

A soft, high-key photograph of a pair of white hands gently cradling a white baby foot. The scene is centered and occupies most of the frame. The lighting is diffused, creating a gentle, ethereal atmosphere. In the center of the composition, the word "Life" is written in a black, elegant cursive script. The background is a light, neutral tone, making the white hands and foot stand out softly.

Life

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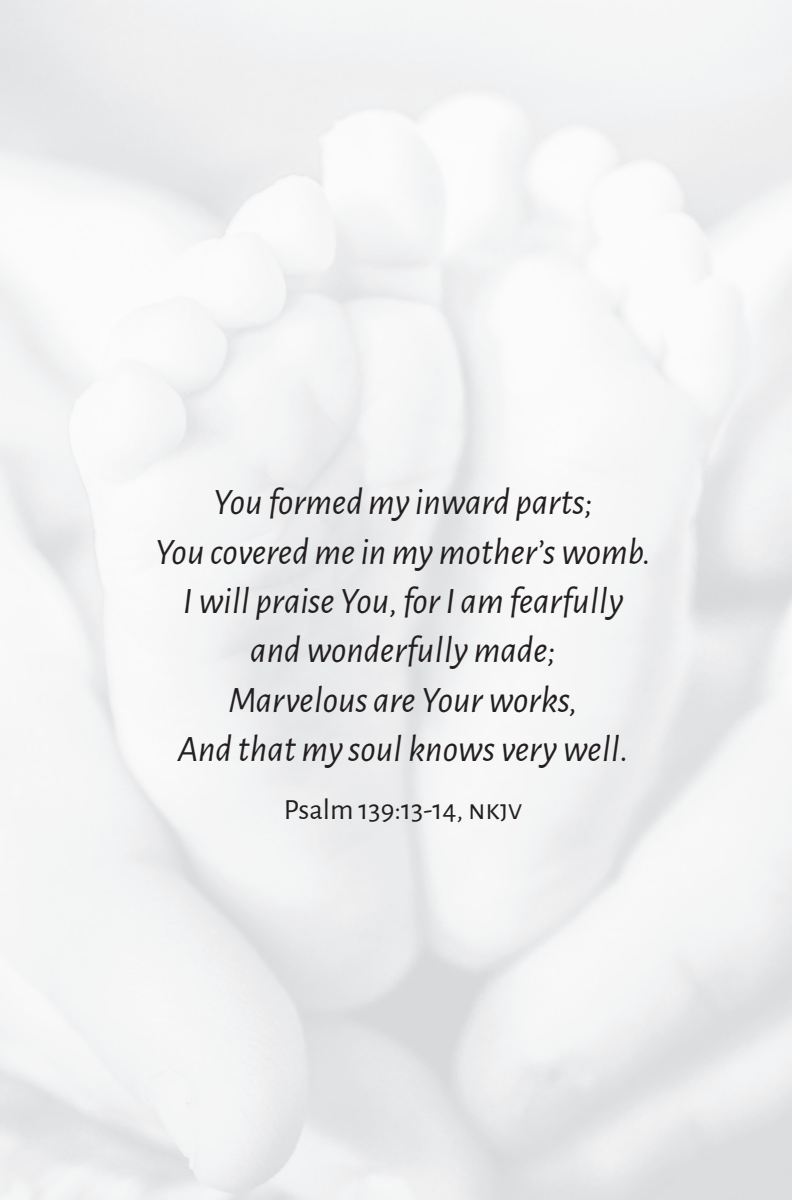
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Scripture taken from the New King James Version®.
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Special thanks to Claire Culwell for permission to freely share her story. Connect with her at www.claireculwell.com.

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*You formed my inward parts;
You covered me in my mother's womb.
I will praise You, for I am fearfully
and wonderfully made;
Marvelous are Your works,
And that my soul knows very well.*

Psalm 139:13-14, NKJV



Claire Culwell knew she was adopted. She knew her mother had given her up for adoption when she was born, but Claire didn't know all the circumstances surrounding her birth—until she was twenty-one. When she finally met her birth mother and was establishing a relationship with her, Claire gave her a card: a card that said “Thank you for choosing life for me.”

But what followed was completely unexpected. Tonya, her birth mother, dissolved into a torrent of tears, and Claire couldn't understand why. That was when the truth came out.

At age thirteen, Tonya had become pregnant. Furious, her mother insisted she have an abortion. Tonya had the abortion, but a short time later realized she was still pregnant. The abortion clinic had not done an ultrasound, so they did not know that she was carrying twins. By now, she was in her third trimester, and at that time, third trimester abortions were illegal in the state of Oklahoma where she lived.

So, Tonya and her mother went across the state line into Kansas. There, they were told it would be too risky to do a second abortion because of complications from the previous one. Tonya's life would be at risk. There was no choice but to go ahead and have the baby.



