



INTRODUCTION

Beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. . . .

—(Isaiah 61:3 KJV)

As I read through this book, written by my mother, I realize how much of my personal life I'm sharing. It scares me. Part of me wants to withdraw, burying the experience of the past.

But stronger than my fear is my desire to reach out to other hurting women, men, and children—especially the many who are affected in some way by an unwanted pregnancy.

Your situation may be similar to mine or completely different. The struggle each one of us experiences is unique. To compare circumstances is not the purpose of this book. I simply want you to see that God can be trusted. There IS healing, and every part of our lives can be transformed into something beautiful.

Though I have never walked in your shoes, I know about the ashes, the mourning, and the heaviness. But I also know that there is hope! And beauty! And, yes, even joy!

x

BITTERSWEET

Our God will see you through your crisis. He doesn't close his eyes and wait until it's over. Because of this aspect of his character we can walk through anything in forgiveness, confidence, and peace.

Laurie Lewis Carr

Part One

BITTERSWEET

... The Restoration Continues ...





1 "I KNOW I'M PREGNANT"

I felt sick inside," Laurie's voice was tight with remembered pain. "Sick and cold. At the same time it was like I couldn't feel anything at all. I remember there was an upside-down water jug in the health clinic waiting room. It was all sweaty and green and cold-looking, just like the walls in the room. There were rows of connected plastic chairs, back to back, and little white pamphlets and folders on tables and in racks."

Laurie suddenly looked at me.

"Mom, I knew that test would be just a formality. I'd been so tired and sore and I always had a crampy feeling. Besides, my period was three weeks late."

I ached for my daughter. What a thing to have to go through anywhere, let alone a thousand miles from home. She was in Bible School, three and a half weeks into her first quarter, when she had made that appointment.

"Did you go to the clinic alone?" I asked.

Laurie sighed. "No. I'd told Collette and Tracy I thought I was pregnant. I hadn't known them for very long, but I guess I felt safe telling them. Anyway, they sat with me while I waited to go in."

She lifted her head with a pleading look in her eyes. "It's really hard to talk about this. I might cry."

"You don't have to tell me about it if you don't want to," I assured her.

"But I do want to. I need to. I guess I've buried the whole experience because it was too painful to think about. It's time to get it out."

Laurie was usually bright and energetic. Her tall, slim figure and blonde hair attracted attention wherever she went. She was warm and caring, and she had a glowing, infectious smile. It hurt to see her so sad and wan.

She stared out the window again. "Sitting there in the clinic, I felt like I wasn't really there. Collette and Tracy were laughing and talking, and I tried to join in. But it was like I was watching some other girl in a movie instead of me. I could hear that other girl's thoughts loud and clear, while her friends talked in the background.

"There were a dozen or so girls in the waiting room with us, and they had also come in for pregnancy tests. They were all nicely dressed, probably from normal, middle-class families. They looked just like me." Her eyes brimmed with tears. "But I felt in the lowest of classes, just because I was there. I thought about the summer before—the way I was then. That 'me' seemed like somebody I used to know, not the person sitting there in that cold, green room."

The tears spilled over and she had to stop for a few minutes. I sat and waited, trying not to cry myself.

Laurie sighed and took up her story. "Somebody brought me forms to fill out. That gave me something to think about for a few minutes. When the nurse called my name, I followed her into the office.

"Several older ladies worked there. I thought, 'They're probably all moms.' They looked at me as I walked by, and their eyes seemed to say, 'Well, here comes another one.'

"The nurse handed me a little plastic cup and took me to a small restroom to leave a urine sample. Then I went back to the waiting room until they called me with the test results. Collette and Tracy were talking about something funny that happened at school. I tried to listen to them, but I kept thinking, 'I know I'm pregnant. What

am I going to do? What is Rick¹ going to say? How can I put my family through this?' I had to blink back the tears."

I took a drink of my now cool tea. I knew exactly what she meant. "When did you start thinking something might be wrong?" I asked.

