

EMPTY ARMS

Hope *and* Support *for* Those
Who Have Suffered *a* Miscarriage,
Stillbirth, *or* Tubal Pregnancy

PAM VREDEVELT

Praise for *Empty Arms*

"Pam captures the heart of what women experience when losing a baby. Her willingness to share her story is an inspiration! The practical advice and wisdom found in *Empty Arms* is second to none."

—DR. GARY SMALLEY, family counselor and best-selling author with appearances on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Larry King Live*, *Extra*, and the *Today Show*

"Where do you turn when you suffer the deep and very personal loss of a baby? *Empty Arms* offers tender words of hope and wisdom for those in grief. Pam Vredevelt's keen insight into the physical, emotional, and spiritual impact of losing a baby brings peace and comfort to broken hearts. After four miscarriages, I seriously wondered if I'd ever not be sad. I wish I had known about *Empty Arms*. I highly recommend this book!"

—LISA JACOBSON, award-winning author and founder of the Club31Women blog

"Healing from a miscarriage or stillbirth is a complicated process. Having walked that road with several close friends, I know how essential Pam's counsel is. Both from personal and professional experience, she has been beautifully equipped to help the process of healing—physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Girded with biblical truth, this book will resonate with and help many, many readers."

—SHAUNTI FELDHAHN, social researcher and best-selling author of *For Women Only*

“Pam’s ability to relate with women suffering the trauma of pregnancy loss, and to guide them through the healing process, is amazing! The best people to help us heal are always those who fully understand and empathize with our hurt.”

—MICHAEL SMALLEY, best-selling author and
CEO of the Smalley Institute

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EMPTY ARMS

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Please Read This First

Thirty years have passed since the loss of our first child and the first edition of this book. Our lives have changed dramatically. John and I have been richly blessed with three beautiful children. Much to our astonishment our youngest son, Nathan, was born with Down syndrome. This special little boy took us on a new path, deeper into love. Then sixteen years later, following a tragic accident, our special son left us for heaven. While the grief over his absence is beyond words, I'm continually amazed by the incredible mark Nathan continues to leave in this world. The angels he saw...the people he impacted...the lives he changed...the stories go on and on. (If you want to read some well-documented mind-blowing stories of God encounters experienced by children with special needs, pick up *Angel Behind the Rocking Chair: Stories of Hope in Unexpected Places*.)

Since *Empty Arms* was first published, I have been flooded with letters from women across the country who courageously tell me their stories and give me the privilege of praying for them. I've laughed and cried through the letters, feeling as if we share some of the deepest parts of who we were with one another. These memories I treasure.

Most of the letters come from women who have suffered a miscarriage or stillbirth, but there are also those that arrive from women who have survived a tubal pregnancy or the death of an infant. They, too, experience great heartache, and some have even had a close brush with death. Many asked if I knew of any helpful resources about tubal pregnancy. Their need sparked the idea for a revised edition of *Empty Arms* that addressed the specific concerns of these women's heartache, and so this book has a chapter on tubal or ectopic pregnancy. I've updated information, written a new epilogue, and added a chapter about letting go of our disappointments and pain.

It is my prayer that God will use the chapters ahead to answer your questions and comfort your heart. If it were humanly possible, I would personally deliver *Empty Arms* to you so that I could be with you in your pain.

I'll likely meet only a small handful of those who read this book, but please, if we ever bump into each other, either here or on the other side of time, let's exchange a hug or two and boast of God's faithfulness as we courageously braved our way along this path called life. Until then...let's keep our faces turned toward the Son.

Warmly,

Pam Vredevelt, 2015

The Shocking News



I'm not picking up a heartbeat, Pam. There doesn't appear to be any fetal movement. I think the baby is dead."

In disbelief my emotions began to run wild and unchecked. Engulfed in a jumble of scrambled thoughts I wanted desperately to hear the doctor say, "Wait a minute—I'm wrong. I've made a mistake. Now I see the heartbeat." Those words never came.

During the next half hour in that little examining room, my life was a blur. Everything was out of focus. I hated my humanness. "Why can't I change this and make things different?" I thought. Somehow I wanted to say a few words and magically raise our baby from the dead.