In Claire's story, we see many parallels between her mother's view of her and our view of God. Her mother did not truly want her child, just as we do not want God involved in our lives before we become a Christian. Her mother was frightened, forced to do what her own mother

told her to do. Before we know Jesus as our Savior, we are lost, slaves to sin, and separated from God. In the Bible, it says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)

Each of us, no matter how good a life we think we have lived, has broken God’s law. James 2:10 says, “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.” If we have told one lie, stolen something, been disrespectful to our parents, or even just had a wrong thought, we are as guilty as if we had broken the entire law of God.

So what’s the penalty for breaking God’s law? Well, the first part of Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death.” Because God is just, our sin must be punished, and as that verse says, the punishment for our sin is spiritual death in a place of torment, known as Hell. Either we must face death for our sin, and eternal torment, or we must accept the substitute that God has given. What is that substitute? It can be summed up in one verse: John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but

have everlasting life.” Jesus, God’s Son, came to earth and lived a perfect life. He died a cruel death, nailed to a cross, so that we would not have to pay the penalty for our sins.



In Texas, a couple by the name of Warren and Barbara Culwell were facing their own struggle. For years, they had wanted to have children and start their own family. But they had never been able to have a baby. Finally, one doctor told them they had a 1 percent chance of having a baby of their own, and even that chance would have to be a miracle from God. He gave them a list of adoption agencies.

For two years, they filled out paperwork and worked on getting approved to adopt. The waiting was hard, but the Culwells firmly believed that God was at work, preparing to unite them with just the right baby. Finally, they were approved to adopt, and a short time later they got the long-awaited phone call.

A baby girl had been born prematurely. Her mother, a fourteen-year-old girl in Oklahoma, was giving her up for adoption. The baby had complications: clubfeet and a dislocated hip, and she would need to spend time in the hospital before they would be able to bring her home.

Before giving their answer, the Culwells needed some time to think and pray about it. There would be years of medical bills for them to pay. Warren had always imagined having a son who could be named after him, a son who could work and play with him outdoors.

After thinking and praying about what they should do and contacting their insurance company to see if the baby would be covered, they contacted the adoption agency and told them they would be willing to adopt the baby.

They named her Lauren Claire. The meaning of Lauren is “victorious one.” By the time Lauren, whom they decided to call by her middle name of Claire, was only a few months old, she had been victorious on numerous occasions.

The first year of Claire's life was filled with difficulty. Shortly before her first birthday, she went in for hip surgery. After she had been given anesthesia, the surgeon began preparing to perform the operation. As he manipulated her legs, her dislocated hip popped into place. No surgery was required. After wearing multiple casts, Claire was able to be up and active like other toddlers.



Baby Claire
(Photo courtesy of Claire Culwell)

When Claire was two, her parents decided to adopt again. Claire's adoption had been a closed case: the Culwells knew almost nothing about the events surrounding her birth. But with their second adoption, they already knew the mother. In fact, after seeing the way the Culwells loved Claire and cared for her, this young woman *asked* if they would adopt her baby girl. The Culwells agreed, and soon little Rachel joined their family. The Culwells loved their two adopted daughters and often assured the girls that they loved them more than anyone had ever loved a child.

Since Rachel knew who her birth mother was, she corresponded with her for years. Then, following high school, she had the opportunity to meet her. Claire saw her sister and her sister's birth mother together, and it brought questions and the desire to meet her own mother. After consulting her parents to find out how they felt about it, Claire contacted the adoption agency and asked if there was any way she could get in touch with her birth mother. She was able to talk to the caseworker who had handled her

adoption, and this lady, Debbie, agreed to see if she could find Claire's birth mother.

After days of anxious waiting, Claire heard from Debbie. Tonya, her birth mother had been located, and she was willing to have contact with Claire. The first contact was a phone call, followed by a visit a few months later, around the time of Claire's 21st birthday.

That first visit went well, with Claire and her family meeting Tonya and her family. This visit led to another: Claire going to visit Tonya and meet the rest of her family. It was on that visit that Claire learned the truth about her birth.



Claire with her birth mom
(Photo courtesy of Claire Culwell)



Just as Claire's birth mother tried to kill her, so our sin—all the wrong things we have done—was responsible for Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus was completely innocent, just as Claire was not to blame for what her mother did. Yet He loved us so much that He was willing to suffer and die for us so we would not have to face eternal punishment, but instead could be with Him in Heaven for all eternity. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

But Jesus' death on the cross is not the end of the story. He didn't just die; He also rose from the dead three days later. He is alive today, and He wants to live in your heart.

