was a voice. It wasn't audible, but it was a voice to my heart and my head: "Trust me," three times. And that comforted me tremendously then, 'cause I knew from whom it came, obviously God. And I didn't know then that I would need that later in our journey when my faith did get really shaky.

The first week after diagnosis was really hard. I was really worried that I would not be able to have kids at all at that point. I wondered how I was gonna cope for the next few months. Initially, I went back to work, and I didn't tell people, so people were congratulating me on the pregnancy. But I didn't want to tell them because I knew I couldn't live in that state of grief all the time. I had to be able to just pretend so I could function and still do things, and I didn't wanna take leave because I knew that I would need that later on.

I felt trapped. There were so many emotions around just I knew I was gonna see him through, or I thought I was gonna see him through to full term, so that was gonna be quite a while. I didn't know how I was gonna cope. I was thinking, "it'll be interesting to see if I go a bit crazy here." But when he did pass away, it sounds terrible, but that felt like a relief for a little while. But then the other grief hit. So, there's just so much going on.

Something I really want people to know is the love I felt for him when I held him after he was born was the same as the love I felt for all my living babies when they were born. I want people to know that for multiple reasons: People who are going through it, I want them to know that their pain is real, legitimate, and it's okay to feel really rubbish, and I want people supporting those people to know how hard it is so that they understand the degree of pain.

Jo: Yeah, I hear you, because I felt that way with my own babies when I lost two before birth. And you never forget them. I actually ended up buying a teddy bear for each of them, so I cuddle them every so often just to remember that they existed, that they were present in my life.

Even through all of those experiences of being told your body isn't as perfect as you think it is and, it's gonna be hard for you, how did you respond to what was happening to you and your body?

Adelle: Not very well sometimes. I was surprised about the intensity of my emotions. I was waiting in the hospital, and I remember a pregnant lady standing nearby, and she was probably 10 years younger than me, so here's the jealousy and the fear kicking in, and I remember having an urge to push her over. And I thought,

"I'm not a violent person. Where did this come from? I'm awful. Oh my goodness." And then I thought, I'll jump onto Google and just see if I am a psychopath or not. So, I got on there, and it was common for women to wanna feel like hitting pregnant ladies. It's awful. It sounds horrific. Who are these people? But it's really normal. And I want people to understand that too.

You're not a terrible person if you don't wanna be around a pregnant friend or family member. You're not a terrible person if you ask someone not to bring their baby to your house, cause this actually happened. My brother's first child was born in August that year, and that was when our first baby would've been due. And my sister's third child was born in August as well. And I know my sister-in-law felt guilt that her baby was alive and mine wasn't, and I didn't want her to feel guilty. I didn't want her to suffer. It wasn't her fault. I remember I avoided that first family Christmas after Charlie [my child] was born 'cause I didn't want to ruin it for the others, 'cause it was their first Christmas with their new baby, and it was the first Christmas for my sister's youngest. So I didn't wanna be there 'cause I knew that everyone would feel uncomfortable, so we didn't go.

Jo: What was your experience of people's response when you decided to share about your grief?

Adelle: A lot of the insensitive things that were said to me made me feel like I was weak or that people thought I was weak. But I want people to also know that that's how you feel when you're going through this sort of struggle. If people don't acknowledge it, you feel like you're somehow failing. And when you're going through fertility or infertility and pregnancy loss, it's really normal to feel like a failure because look at that person, they're pregnant. That one's pregnant. Everywhere, pregnant people everywhere. And they're not, but you feel like they are, and you just wonder, "Well, what is wrong with me? I can't get this right."

Jo: But, but even it's the simple thing like you see them happy and you go, "What right do they have to be happy?" 'Cause, you know...

