PART ONE Transitions

Page 1

A nticipation runs high when a baby is due. Whether it is the emotional exhilaration of preparing for a nursery, selecting names, or attending baby showers, women can feel the excitement of change surround them. Although most of the pre-baby work is fun, some adjustments are challenging and demanding. From coping with dramatic shifts in body image, making the choice between breast or bottle feeding, or considering modifications to work schedules, every woman will find herself facing significant life changes as the big day draws near. Perhaps one of the most valuable attributes to hone is that of flexibility, for life with baby will never be the same. b 967726 Part 1.qxd 10/20/03 11:36 AM Page 2

AM Page 3

He or She?

C veryone at the office had been pestering Renee to find out the sex of her baby ever since her obstetrician informed her that the optional procedure was her call. At thirty-five years old, Renee had jokingly told her coworkers that she'd already waited a good number of her adult years just trying to get pregnant. Another four months she could handle. Still, Renee wondered if she shouldn't go ahead and just get it done regardless. Her physician had explained to Renee that she was at a higher risk now due to her first pregnancy coming after age thirty. When Renee explained that even if her unborn baby had physical problems she would still carry her child to term, her doctor relented. But her physician advised Renee that ultrasounds were helpful in detecting unseen potential problems that the delivery team could be made privy to and prepare for prior to the actual birth. After she discussed this information with her husband, Tim, they decided to go ahead and have the ultrasound. "Just don't tell us the sex of the baby," Renee implored.

On the afternoon of the ultrasound, Renee and Tim sat waiting nervously. Suddenly the import of what had seemed to be a simple enough decision loomed large before them both. Renee started wondering about how just knowing a problem existed, if it did, would forever change the 4

PRAYERS FOR NEW AND EXPECTING MOMS

final months of the pregnancy. How would she handle the knowledge that something was wrong? Could she relax and enjoy the remainder of this long-awaited pregnancy? How would she respond to others' questions and their proposed solutions to such an emotionally charged situation? Just when Renee was about to get up and leave the waiting room, her name was called. Tim took Renee's trembling hand and gripped it tight.

Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! Thou hast relieved me in my distress; Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. —PSALM 4:I

Dear Lord, I am afraid. I am honestly frightened that I may not handle the news that I might be called upon to hear. Suddenly, I am worrying about all the "what-ifs" again. This entire pregnancy has been such a gift to me. You know the long years I waited to become a mother. And now, when that precious time draws so close, I am wasting my days and nights fretting about the unknown. I cannot even sleep at night so powerful are my worries. At times, I feel paralyzed by a growing apprehension that something will go badly wrong with my baby's development. Lord, only you can see what the coming days will bring. You alone are able to hold this world, my world, securely in its place. Teach me to lay my fears and my fretting down at your feet. Give me the strength and the HE OR SHE?

Page

good sense to leave them there. Instruct my heart in wisdom and give me a generous outpouring of your grace. Let not uncertain happenings spoil these treasured months of carrying my unborn child. Give me a strong and robust faith, one that will gladly face down the enemies of my soul. Encourage my heart when weariness and doubts begin to plague my mind. Bring into my life others of like faith who will speak words of comfort and consolation when I need it most. Surround me with your protection and lift my smallish mind to see beyond potential troubles. Open my heart and soul to receive this blessing with all the joy you seek for me. Thank you for your faithfulness and your goodness. I am so grateful for your provision of love and mercy. My greatest desire is that I learn this lesson of faith so soundly that I might teach it to my own child when the day comes. A greater lesson I could not bestow on my dear child, heart of my heart. Prepare me to be the mother you have designed me to grow into-in your time and through your grace. Amen.

Life is not a performance. The most important battles are fought where no one sees them. —JERRY WHITE IN Making Peace with Reality 5

Page 6

Ball Baby

am wished she had had the forethought to bring a pair of earplugs with her to her sister's house. After an hour of listening to her nieces and nephews either screaming for attention or screaming in earnest, Pam felt nearly deaf. Patting her own still flat abdomen, Pam wasn't exactly thrilled with the idea of becoming a mom herself. Married only two short months, Pam never dreamed she would get pregnant so quickly. But she had. A quick stop at Jean's might help me gain some perspective, she had thought. If anyone can help me get a better perspective on impending motherhood, Jean can. At least that had been her hope. "But it's certainly not working out as I had planned," she lamented as her niece threw her brother's Tinker toy creation across the floor, thus eliciting more yells from said brother. Just as Pam was getting up, ready to snatch her purse for a quick exit, Jean reentered the room with a tall glass of lemonade, Pam's favorite. She sat back down, resigned.

