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I was a “good Christian girl,” and now I was pregnant.
Instead of gossiping and shaming me, my church loved me ...

Choosing Hope

Hope Ashley will be her name!” I decided then and there as the ultrasound tech wiped the gel from my pregnant belly. It was a girl, or so she informed me. Despite the technician’s confident proclamation, she was wrong. And, it would turn out, I was wrong in harboring fears about this unexpected child. I would come to learn that there would also be unexpected blessings.

This story doesn’t solely revolve around the gender mix-up as much as it offers my testimony of resilience, faith, and the transformative power of the church community, for me and other teens facing unplanned pregnancies. Without Christ and His people, this story may have ended much differently. Four months earlier, I sat alone in a doctor’s office, waiting to hear the results of my pregnancy test. As the doctor entered the exam room, I could see the answer on his face. Emotionless, he confirmed what I feared, “You’re pregnant.”

The doctor announced his prescription. “Don’t make this into a bigger problem. Get an abortion and get on with your life. Schedule it at the front desk.”

Across my chart, he scribbled in large red letters: ABORTION and exited the room. Alone, I hung my head.

At 19, I was nowhere near ready to become a mother. A recent high school graduate, I lived with my parents. I couldn’t support a baby. Although my boyfriend and I had planned to marry someday, those dreams disappeared when he walked out the door, leaving me to sort this out alone.

As a “good Christian girl” from a respected family, the shame

felt insurmountable. I wrestled with the fear of societal judgment and the weight of my family’s reputation in our church.

During a moment of despair, I sat on the edge of the bed sobbing. If I had the abortion, no one would ever have to know, I reasoned. I could go on with my life free of embarrassment. That was tempting. But I would know—God would know. Lord! I don’t want to have an abortion! What have I done? Forgive me, but I don’t know what else to do. I’m desperate.

Suddenly, I was overcome by a profound sense of presence that surrounded and embraced me. It brought indescribable comfort. Although no one was physically in the room, Jesus was there. I was not alone.

“I will choose hope,” I whispered, determined to navigate this unexpected journey with faith as my compass. “Please, God, bring hope from these ashes.”

My story is all too familiar. Many other young women have found themselves in the same demoralizing situation. Statistics reveal that 14% of girls will give birth in the U.S. before the age of eighteen. Although there’s been a commendable 73% reduction in teen birth rates since its high point in 1991, the issue persists.

Teen pregnancy rates have dropped for various reasons, but the United States is still nine times higher than other Western industrial countries.

Our churches play a pivotal role in addressing the challenges teen parents face.

Here are five easy and intentional actions a church can take to truly support teens coping with unplanned pregnancy.

1. Be Proactive

Initiate open dialogues with teens about sensitive topics, including sex. They have questions. Sex is all around them: at school, on television, and social media. It’s not enough to tell them not to have premarital sex because the Bible says so. There are many others with louder voices telling them why it’s okay. Teens want to talk about issues. They want to discuss the reasons for God’s instruction. Help them make healthy decisions based on biblical principles.

2. Give Teens a Purpose

Teenagers are essential members of God’s family and need compassion, love, inspiration, and acceptance. Foster a sense of belonging and purpose within the church community. Establish platforms for youth voices to be heard and acted upon. With the guidance of a godly person, start a youth council. Let the young people tell the congregation what

issues are important to them. Then, provide the biblical tools and opportunity to address the issues. Studies show that when a teen feels valued, suicide and pregnancy rates drop.

3. Come Alongside

Replace judgment with compassion. Trust me. You cannot judge an unwed, pregnant teen more than she’s judged herself. Many teen moms walk away from the church to avoid the stigma of being a “sinner” and don’t want to be the focus of gossip. Young mothers need understanding and support, not condemnation. Let’s not forget the father. Teen fathers are often overlooked. He will need as much compassion as the mother. Find a godly man to walk with him and teach him how to become the man God intended him to be.

4. Pledge Support & Stick With Them

Both teen parents will need support. Provide mentorship from spiritually mature individuals. Offer guidance and love without preaching. Let them know they are deeply loved by God and by the church.

A teen parent has many needs, financial, physical, and emotional. Demonstrate the love of Jesus tangibly.

Find volunteers to drive them to doctor’s appointments. Many teen parents don’t graduate high school. Help with homework. Babysit so they can study. Assist with any paperwork. Offer childcare during youth group. Sometimes, older women in the church are looking for opportunities to volunteer. Connect them with the new parents. It’s a win-win.

5. Support the Grandparents

Minister to the parents of the pregnant teen. They will need judgment-free support. They’ve been blind-sided. An unexpected responsibility has been placed on their shoulders. Find a spiritually mature couple to walk alongside them.

Fortunately, my family offered unwavering support, guiding me into motherhood. Initially a source of concern, the church community became a pillar of strength. They were “Jesus with skin on” for me.

They made it their mission to love me, which helped me love myself again. The congregation showered me with support, hosted numerous baby showers, and welcomed my son into the family of God.

My story is a testament to the power of hope, community support, and the transformative influence of a church willing to embrace and uplift those in need. It’s a reminder that amidst struggles, there’s always room for redemption and joy, ultimately leading to a life filled with unexpected blessings.☺