Adelle: I wanna say that it's different for everybody. So, what we learnt is if you hear of somebody going through something really tough, listen more than you talk. It's a strong human urge to just start about your own story. You hear a bit of it and then you go, "Oh, I heard about this person that went through that," or, "We did this," or, "This happened to us." And that's not really helpful. Just say that you're sorry for the loss of that baby. Talk to them and tell them that you're thinking of them, and if you've never been through that sort of thing, tell them, "I have no idea what you're going through. Know that my words won't do the situation justice, but I love you and I'm thinking of you, and I'm here for you." But also, if you do say something that you know hurt that person, and you've left the situation or that room, et cetera, pray about it and if you think it's right, write them a message and say, "I'm sorry."

So, I think be humble. If they're a friend, see if they wanna go out for a cuppa and let them talk. Pick a spot that's not really busy, that they can have a bit of privacy. There's some cafes that have little nooks where a few tears won't be noticed because you're likely to cry if you're going through infertility or pregnancy loss.

Jo: I'd love to know more about how you sourced healing, how you sourced some sort of hope in all of this tragedy.

Adelle: I tried naturopathy. I tried acupuncture. I took Chinese herbs. I walked a lot. I was too scared to run in case I had conceived and I lost it 'cause I was running. I got so cautious and scared that anything I did could kill a baby. It was not a nice place to be, and my brain was often going on thought journeys of, "What should I be doing? Am I missing something? Should I try this?"

I went off sugar. I went off processed food, so I ate really clean. I asked for prayer. I prayed. I asked for all the testing that conventional medicine could provide or would provide, and we were going to fertility specialists and doing IVF. So, I was doing everything that we knew could be done.

Jo: And it just sounds like you've put a lot of effort into just that whole, what can I do more? What can I do more for this? But then you did also mention prayer. Did that have any impact on your perspective?

Adelle: Well, as I tell people, because we obviously can't say this or this worked or whatever, but I know that God guides our actions. But when people ask me, "what do you think worked?" It could've been this, could've been this, or prayer. I believe that God was with us the whole time. He knew it was going to happen. He had his hand on us. And I would never want to go through that experience again, but I know that what we learnt is an enormous blessing for us and hopefully we can bless other people, they will benefit from the compassion and empathy and wisdom that experience has given us. So, it wasn't for nothing, that's for sure.

But, look If I'm being honest, we could have not done any of those other things and we would have had babies 'cause that was God's will. But you don't know that then, and who knows? Maybe we had to do those things. I don't know.

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Jo: So, Adelle, despite the painful experience of loss, you didn't give up on trying to have children, and you were eventually blessed with your daughter, Isabelle, through a successful IVF round. What was your journey like after that?

Adelle: In May of 2016, I gave birth to a beautiful little girl, healthy little girl, and she was placed on my chest, and I just felt like, "Wow, I am so blessed right now." And then I remember as they wheeled us back to my room after she was born, I just felt, "Wow, this has happened. I've got a living child."

Adelle: So after Isabelle was born, we gave it a few months, but then tried again for another baby, but unfortunately we miscarried at eight weeks. And I remember feeling really shocked, like, "What? I thought we were past our problems. What, God? Come on." I thought that it had all been figured out, we weren't gonna have any more problems, and I was really concerned that we were only gonna end up with one child, and I really wanted more. And in particular, I really wanted to have a sibling for my child because I know that's a gift as well.

We did two more IVF rounds, and they both didn't work. So, we'd just bought the medication to prep me for another egg collection and found out that I was pregnant. So, Vivian, was born in March of 2019, another beautiful little girl, and I remember a couple of weeks off her being born just being amazed that I was going to have two live healthy children.

And then we knew that we wanted to try again for a third. We'd prayed about it a lot because once you have a trisomy baby, your risk of having another one is greater than just the general population. So not only does the risk increase with age, it's extra because of that previous history. And then, I realised I was pregnant. We found out we were having twins.

I was overjoyed initially, but then I went through a stage of, "Oh my goodness, twins. I am 40. I'm going to be almost 41 when they're born. I hope they're good sleepers. Oh, my goodness."