"OK, Pam, let's grab a few minutes while it's quiet and catch up a bit."

Was she kidding? Pam looked around the room to see if her normally sane sister had lost her mind. With three rambunctious kids under age six running helter-skelter BALL BABY

through the house, she wanted to talk? Amazing, Pam bristled. Taking a sip of lemonade, Pam looked up at Jean who seemed oblivious to her chaotic surroundings. Gulping down the rest of her drink, Pam abruptly looked at her watch, made her excuses and walked out fast. Outside, Pam dug around for her keys, "Where are they?" she said in frustration. "Must have left them inside." Re-entering Jean's kitchen, Pam looked around but found no keys. Just when her spirits couldn't sink any further, Pam's niece sidled up to her with an exuberant smile as she offered Pam her keys, now attached to a ribbon with a red construction paper heart hanging from it. "For you, Aunt Pam," and she held Pam close. Unexpectedly, Pam felt the first surge of expectant joy rush through her, and she began to feel hopeful.

RÀ

Thus says God the Lord, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it, And spirit to those who walk in it, I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you. —ISAIAH 42:5–6A

Dear Lord, each part of me is hard pressed to accept the truth of my condition. This shouldn't have happened to me—not yet. I'm just not ready to become a mother. It's only been a short while since I married. I'm still getting used to being a wife.

7

8

PRAYERS FOR NEW AND EXPECTING MOMS

Everything has changed so quickly. Marriage, now motherhood. I'm still reeling from the news and I can't seem to gain a foothold on this. How will I manage marriage, working, and being a mom? I'm not ready for more life changes. Lord, I understand that children are indeed blessings from your hand. I believe that you have a purpose and a plan for my life. Yet I never expected this! I had my life planned out pretty well, thank you. I didn't want children for some years. Lord, I can't do this alone. I'm so weary of trying to figure out how to make it all work. I've cried more tears in the last few weeks than in my entire life. And no one seems to understand what I'm going through. People offer celebratory congratulations while I struggle to make my whimpering response. Intercede for me, please. I need your strength and your perspective. Extend to me a good measure of grace and show your benevolent mercy toward me. I am weak, weak and unsure, frightened and overwrought. Lord, I cannot walk this road without you. Be my arm of strength to lean upon, my wisest counselor, and my dearest confidante. Amen.

No, parents, you are not paranoid. Babies really have been sent into your life to confuse all your plans, to frustrate your best intentions, to outwit you at every turn and to drive you to your knees. In short: to reduce you to tears, just like themselves. —MIKE MASON IN The Mystery of Children AM Page

Weighty Matters

ill closed one eye and squinted through the other as she tried to see what the scales read. Sixteen pounds already, Jill lamented. Checking the wall calendar, Jill counted the weeks since her baby's conception. Twelve weeks along and I've already gained over one third of the total weight the doctor recommended. As Jill began mentally tabulating her progress, she guessed she'd be way over her OB's recommended weight gain if she kept the pace she had set. Well, Jill thought ruefully, it will be nothing new. I've fought against the extra pounds my entire life anyway. But Jill's more realistic thoughts soon gave way to some inner panic.

She went into her kitchen and stood there trying to decide what to eat. Instead of focusing on eating a nutritious meal that both she and her baby needed, Jill was thinking in terms of low-calorie, low-fat, and low-carbohydrate. She didn't want to put back the weight she'd worked so diligently to take off just a few years earlier. Jill always expected to fight a battle against regaining her weight as the years wore on. But she never considered how difficult putting on the needed and expected healthy weight while pregnant would be to her psyche. She loathed going into her monthly exam and getting weighed in front of God and everybody. Jill cringed when the nurse announced her gain RA

10 PRAYERS FOR NEW AND EXPECTING MOMS

for everyone to hear. Then her physician would repeat her weight gain during the exam. It was as though the weight police were buffeting Jill from every angle. She didn't need to hear it. Jill was already trying to maintain a balanced and healthy attitude toward the changes occurring in her body. Still, Jill thought with determination, I've lost the extra pounds before and I'm sure that running after a little one will help me do it again.

