

Death of a Little Child

by Dr. J. Vernon McGee



Thru the Bible Radio Network
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In Memory of

RUTH MARGARET MCGEE

She was so small, but her influence was so great;
her life was short, but the memory of her is long.

“And Jesus called a little child unto him...”

(Matthew 18:2)

*“Let little children to come unto me, and forbid
them not; for of such is the kingdom of God.”*

(Luke 18:16)

Unless noted otherwise, all Scripture references
are from the *New Scofield Reference Bible*.

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Foreword

The ministry of “Death of a Little Child” is reflected in the following letters:

From Seminole, Texas

“I have just finished reading your booklet, ‘Death of a Little Child.’ We lost our nineteen-month-old baby girl in October. After reading your book, which was loaned to me by a neighbor, I can understand more fully why our child was taken. The most encouragement I got was that someday I can hold in my arms again my baby. Heaven is a place now, a real place.”

From Minneapolis, Minnesota

“In September the Lord chose to take to Himself our darling seven-year-old Eric. He was killed two blocks from home when he stepped out in front of a parked bread truck into the path of an oncoming car. How our hearts ache for him, but how wonderful to know he is at home with the Lord. The day following Eric’s homegoing, your book, ‘Death of a Little Child,’ was sent to me by one of my very dear friends. What a blessing it was to my husband and myself at that time.”

From Norwalk, California

“We just lost our little four-year-old girl with leukemia. The booklet, ‘Death of a Little Child,’ was given to us by a church member. We found comfort in it for ourselves, but especially for our seven-year-old son.”

From Wichita Falls, Texas

“A friend here had a book on the promises of God in the death of a child. She can’t remember the title, only the author. She received the book five years ago when her baby passed away and read it until it literally fell apart. We would so appreciate any

information you might be able to give us as to how we might obtain this book.”

From Fresno, California

“I think it’s only fair to let you know that your little book, ‘Death of a Little Child,’ has done it again. On Christmas day my husband’s sister lost her twenty-four-hour-old baby son. He was much wanted, and there cannot be another. Both parents were just crushed. We wrote to your office, asking that the booklet be sent to them. In due time a letter came from them, thanking us for the copy, and saying that they both had received Christ as Savior. Through their witness my husband’s two other sisters have also been saved.”

In view of the fact that this personal brochure has met such an evident need in the longing hearts of many parents who have lost little ones, we are reprinting it again that it might continue to minister to broken hearts.

The reader will note that Scriptures are quoted *in toto*, rather than merely by reference, in this edition. This will add, we feel confident, to the value of the message for those who do not have a Bible at their fingertips.

Again, we send this message forth with the prayer that it might continue to reach those who need a word of comfort in a lonely and dark hour.

*There is a new lamb cradled on Thy breast tonight,
A sweet small lamb, so lately mine
I scarce can keep my arms from reaching out
As though to snatch her back from Thine.*

*These arms of mine are wonted so to her, dear Lord,
They curved about her little form
So sweetly, and from dawn of time my breast was meant
To be her pillow, soft and warm.*

*What does one do with aching arms and empty hours,
With silent rooms, and dragging days?
The things I knew before will not avail me now –
Teach me new lessons and new ways.*

*Take Thou, I pray, these idle folded hands of mine
Which can no longer busied be
With dear, familiar tasks for her.... In mercy, Lord,
Fill hands and heart with tasks for Thee!*

– Martha Snell Nicholson

Death of a Little Child

At the death of my firstborn, God gave me some words of comfort which I desire to pass on to parents and to loved ones of little ones who die. There is no sorrow quite so heartrending as the death of a little child. The image of the little one is written so indelibly upon the mind and heart that during the long watches of the night it appears on memory's screen to haunt us. If the child lives long enough to walk and to talk, the faltering steps and childish prattle are like a lingering fragrance in the home that seems so strangely silent. The arms are empty, the eyes are filled with tears, and the heart is like a vacant house. Yet, there is no affliction for which God has provided such tender comfort and such sweet solace. He is "the God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3).

The following comforts are mentioned with the prayer that the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, will apply them to broken hearts and to wounded spirits as strong splints and sweet ointment.

A Brief Life is Not an Incomplete Life

We sometimes feel that a life which was so brief was in vain and that God has mocked us by giving us the little one and then by taking it away immediately. The child had no opportunity to perform a work, nor was there any time given to develop character. Let us remember, first of all, that the little one had an eternal spirit and that it has gone into the presence of God where there will be an eternity to perform works and develop character.