"During my first week at school I started to worry. I knew that Rick and I had gotten much too involved during the summer. When I was pretty certain I was pregnant, I began to think about abortion. Wouldn't it be okay so early in a pregnancy? It wasn't actually a person yet, was it?

"But also in that first week of school, we were given copies of a regular prayer-newsletter. One of the main articles that month told the facts of abortion, and I had to think twice. Then God started speaking to me about the tiny, innocent lives that get thrown away so easily every day. I underlined Psalm 139:13–6 in my Bible."

I reached for my husband's Bible lying on the table and turned to those verses. "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

Laurie nodded her head. "I saw that if I were pregnant, then God already knew my baby and loved it as a tiny human being. How could I do any less?"

As Laurie reached for the teapot and refilled our cups, I quietly thanked God that He had faithfully led her into that firm decision.

She took a sip. "Okay, so there I was, still sitting in that awful room. I looked again at the other girls who were waiting. They had each had their turn in the office just as I had. I wondered if they all felt as numb and sick as I did.

"Every once in a while a nurse would come out and talk quietly to one of the girls. Then the girl would get up and leave. But others were called back into the office.

¹ Rick was fictionally called "Mark" in the original *Bittersweet*.

“The nurse came out and said, ‘Laurie Lewis?’ and motioned me to come with her. I felt dizzy, like it must be some other person who was standing up and walking toward her.

“Then the nurse said, ‘Oh, I’m sorry! I said the wrong name!’ And she called someone else.

“I sat down again and waited for my heart to stop racing. Tracy and Collette kept telling me not to worry. ‘Every year girls come to the school thinking they’re pregnant and they never are.’ Their words still sounded like background conversation.

“Then my name was called for real, and I felt like I was dreaming. I followed the nurse into a little room. Everything seemed so small. The room, the window, the desk. And it all got smaller when she closed the door.

“A social worker sat behind the little desk. She pointed to an empty chair and I sat.

“‘Your test was positive.’

“That’s all she said. I got tingly and hot. I thought I might throw up. The only answer I could get out was, ‘Uh-huh.’

“The lady asked, ‘How do you feel about that?’

“Then I started to cry. The woman smiled and said, ‘That’s what I thought.’ She handed me some tissues. Then she asked questions about my family, about Rick, and about my plans for the future.

“‘I don’t intend to marry Rick.’

“She nodded, ‘Have you considered abortion?’

“‘No, I definitely don’t want an abortion.’

“But the woman was persistent. She went on, ‘Okay, but let me just tell you a little bit about it. It’s no big thing, you know. It’s certainly no big surgery, just a simple visit to the doctor’s office. In and out and it’s all over with. Would you like a list of the doctors who perform abortions here in the city?’ She reached for a desk drawer.

“‘No!’ I cried. ‘I don’t want to have it or even see it!’

“The woman was very kind. She was obviously trying to give me what she thought was the easiest way out. She asked more questions, and I told her I wasn’t sure what I would do. ‘But I’m considering adoption.’

“The woman looked surprised. ‘Why would you do that? Abortion is so much simpler.’

"Several more times she asked me, 'Are you sure you don't want that list?' I just kept saying no. When I stood up to go, she said, 'Do call me and let me know what you decide.'

"I was in a daze when I walked back into the waiting room. For a second or two I stood staring at Collette and Tracy as if I didn't even see them. Then something snapped inside of me. I turned and ran for an exit door."

Laurie's cheeks were flushed and her eyes full of intense emotion, but she kept on talking. "I pushed through the door, and a strange, sobbing sound came from my throat. The door hit a metal garbage can outside. The crash seemed so loud. I ran down a ramp and into the parking lot. I stopped, not knowing what I wanted to do or where I wanted to go. Tracy and Collette caught up with me.

"I managed to say, 'I told you!' They led me to a lawn where we sat down under some trees. I was crying harder by then, and they were wonderfully kind. When I finally stopped crying enough to talk, I told them what had happened.

"Collette said, 'But, Laurie, those health clinic tests aren't always accurate. If you really want to be sure, then let's go to the hospital and get a blood test.'