But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. —I ТІМОТНУ 6:6

Dear Lord, what have I gotten myself into? I am fighting against my own good health and against the changes taking place inside me. I don't think I can stand to see how much my body is going to alter these next months. This is so difficult for me, Lord. You know my past struggles with accepting my body and all my difficulties in learning to work with my metabolism and genetic disposition. I have been so diligent in eating right and exercising, and now all that for nothing? Will I be doomed to see all my efforts come to naught? Even though this weight gain is temporary, I'm afraid that I won't be able to take it off once my baby is born. If I'm really honest, I still want to diet while I'm pregnant. In fact, I'm fighting against that temptation even now. Lord, help me gain some much-needed perspective here. I must, first

WEIGHTY MATTERS

and foremost, care for the well-being of my unborn child. Show me how shortsighted it is to be more concerned about my body image than about life in general.

In my heart, I know what is true and right. Still, I struggle against what my body is doing. I'm realizing that this wondrous work is being wrought without any effort on my part. Certainly, I must continue to take care of myself, yet you are creating a life within me and it's as though my body has taken control of me! I know this sounds foolish, but it is overwhelming to my mind. I feel and experience all these new sensations taking place and it's almost as though I'm an outsider. Lord, help me relish these next weeks and months. Give me your precious perspective and teach me to appreciate this miracle within me. Lord, this isn't just about me anymore. Help me grow up and start thinking about this little one who will soon be with us. Continue to teach me that acceptance and contentment in the midst of change is a great gift in and of itself. Never cease to transform my oftenmisguided heart, Lord. I know my weaknesses well. Please be with me and refine me as you see fit. For your sake and the sake of our baby, I pray. Amen.

The burlap bag of worry. Cumbersome. Chunky. Unattractive. Scratchy. Hard to get a handle on. Irritating to carry and impossible to give away. —MAX LUCADO IN Traveling Light for Mothers

M Page

Just Concerns

egan was pregnant. But she wasn't excited, nor was she happily anticipating telling her husband, Kurt. Megan still winced in memory of the last time she became pregnant and the emotional aftermath that had followed. At thirty-three years old, Megan had conceived four times previously. Every one of those conceptions had ended in miscarriage. By the end of the third month, she lost each precious child. After each of her miscarriages, Megan grieved bitterly, vowing to never again put herself through such misery. "We'll adopt," Megan told Kurt. But Kurt disagreed. He had read too many "miracle" stories about women who had experienced unfortunate track records similar to Megan's yet had gone on to carry a child to term. Megan listened to Kurt quote the statistics, trying to turn dismal numbers around to make them appear more hopeful. Yet Megan resisted. She was the one whose body had to endure the horrible pain of miscarriage and the emotional strain that losing one's child places on a woman. So, for the time being, Megan and Kurt had called a truce: no more adoption planning from her and no more pep talks from him. They both realized the other needed some time to heal from their most recent loss.

Fast-forward five months: Megan is again pregnant, but this time she is under the care of a fertility specialist.

Unlike many of her fellow patients, Megan has no trouble getting pregnant. Still, her previous losses put her in a high-risk category. Megan is troubled when she hears the news, but a minute part of her dares to believe that this time, under these circumstances, she might be able to carry her baby the entire nine months. What Megan doesn't want is to hear the overly exuberant voice of Kurt, whose enthusiasm, so reminiscent of her four previous pregnancies, would resound in her heart only as bitter reminder of what they'd already lost. But suddenly realizing that she must not hang on to past disappointments, Megan stops herself short and sends up a plea to her loving Father to help her turn a corner in her emotions and begin to rejoice over this new life within her.