And...It's wonderful. They were wonderful. It's just a normal family. Just because you've gone through a lot of a struggle to have a family doesn't mean it's any different from a family that hasn't. You've got your bumps and your bruises and family dinners that you think are gonna go really well, but they end in lots of food on the floor and tears and some yelling of children at the other children.

Because another thing that happens, you go through all this, you have the baby, but that's hard, too. So, I remember Isabelle just wouldn't stop crying. I was like, "Argh!!!" And I remember having an urge to throw her out in the grass in the backyard, and Andrew came home and I was crying 'cause I said, "I wanted to throw her. It's terrible." And he lovingly said, "But if you had have thrown her, you would've done a dive and caught her."

But finding parenting hard after you've gone through this is normal. It is hard. And any parent can have guilt about feeling that parenting's hard or when you're cross with your kids and yell at them, et cetera.

But I feel that it can be exacerbated when you've gone through the journey, a really big struggle to have kids. You feel extra guilt because you think, "What sort of monster am I? I know how blessed I am, how can I possibly be complaining about having soup smeared in my hair right now? How can I possibly be so cranky with the kids just being horrible today?"

Jo: I know faith is a big part of your life, so how would you describe your journey with God through all of this?

Adelle: A bumpy one. I got really mad at God, I sometimes lost my trust, and I remember feeling really low and feeling like, "Really? Is God out there? Does He really give a hoot about me?" And I just felt really mad with him.

I remember walking down the paddock one day, and I was still pregnant with Charlie, and I was just grief-stricken. And Andrew, my husband, bless his socks, he was following behind me just to be there for when I was ready to stand still and be hugged. And I remember kicking a panel on a shed, 'cause obviously I must find comfort by letting out the noise and stuff. So, I was kicking a shed, and then all of a sudden the panel gave way and I fell through. So, one leg was on one side and one leg on the other. And a 22-week belly is still a bit unbalancing, so Andrew had to come and pull me out. So yeah, it was messy.

I was a mess at times. I remember feeling fearful that things could get worse and harder, 'cause how would I cope? But actually, it was when I was in hospital before the twins were born, and I thought I was losing Alana, one of the twins. I remember saying over and over, "The Lord did not give me a spirit of fear, but one of love, power, and self-control." And I could say that my experience brought that out. I think it's a life skill to know that verse; God did not give us a spirit of fear, there's *love, power, and self-control*. We have power in prayer. And that's not to say that because we pray for something, we're going to get what we want how we want it. But it is telling us that we are not a helpless little person on a raft in the middle of nowhere in life, there's a big God. And from Psalm 139, He's got us hemmed in behind and before. I love that. It's like I can't run anywhere in a fit of rage or disappointment that God's not gonna be. He's there.

Jo: So, for somebody hearing your story today that, has experienced that grief and the loss, what are some practical things that they can do to find that sense of, is the right word healing? That sense of healing through your story?

Adelle: I do want people to know that are going through infertility and pregnancy loss that's not your full story. There are other things to come.

I do know and I do acknowledge that not everybody gets to take home a baby, and I am very sorry for those that never get to take home a baby, but I know that there's a beautiful future for them, in some other story.

For fear of sounding like a commercial, there are support organisations that can provide literature and videos that I found helpful in my journey. I went to the Sands website, and there were some videos there. Just hearing other people's stories helped to validate my emotions.

Just remember that you are loved. People do love you, and even if people that love you say really hurtful and dumb things, remember that you have said dumb things before. And remember all of the relationship with those people.

Have faith that God will provide, 'cause he does, and he surprises us.

The organisation that Adelle referenced in this interview, Sands, has now merged with Red Nose.

*For resources and support for any form of grief, including miscarriage, visit
rednose.org.au*

*Support for miscarriage loss can be found here:
rednose.org.au/grief-and-loss-support/overview/*

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