So how do we access the salvation made available by Jesus' death on the cross? All you have to do is accept it. Do you remember the first part of Romans 6:23 mentioned earlier? Now let's finish that verse. "For the wages of sin is death,

but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Just as all you have to do to receive a gift is reach out and take it, all you have to do receive Jesus’ free gift of salvation is believe and accept it. Romans 10:9 says, “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”



After giving Tonya the card that said “Thank you for choosing life for me,” Claire watched in confusion as her mother burst into tears. What did it mean? Why was she in so much anguish?

When she was calm enough to talk, she told Claire the truth: she *hadn't* chosen life for her. She had chosen to have an abortion, and Claire’s twin had been killed. This news was shocking to Claire—not at all what she had expected to hear when her birth mother shared the story of her birth with her. In the days following, Claire tried to fully comprehend what Tonya had told her. She was able to turn to her parents, and Warren

gave her a new way to look at her birth story. He told her that God must have a big plan for her life, for her to have gone through all that and still have been born.

And his words were true. God did have a big plan for Claire. Before, she had thought little of the pro-life movement. Now, it was something she became interested in. Right outside her apartment was a business, a business where people regularly lined the streets, praying, talking to the women going in, sometimes giving them a piece of paper. That business was a Planned Parenthood clinic.

After learning about her past, Claire became interested in the pro-life group that prayed outside the clinic. She decided to write her story on a flyer and give it to the people to share with the women going into the clinic. Maybe sharing her story would encourage the women to reconsider aborting their own babies.

The pro-life group, the Coalition for Life, was touched by Claire's story, and they invited her into their office. There, she met Abby Johnson,

the former director of that Planned Parenthood clinic. She had just resigned and was now joining the pro-life movement.

Claire's involvement with the pro-life movement gradually began to increase. She started speaking to local groups of young people. She decided to quit attending nursing school so she could be more involved. As time went on, she became more and more well known in the pro-life community. She and Abby Johnson became close friends. They had a seemingly impossible friendship—the former director of a Planned Parenthood clinic and a woman who had miraculously survived an abortion.

Claire has now had several opportunities to speak to various groups of lawmakers in favor of pro-life bills. She has also spoken at different events alongside other abortion survivors. Claire is not alone; she is not the only abortion survivor.

Because of Claire's testimony, women have chosen to save their babies' lives. These women have been shown that there are alternatives to

having an abortion. Those who have already had abortions have also been helped by her, as she has shared with them how they can find redemption and forgiveness for what they did.

Claire has not only become a pro-life activist; she has also forgiven Tonya, her birth mother, for having the abortion that took the life of her twin. She has forgiven her for almost having a second one that would have taken her own life. They have developed a close relationship, and Tonya has been able to experience redemption for what she did.



There are some similarities between Claire's attitude toward her birth mother and Jesus' heart for us. After finding out that her mother had tried to kill her before she was born, Claire was willing to forgive her and continue pursuing a relationship with her. Jesus is willing to forgive us for our sin that caused his suffering and death on the cross, and He seeks to have a relationship with us. Today, Claire is a pro-life advocate, doing

all she can to save the lives of unborn babies, just as Jesus seeks to save us from eternal punishment.

Friend, have you accepted Jesus' free gift of salvation? Have you confessed the wrong things you have done and asked for His forgiveness? Maybe you think you have done too many bad things to be forgiven. John 6:37 says, "The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." If you come to Jesus, genuinely sorry for what you have done, recognizing that you are not able to save yourself in your own strength, and willing to turn away from your sins and follow God's will for your life, He will not turn you away.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." Once you have received Jesus as your Savior, you have a new mission in life: living for Him, doing what He wants you to do. And instead of being a slave to sin, you are now adopted into the family of God!



Baby Development Before Birth

Source: New Hampshire Right to Life

3 weeks

Baby's heart begins to beat.



6 weeks

Brain activity is detectable and can be measured and recorded.

8 weeks

Except for size, Baby's overall appearance and many internal structures closely resemble a newborn's. Of the 4,500 permanent body parts in the adult body, 4,000 are already present.

9 weeks

Baby sighs, stretches, and sucks thumb.

10 weeks

Baby makes a fist around objects placed in palm (such as the umbilical cord).

11 weeks

Baby can make complex facial expressions – even smile.

12 weeks

Baby has all essential organs and a working circulatory system. Baby's entire body (except for parts of the scalp) feels and responds to light touch.



14 weeks

Fingerprints and toeprints are unique and complete.

16 weeks

Baby releases stress hormones when it feels pain.

18 weeks

Rapid eye movement begins, indicating dreams.

20 weeks

With highly specialized medical care some babies can survive outside the womb by 20 weeks. Baby now feels pain more intensely than at any other time in development because while Baby's nervous system has developed, natural pain inhibitors have not.

27 weeks

With intensive care, a baby born at this stage is capable of breathing air. The final weeks of pregnancy, Baby continues to develop and become prepared to enter the world.

38 weeks on

The pregnancy is considered full-term, and Baby is ready to be born.



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