JUST CONCERNS

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried. —ISAIAH 53:4A

Dear Lord, can I endure another tragic loss? I don't believe I am able to shoulder the burden of another miscarriage. I cannot go back to that place of grieving again. Lord, you will have to meet me right where I stand—now, even at this very moment. I do not want this burden upon me any longer. I am in a stranglehold of consuming fear and do not know how to free myself from it. Hold my heart, my soul, in your able hands. Regard me as one who is immeasurably weak

13

14 PRAYERS FOR NEW AND EXPECTING MOMS

and frail and unable to handle the strain of living with such sorrow. Lord, I need you as never before. I am helpless and stagnant without your steadying hand of strength. Bestow your grace upon me, I plead. Even my heart is unstable, conflicted, and filled with worrisome thoughts. Lead me to a place that is safe and secure.

Shelter me, Lord, from the torment and instruct my heart in your ways. Give me a new vision for life. Help me see past all the agonies of these losses and give me your grace to place them into your hands. Safe keep all my hopes and desires for a family, Lord. And temper these longings with the overarching desire to live the life you've planned for me with resolve and courage. Shoulder me up through these coming weeks and months with your precious promises of mercy and peace and the joy of your fellowship. Let me not drift from your love; keep me close, and minister to my broken heart. I know that you love me. I trust in your sovereign reign over all things. Yet I'll never understand the whys behind so many of my heart's questions. Beyond my unanswered pleas, Lord, lead me to a place that is higher than where I am now. Lead me home to you even as I walk in faith through this pregnancy. Amen.

The Word of God pierces down into the unseeable me to release the invisible God. It floods my uncertain way with life. . . . The Bible works deep down and its chief work is to remind us that Jesus loves us.

-CALVIN MILLER IN Jesus Loves Me

Options, Please

arie had a secret goal. No one else knew how much it meant to Marie, because she was afraid others would try to talk her out of it. Having had one cesarean birth, Marie was determined to have her next child naturally. When Marie said "naturally" she meant it. After listening intently to countless other women who birthed their babies with the help of a midwife and who took the principled approach that the body already knows what to do, women just need to let it work, Marie ached to go this route when her baby was due. Already seeing a midwife was putting Marie in good stead. She was mentally and physically preparing for her baby's upcoming birth. Marie and her midwife carefully went through the prospective birthing process and planned as much as anyone is able. Marie was assured that her chances of having a natural delivery were excellent. With the medical staff on the ready, Marie felt comforted that even if her own plans went awry, a doctor was ready to take over and perform another cesarean if need be.

Still, as confident as Marie felt personally, she didn't want to let it be known what her intentions were. She'd already heard enough of the doom-and-gloom tales of women who tried to avoid a repeat C-section. That she wanted to do it with no drugs was another rung up the

16 PRAYERS FOR NEW AND EXPECTING MOMS

ladder of impossibilities to many of her family and friends. Why would you not want to take advantage of the painkillers available? Are you certain your abdominal muscles won't burst when you start pushing? Marie could almost predict the dire predictions she'd be likely to hear. Listen she might, but then Marie would go home and talk the matter out with her spouse and her midwife, do some more research, and, above all, pray.

Give ear to my prayer, O God; And do not hide Thyself from my supplication. Give heed to me, and answer me; I am restless in my complaint and am surely distracted. —PSALM 55:1–2

Dear Lord, thank you for your attentiveness to my prayers of late. I am so grateful that I can know you are close by and listening to my petitions. Lord, I believe in my heart that this desire is given me from you. Otherwise, I would not have the courage to forge another course. Please help me maintain a sense of calm well-being as my preparations for delivery draw to a close. Demonstrate your strength to me as I lean heavily upon you for reassurance and encouragement. As I continue to plan, let my thoughts and mind be disciplined and orderly. Let me not give way to debilitating worries and fears. I am confident that you are in control of all that transpires within my life.

OPTIONS, PLEASE

Help steady me under your watchful gaze of loving protection. Extend your arm of support to me even now. And please, I ask that you would protect me from those who might unwittingly bring anxiety with their careless comments. Keep a shutter upon the mouths of anyone who would bring doubt or discouragement to us. Lord, we are indeed in your hands. We look to you for wisdom and support. Let our trust in your provision not be in vain. Even now, I am tempted to doubt and to turn back to another more familiar path. But I believe you have something better for me if only I would have courage to try. Take this, my body, and use it to bring a new life into this world. I commit this, oh so miraculous event, into your care and keeping. Bless my feeble efforts and give me your good grace to see it through to its completion. Surround us with those who are both wise and skilled. Work through them to deliver this child. I thank you for your love, unbounded and unconditional toward me. I pray that I would always look to you for all that I require. Amen.

