

STORIES OF GRACE

Members of our church family share their stories of Grace.

Gardner Family: Mike, Sarah, Mikie, Emma, & Ella



Mike and I are high school sweethearts. We have had a long, crazy, amazing road together in the last 12 1/2 years. We met in 9th grade English class (where I could not stand him!). If you had told us that we would be married just a few short years later, I am sure both of us would have laughed! We came from different but similar backgrounds. Both of our parents were divorced. Mike had moved from Mt. Airy to Baltimore when he was 12, whereas I had lived there all my life. We were both pretty typical teenagers. Didn't get into too much trouble and both of us had to work for things that we wanted.

We started dating a month into our senior year in high school. We became inseparable pretty quickly. I knew he was who I was going to marry. We did the typical senior things such as prom, graduation, senior week at the beach with all of our friends. It was there that he proposed on the beach. We also found out that we were expecting our first baby when we got home from that trip.

Our lives went into a whirlwind that summer. We knew that we wanted to get married, but I was still only 17, so my parents said absolutely not, so we continued on and started planning our future. Mike started college on July 21, 2003, his first night of the beginning of the career

he had dreamt of for years. On his first break, he called me. I had to tell him that I was on my way to the hospital because I had lost our baby. At age 17 and 18, we sure were dealing with some pretty crazy adult stuff. Through that though, God brought us even closer together. We were both heartbroken even though we were so young. We trucked on though and continued life. I took a class that summer and got my CNA license. We got our first apartment together. Then a few months later, we found out we were pregnant with Mikey.

We had Mikey in July of 2004. He became our world. We traded all of the typical teenage things for being Mom and Dad. That little guy taught us so much about life. We didn't have 2 nickels to rub together. We both worked hard, long hours, but we were happy. We got married in November of 2004. Life was crazy but good. We didn't really go to church. I would occasionally go with my mom, but nothing regular. We decided that we needed more space since we only had a 1 bedroom apartment. In March 2006, we bought our first house. A month later, we found out that we were expecting Emma. That began one of the craziest times in our lives. It was the first time we really had to put our trust 100% in God, Emma is our miracle baby. Among other complications, my water broke at 25 weeks with her. We thought we were going to have a precious preemie baby, but after trusting God, a month long hospital stay, and bed rest until the end of my pregnancy, Emma Frances was born 3 days after my due date 100% perfect!



Our lives continued like normal after that for the next year or so. We spent a lot of time in Waynesboro with Mike's family. We decided that it was time for a change and started looking to buy a house up here. We looked at tons and tons of houses, and eventually came back to the first house we looked at. We said goodbye to Baltimore in April 2008. By this time, things were not good between Mike and I. We had turned into 2 different people. We were still very young and didn't know where to turn for help, and both had come from divorced families, so we gave up. After the hardest months of our marriage, Mike realized we had done everything but one thing. We had never had God in our marriage. We told the kids about Christmas being Jesus' birthday, but that was the extent of our "religious" talk. We started going to church as a family that summer. It didn't feel like home, but we knew we had to give it a shot. We then were invited by a friend to attend a

new church. This one seemed much more "us". It was there that we learned that being a Christian doesn't make life a cake walk, but having the relationship with Jesus Christ as a personal Savior gives you the tools to navigate life. We both became saved. We rededicated our marriage and lives to making them Christ centered. We were given tools to help raise our children to know Jesus. It was a perfect God in HIS perfect timing.

The next few years, became an awesome adventure. We learned so much about God and his love and mercy. Both of our kids accepted Jesus into their hearts. We vowed to each other to never let ourselves get back to the point of giving up. God has been faithful time and time again. Through job losses, death of family members and friends, the uncertainty of life, trying to navigate through relationships with our families who didn't understand our new faith, as well as loss of friendships, God was faithful 100% of the time. He has given us the strength through His word, to know how to respond to the tricky things in life. He has shown us what Godly relationships are with amazing brothers and sisters in Christ. He has changed our hearts.

A lot of changes started happening at our church. I had felt for a long time that God was leading us elsewhere, but Mike didn't have that same feeling. I obeyed and listened to God and let Mike lead our family. We both decided to look for a new church home in the spring/summer of last year. I knew in my heart that we would end up at Grace. God made that clear to me very early on, but we went to a few churches and church "shopped". After being very active and involved in our previous church, we wanted to be invisible and just go to church. We went to a few but nothing felt right. So, we decided to give Grace a try. It was a little different than what we were used to, but it felt like home from the first Sunday we came. I knew from Wednesday nights, that the people were wonderful, but after hearing the messages and worshiping in such a family environment, we knew this is where God wanted us. Our kids feel like they are part of a big extended family with tons of brothers and sisters. We have been welcomed with open arms.



We can't wait to see what the future holds for our family. God has been with us always, even if we didn't see it all the time, and will continue to guide our lives.

Editors note: Mike and Sarah have a third child, Ella who is two years old and they are expecting a baby on December 3.