With eternity as a measuring rod, the long life of Methuselah was merely a pinpoint on the calendar of time. Although the span of life of your little one was brief, your child completed a mission, served a purpose, and performed a God-appointed task in this

world. The child's presence turned your thoughts to the best. Your little one's helplessness brought out your strength and protection, and your child's loveliness roused your tenderness and love. The little one's influence will linger in your heart as long as you live. If anything can bring a man to God, it is a child. "A little child shall lead them" is not idle rhetoric. We think of Methuselah in connection with old age, but did you ever consider him as an infant? Well, he was once a baby, and a most arresting thing is recorded about his birth. He was the son of Enoch, and it is written: "And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begot Methuselah. *And Enoch walked with God after he begot Methuselah* three hundred years, and begot sons and daughters. And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years. And Enoch walked with God, and he was not; for God took him" (Genesis 5:21-24, emphasis mine). We do not know what the life of Enoch was for the first sixty-five years, but when the day came that he looked down into a crib at a little boy named Methuselah, he began to walk with God. If Methuselah had died in his crib, he would have accomplished about as much as evidently he did in his long life.

Your little one served its purpose. A brief life is not an incomplete life.

You Can Be Assured That All is Well With the Child

David lost two sons for whom he grieved deeply. One was Bathsheba's child, which died shortly after birth. David was greatly exercised about the life of this child. The record reveals the magnitude of his grief:

David, therefore, besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in and lay all night upon the earth. And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth, but he would not, neither did he eat with

them. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead; for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice; how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead? But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead. Therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead. Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshiped. Then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set food before him, and he did eat. Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? Thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat. And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me. (2 Samuel 12:16-23)

David knew that the child was with the redeemed and that he would join him someday by death and would be with him forever.

David had another son, Absalom, who in manhood became rebellious and sinned grievously. While ruthlessly attempting to seize the kingdom from his father, he was killed in battle. Upon learning of his death, King David, a strong, rugged old soldier, wept as a woman. The Bible records his appalling grief:

And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died

for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son! (2 Samuel 18:33)

David did not know the destiny of the soul of Absalom, or at least he doubted his salvation. David wished it had been possible to have died in his stead so that Absalom might have another chance. David could be sure of the first child, but he was not sure of Absalom.

You, likewise, may have the assurance of the salvation of your child; it is “safe in the arms of Jesus.” You would be willing to turn over your child to the care of a faithful nurse in this life, and you can rejoice that your little one is in the arms of the Good Shepherd who is more tender than any human nurse. In fact, the little one is better off than if it were asleep in its crib in your home. It is beyond this veil of tears. There is no danger or evil to beset its pathway. We may rest in the confidence that our children are safe with Christ. Remember that when He was here on earth, He took up little ones into His arms, saying,

Let little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. (Luke 18:16)

On another occasion He said,

Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father, who is in heaven. (Matthew 18:10)

If you could but know the blessedness of your little one at this very moment, it would reconcile you to the loss of the darling of your heart.

Heaven Should Be More Real To You

The Lord Jesus has gone to prepare a place for those who are His own. Part of this preparation is the taking of your child. Heaven will mean more to you now – your dearest treasure is

there. “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21). He takes from the family here to form the family there. Baby hands are beckoning to you, and a baby voice is calling you home.

I did not realize how many parents there were who had lost children until our first baby was taken. One after another in the congregation came with tears in their eyes to tell of their secret sorrow. One dear lady and her husband always sat down in the front pew. They were elderly and they had a son who was a great sorrow. In spite of this, they were always smiling and seemed never to be defeated by life. I shall never forget my surprise when I discovered the reason for this as they told me of the loss of their first-born and of their happy anticipation of seeing the little one in heaven someday.

There Are No Mistakes in God’s Plan

God has permitted this to happen to you. It was no accident, nor was it something over which He had no control. He knows the way you take; your times are in His hands, and He numbers the hairs of your head. Somehow and some way God will make this work out for His glory and your good.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Perhaps you do not see this now, and I am sure that I cannot explain it in detail, but here is where you can trust God. He permits us to suffer here, and in this world of sin it is part of His discipline for a higher place.