We let go of stress and restore peace when we take the attitude that only God is God. Only God is perfect, unfailing, everpresent, and never-leaving. —DAVID HAZARD IN Reducing Stress

17

1 Page 18

Late Notice

t was the Fourth of July and Sara's family was going to attend the fireworks downtown. At the last minute, Sara's husband poked his head back inside the door and issued one final invitation to join the rest of the family. "No," Sara rejoined, "I've already told you, I'm not going anywhere until this baby is born." "OK," he apologized, "we're leaving now." As Sara peeked out the window and watched them drive off, she felt overcome by emotions of despair and loneliness. Looking down at herself, Sara felt even worse. She was absolutely humongous, she was sore and achy, her stomach itched, her feet were bloated, and she wanted to have her baby—now. Sara couldn't describe how desperately she prayed her baby would arrive within the next twenty-four hours.

Already seven days overdue, her OB had casually remarked that Sara really wasn't "progressing" too much yet. Could be a week, he predicted. You're wrong, she had wanted to counter. You try carrying around an extra fortyplus pounds, and in this heat no less. Sara's usual even temper was lost these days. She was also troubled about a decision she had to make before her next weekly exam on Tuesday. Since she wasn't dilating and her cervix wasn't thinning, Sara's OB suggested inducing labor. As soon as he

LATE NOTICE

said the words, Sara's temper snapped. "What about my plans to go naturally? Isn't this interfering with my body's own timetable?" After a long and controversial conversation, Sara left the office with more information plus some added confusion. Although in theory she had totally been against any "outside" interference during her pregnancy and upcoming childbirth, Sara was losing her resolve. She was exhausted and anyone who suggested a way to get the baby on the road to delivery was a godsend in her book. Sara eased herself into the recliner, sipped her water, and decided not to think about it anymore. Today she was going to relish the quiet and relax.

DA

Lead me in Thy truth and teach me; For Thou art the God of my salvation; For Thee I wait all the day. —PSALM 25:5

Dear Lord, please undertake for me now. I am surrounded by information and opinions and advice from everyone, and I am drowning in the overflow. I realize that my loved ones only desire what is best for my baby and me, yet this constant questioning is making me ill. I can scarcely cope with getting through the day, let alone being harangued by the unstoppable quizzing on such private matters. Lord, I doubt if I will even have the stamina to make it to my own baby's delivery. My heart and soul are despairing because of my body's discomfort and weariness. I never expected this

20 PRAYERS FOR NEW AND EXPECTING MOMS

all-encompassing exhaustion to take such an emotional toll on me. I've always been strong, energetic, and resilient. These days, it is something grand if I can make it through my day without hourly rest breaks. As much as I am anticipating my baby's birth, I am longing even more for this pregnancy to be over. I want my body back. I need my body back!

Help me make it through these final days of pregnancy with good grace. I admit my temper has been short. I have snapped and snarled and been thoroughly disagreeable. Please forgive my irritability. Give me your strength hour by hour to complete the needed preparations. Bestow on me your hand of guidance and assist me as I decide what medical options to select. Clothe me with a humble heart and let me not be ashamed or discouraged if my plans must be altered. Let me concern myself only with doing what is best for my child. I ask you now, Lord, for a good night's rest. I pray my little one would sleep when I do. Let him get comfortable within my womb and settle into slumber so that I might be rejuvenated and ready for the hard work of delivery. Calm my heart and mind. Soothe my emotions and stay close to me. I need you as never before. I hunger for your gentle touch of comfort. In my most worrisome moments, I place my life and that of my child into your care and keeping. Amen.