Nothing made sense. Angry questions darted back and forth in my mind. "Why is this happening to me? To John? It's not fair! Thousands have abortions, but we want this child . . . why are we the ones to get ripped off? I hate this!"

The tears poured out. I sobbed long and hard, trying my best to listen to the doctor. He painted a picture of what might have happened: "Based on the measurements on the ultrasound screen, I can see that the baby is fully formed

according to schedule, and most likely died just a few days ago. It's possible that the umbilical cord wrapped itself around the baby's neck. Or perhaps part of the placenta detached itself from the uterine wall. More information will be gleaned from pathology tests."

The doctor's words were overshadowed by my own thoughts: "I can't believe this is happening!"

Our day had begun in such a normal fashion. The alarm awakened us at 6:00 A.M. The leaders who help us pastor junior and senior high youth arrived forty-five minutes later for doughnuts and prayer. Our time together was one of closeness and warmth. As special prayer was offered for our baby just beginning its fifth month, I felt my love deepen for the child I carried.

By 8:00 A.M. the youth workers were gone and John left for the church office. Rather than going to work at the counseling center, I headed for my monthly visit with the doctor. I was excited about hearing the baby's heartbeat again. The fascination of hearing our child on the Doppler (a small amplification device used to listen to sounds in the womb) just four weeks earlier was still vivid in my mind.

The wait in the doctor's office was entertaining. A room full of pregnant women has always amused me. My imagination raced. "Will I really get that big in four more months? I wonder where she found such a beautiful maternity dress?"

Finally it was my turn for an exam. The usual blood pressure check and weigh-in were done first. "Hey, all right! Only one pound up from last month!" That was good news along with the nurse's words, "You're right on schedule."

The doctor was soon with me. Next came the moment I'd been waiting for. He said, "Let's listen to the heartbeat." It was like the first time all over again. I was so excited I embarrassed myself. After all, this was a common occurrence for the doctor. But for me, it was a thrill of a lifetime.

He placed the Doppler on my rounded tummy and gently searched for the baby. About a minute went by and my anticipation was at a peak. "Come on, Doc, let's get that thing in the right place.... I want to hear what this kid is doing in there!" I thought. The doctor explained that often the baby positions itself toward the back and this makes it difficult for the amplifier to pick up any significant sound.

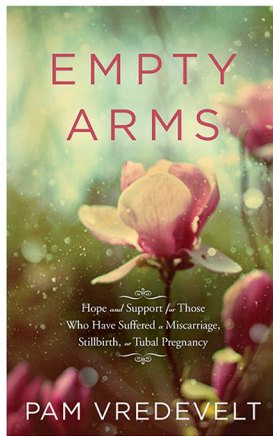
A few minutes passed. Nothing was picked up by the Doppler. I watched intently for some cue as to what was going on. The doctor's face was blank. The nurse was stoic. I began to feel scared. What was happening? Confusion began to replace my excitement. The doctor very professionally explained that it would be best to take an ultrasound test for everybody's peace of mind before leaving the office. This would be a more reliable way of finding the heartbeat and checking on the baby's progress. I agreed and was moved to the next room where the test could be run. Apprehension lurked in the back of my mind as I entered a room filled with foreign instruments and equipment. My arms and legs felt like 200 pounds as I climbed up on the examining table. There I sat...shaken and chilled.

The nurse began to probe with the sound device to secure a clear picture of the uterus, placenta, and fetus. For what seemed to be hours it was unbearably quiet in that little dark room. I painstakingly blurted out, "Do you see a heartbeat? What are you finding? Can I see the screen?" only to be quieted with the remark, "I don't have a clear picture yet, Pam." More long drawn out minutes passed. Once again I bombarded the silence with, "Can't you tell me anything? Are you seeing a heartbeat?"

And then the ripping truth came. There was no heartbeat. The baby wasn't moving. Our baby was dead. What had gone wrong? The doctor didn't give a pat answer, but encouraged me that more information would be gleaned from pathology tests after delivery.

After delivery. Those words jolted me into reality. It would be necessary for me to go through the normal delivery process—but I would deliver a dead baby and go home empty-handed. It was all too incredible to grasp.

I had entered the doctor's office cheerful, bright, and anticipating the sound of life within me. I was leaving shattered, broken, and fearful of tomorrow. What would I have to walk through in the hours and days ahead?



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