"I let them drive me to the hospital, and sat in the car while they went in. While I waited, the sun on my arm and shoulder made me hot, and I rolled down the car window. I had forgotten that it was a beautiful, sunny day. There was a cool breeze blowing.

"The girls came back before very long. Tracy said, 'We asked where to have a pregnancy test. We told them where you had gotten the other one. They called the clinic, and that lady wants to see you again.'

"So we drove back and the woman came outside to see me. She looked like she thought we had been complaining about her. She asked me if I had a question.

"I said, 'No, but my friends wanted to be sure that the test was right.'

"Then the woman turned to Collette and Tracy. 'It's natural to want to protect your friend, but you must accept the fact that she is pregnant.'

“We were all pretty quiet when we drove away. We went to a park and talked some more. I told Collette and Tracy that, somehow, I wanted the very best to come out of this. I knew God would take care of me, and maybe He could help me to help other girls.”

Laurie grinned wryly at me. “It was pretty hard to believe all that right then,” she admitted. “But it helped to say it!”

On one hand my heart broke as I listened to Laurie’s story, but on the other I was awed. “Oh, Laurie, I’m so sorry you had to go through all this alone. How long was it before you called us?”

“Well, the night before the test I called Lynn to tell her what was going on. You don’t mind that I called her first, do you?”

Lynn was our twenty-year-old daughter. She and Laurie were very close, and they missed each other a lot when Laurie left for school. “Of course I don’t mind. I’m just glad you had some family praying for you and loving on you.”

Laurie smiled. “I called her back that night. She cried when I told her and said she would do anything she could to help me. I had already told Rick over the phone what I suspected, so I asked her to please call him for me, and tell him that if he was at all concerned about the situation he should call.

“When I told him my fear, he had just said, ‘Oh, Laurie, don’t worry. You’re not pregnant.’ He was real confident.”

“Wishful thinking,” I said.

Laurie nodded. “I’d just told him ‘Okay, you wait and see,’ and I hadn’t talked to him since.

“After Lynn called him, he called me. It was, ‘Hi, how are you doing?’ like nothing was wrong. Then I said, ‘I had a pregnancy test today. It was positive.’ Silence. And then, so quietly I could barely hear him, ‘Are you sure?’

“‘I’m sure, and I’m going to have the baby.’

“He absolutely couldn’t accept that. He thought abortion was the only acceptable, sensible solution. ‘You’re going to wreck your life! You can’t do it. I won’t let you. This is one time I’m going to put my foot down! And I’m not going to change my mind.’ He sounded desperate.

“‘Stop, Rick. I’m here at this school because I want to make a commitment to Jesus. I’ve already made one bad decision. I can’t do

it again. I have to go all the way with Jesus or else go the other direction. I believe abortion is wrong. If I have one, I'll be compromising what I believe. And I'd have to live with it for the rest of my life.'

"Rick tried to change my mind for a while longer. Then he was quiet. He laughed softly and said, 'I'm sorry. Whatever you decide, I'll support you in that. You're a strong person and I admire you for not just taking the easy way out.' We talked for a while longer and just before we hung up he said, 'Wouldn't it be weird if we got married?'

"I didn't say anything right then, but in my heart I knew that our lives were heading in opposite directions."

Too bad she hadn't thought this way during the summer, but then we never do plan these things, do we?

"I was sad when we said goodbye," Laurie continued. "I knew things had changed between us even if he didn't. The love that had seemed so real was now distant and awkward."

I was relieved at her mature evaluation of their relationship. I would never want her to marry because she felt she "had to."

"The day after the test began with a sense of unreality. I looked the same and I felt pretty much the same, but everything was changed. I knew that my whole life was permanently altered.

"Finally, I knew I had to call you and Dad. I asked my roommates not to disturb me for a while, and I dragged the telephone into the bedroom. I sat on the bed with the phone in my lap and dialed your number. I squeezed my eyes shut, tight. The call went through much too fast. The minute I heard your voice I started to cry."