Your biggest weakness is God's greatest opportunity. Instead of complaining and begging God to change your circumstances, why not ask Him to fill that void with His strength? —CHARLES STANLEY IN How to Handle Adversity

Difficult Reminders

n her knee, Barb sat jostling her best friend's child. In her heart, Barb was petrified. Barb loved children, always had. She had a natural, unpretentious disposition that drew youngsters to her like a magnet. No matter where she was, Barb could spot a child and immediately find something in that young one to relate to. It was a gift; at least that was what her friends told her. Today, Barb didn't feel so blessed. It was the beginning of her now-weekly OB appointments. The last stretch in the race toward delivery. Although Barb was overcome with joy as she anticipated these final days of pregnancy, she had to fight the waves of fear that intermittently suffocated her heart. If only she could forget, Barb frequently told herself. Look ahead, not back, was her well-spoken watchword. Still, how could a woman forget the tragic circumstances surrounding her own mother's death? Such horrific memories don't fade with time.

Barb picked up the precious bundle, now asleep, and carefully handed her over to her friend. Speaking now in quieter tones, Barb agreed to spill it—all. Those closest to her had a right to know what she was battling against. During the next hour, Barb shared her mother's story. A young happily married woman gives birth to a baby girl.

22 PRAYERS FOR NEW AND EXPECTING MOMS

Life is good, everyone is healthy, content. Then the mother becomes sick and after a lengthy illness, takes her own life in despair. Her five-year-old daughter is left behind with vague, shadowy memories of a mother who left her alone, too suddenly, too soon. Over the years, Barb would hear the sordid details from extended family members who clucked their tongues one time too many. She never really could understand how or why her mother decided to commit suicide. Even into adulthood, Barb continued to ask why. But the answers never came. Now, at the eleventh hour, Barb had chosen to take the step her own mother never had: she started sharing her heart, and as she did new hope surged through her body and soul.

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And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weaknesses; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. —ROMANS 8:26

Dear Lord, how can the mistakes of others hold us in such a vice-like grip? As an adult, why can I not forget the sadness that seeped into every portion of my childhood? I want to let go of the pain, the hurt, and the unanswered questions. I try to. Yet every time I believe I've turned a corner and found peace it eludes me again. Lord, I do not understand any of the reasons behind the pain we suffer in life. I don't have the answers to the questions I need to find. Will you guide me

DIFFICULT REMINDERS

through this process of letting go? Set me free from the doubts that linger in my mind. Help me to push past the fears that threaten me when I am weakest.

I want to relish every moment of my pregnancy, but my heart is frail and my faith is shaky. I don't seem to know how to pray anymore. What exactly should I come into your presence in petition for? Emotional healing? Mental stability? Spiritual maturity? I am at a loss. Please undertake for me now. Cover me with the blanket of your love. Bestow on me your enduring peace. Wrap me tight with your gentle care. I have great need of your closeness now. I desire nothing more than to live a life free from worries and burdens of the past. Show me how to let go, set me free, I pray. Infuse me even now with your spirit of power, love, and soundness of mind. Demonstrate your strong provision to me in my state of dire neediness. I count upon you every hour, every minute. I put my future hope in you. Amen.

We want God to know the earnestness of our heart. We beat on the doors of heaven because we want to be heard on high. We agonize. We cry out. We shout. We pray with sobs and tears. Our prayers become the groanings of a struggling faith. —RICHARD J. FOSTER IN Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home

M Page

Body by Design

udy decided to spend the remainder of her evening finishing up her book on breast-feeding. From everything she'd read, nursing a baby was so much more beneficial than bottle-feeding. Judy learned that a child's immune system was stronger, there was less chance of digestive problems, and it helped tighten the maternal bond between mother and child. The only aspect of breast-feeding Judy wasn't keen on was that, at least until she learned how to pump her own milk, her husband Craig could have no part in feeding their newborn. That and the obvious fact that she'd be the one up each night for some months. Still, Judy was sold on the idea of nursing. How long, she hadn't decided yet. Now if I could only get Craig on board with this, too, Judy reflected.