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth

with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? (Hebrews 12:6, 7)

You Did the Best You Could Under the Circumstances

Perhaps you are rebuking yourself for not having done something more in behalf of the child. You may be harassed by a haunting fear that you did something wrong. Martha and Mary felt that the death of their brother could have been averted. They both said to Jesus Christ, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died” (John 11:21, 32). Yet in the providence of God it was best for Lazarus to die, though it could have been averted – but only with divine help. Humanly speaking, you did the best you could. You are not as wise nor as strong as God. You did what you could, and you must leave the results to Him. Do not reproach yourself for negligence or ignorance. Regardless of what you had done, you are still a fallible and feeble creature. You did the best you could.

Suppose Your Child Had Lived

Multitudes of children today, growing up to maturation, are entering upon a life of crime or shame. Think of the children who bring disgrace and suffering to their parents. A father in Atlanta, Georgia, a man of wealth and known for his gentleness and graciousness, said to me that he wished he had buried his son the day that he sent him away to college. Think of the sad parents who have nothing but bitter memories of a debauched and godless son or daughter. Think of the anxiety of parents as their children are swept along in today’s changing world. Think of the millions of starving children in many parts of the world, of the multitudes of boys and girls being brainwashed by godless ideologies. Think of the pinched faces and swollen tummies of

children who are the victims of war. You will never know a haunting dread for the future of *your* child, nor will there ever be a sting in your memory.

God knew what was in the future for your child. Perhaps there would have been a life of illness, a disfiguring accident or brain damage, or a lingering, incurable disease. God knew all of this, and I am confident that He has given you the better part. You can be certain about your child's future now; you could not be certain if your little one were alive.

You Will See Your Little One Someday

If you have faith in a living Savior who was victorious over death and the grave, then you will someday see your little one. We are told through the apostle Paul,

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them who are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. (1 Thessalonians 4:13)

Notice that he did not say we are not to sorrow; he said that we are not to sorrow *as those who have no hope*. Death is yet to be defeated. Someday the dead in Christ are to be raised from the grave,

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17)

The little form of your child will be raised from the grave and the spirit joined to the glorified body. If you are in Christ, you at that time will be reunited, and together you will be at home with Christ forever.

Will our children be as we last saw them? I do not know nor can I prove it from Scripture (for Scripture is silent at this point), but I believe with all my heart that God will raise the little ones as such and that the mothers' arms that have ached for them will have the opportunity of holding them. The father's hand that never held the little hand will be given that privilege. I believe that the little ones will grow up in heaven in the care of their earthly parents – if they are saved. One of the worst things of which I, as a father, can conceive, is of parents being in hell knowing that they cannot have their child – there are no children in hell.

What an added joy this lends to heaven in looking forward to having your little one again! Though the Scriptures do not teach this explicitly, this does seem to be the sense. Remember that David expected to go to his *child*. And referring to children Christ said, “Of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

You Can Prove the Reality of God's Comfort

His comfort is real; His presence is vital; His words are life. He can become a mighty reality to you now. He wants to enter into your sorrow and sympathize with you. When Jesus went to a funeral, these amazing words are recorded: “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). Because He had our humanity and was touched with the feeling of our infirmity, when He went to the cemetery, He wept – in spite of the fact that He intended to restore life.

*In every pang that rends the human heart
The Man of Sorrow had a part.*

There is a story of sweetness and beauty which enlightens the heart of every parent who has lost a child. It concerns a custom among the shepherd folk of the Alps. In the summertime when the grass in the lower valleys withers and dries up, the shepherds seek to lead their sheep up a winding, thorny, and stony pathway

to the high grazing lands. The sheep, reluctant to take the difficult pathway infested with dangers and hardships, turn back and will not follow. The shepherds make repeated attempts, but the timid sheep will not follow. Finally a shepherd reaches into the flock and takes a little lamb and places it under his arm, then reaches again and takes another lamb, placing it under the other arm. Then he starts up the precipitous pathway. Soon the mother sheep start to follow and afterward the entire flock. At last they ascend the torturous trail to green pastures.

The Great Shepherd of the sheep, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, has reached into the flock and He has picked up your little lamb. He did not do it to rob you but to lead you out and upward. He has richer and greener pastures for you, and He wants you to follow.

Will you follow Him? You will, if you catch a glimpse

Of the good Shepherd on the height.

Or climbing up the starry way,

Holding your little lamb asleep.

While like the murmur of the sea

Soundeth that voice along the deep,

Saying, "Arise, and follow Me."