Before she could think of some way of convincing her loving spouse, Judy heard the voices of her in-laws. Leading his parents into the living room, Craig took one quick glance at the book Judy held in her hand and motioned for her to put it away. With a confused grimace, Judy tucked the book into the pile of parenting and baby care books on the table in front of her. My word, Judy thought. As they sat chatting about incidentals, Judy's mind continued to wander back to the spats she and Craig had already weathered on the subject of how to feed the baby. Judy was incredulous

that any man as intelligent as her husband would take issue with breast-feeding. She really couldn't figure out where he got his bias against it. After all, wasn't a woman's body designed to not only birth her child but to nourish it as well? While Judy and her mother-in-law hadn't specifically discussed breast-feeding between themselves, after seeing how nervous Craig had become when he found Judy reading a book on breast-feeding and his parents' unexpected visit, Judy understood. It wasn't Craig who cared; it was his mother. Judy brightened as understanding dawned; she suddenly realized that perhaps with some gentle instruction and kind conversation, she might be able to shed some new light to her spouse and his family.

BODY BY DESIGN

R A

Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. —JAMES 1:19–20

Dear Lord, I thought I knew my spouse so well, yet I've just been hit square in the face with another revelation. I am amazed that even now after years of marriage that we continue to surprise one another. It is also unfathomable to me that my strong, secure spouse could be so affected by his family's views. Lord, I admit to struggling with this myself. I find people around me frequently taint my own ideas. In this situation, Lord, we are at an impasse. Will you intercede for us? Please help us listen to the other's thoughts and concerns

26 PRAYERS FOR NEW AND EXPECTING MOMS

with open hearts and receptive minds. Let not any preconceived notions take over our desire to truly hear each other's arguments. And show us how to speak in a way that evidences our mutual respect and care for one another. I pray that we learn how to work through delicate issues with unconditional love and the highest level of commitment. Keep the views and opinions of others, even family, far from our debates. Teach us to listen and consider wise counsel, then come together as the unique and separate family unit we are to make our own choices.

As we struggle to find our way, let us each be confident in your constant presence and ready willingness to buoy us up during difficult moments. Give us your wisdom and knowledge in all matters. Help us not underestimate the feelings and opinions of the other. Above all, temper our tempers with your gentleness and grace. Let your words of affirmation and understanding become the watchword on our lips. Lord, I commit this situation into your capable hands. I trust in your timing to set things aright. Be with us now, continue to do your marvelous work of transformation in us both. Amen.

Feelings are important. First of all, they were created by God, and anything molded by his hands has intrinsic worth. —CAROLYN AND CRAIG WILLIFORD IN Faith Tango

Sanctuary

n her hands, Olivia held her grandmother's ragged leather Bible. It was worn and crumbling around the edges. No matter, Olivia treasured countless endearing memories of her grandmother reading to her when she was just a child. Olivia closed her eyes and felt the aged leather, all creased and scarred. She could almost hear her grandmother's voice mingled with her own as she read portions of scripture aloud. It was always the same. Olivia would dash in the door after school, toss her books, and run to the kitchen for a snack. Her grandma never disappointed her on that point. Olivia could imagine the wonderful juicy raisin-filled sugar cookies and the ice-cold milk that was served up on those early fall and late spring days. During the cold winter months, it was hot cocoa and buttered toast. Olivia never tired of the standard fare; she somehow relished the continuity as much as the snack itself. As Olivia filled her tummy, her grandmother filled her soul. Reading as Olivia ate, Grandma always had just the right stories picked out for that particular afternoon. How she knew what to share on any given day remained a mystery to Olivia. But the truth had a way of seeping deep within Olivia's childish heart, and there it stayed.

Gone many years now, Olivia's grandmother had given her treasured Bible as a remembrance and as a challenge.

28 PRAYERS FOR NEW AND EXPECTING MOMS

"Read this every day, pray for those you love, expect great things from God," she had said in her no-nonsense fashion. This was the message Olivia replayed. And so now she was carrying on in her grandmother's stead. Seven months pregnant, Olivia was already praying for her unborn child. Olivia spent some quiet time each evening with Grandma's Bible, searching its pages for insight, encouragement, and wisdom. She prayed thoroughly and completely for God's hand to surround her child and use this dear one to make a difference for all eternity. The more fervently Olivia prayed the more she resembled her grandmother's faithful and tenacious spirit, and Olivia smiled at the thought.

D

Make me know Thy ways, O Lord; Teach me Thy paths. —PSALM 25:4

Dear Lord, good evening, Lord. I'm back again with an eager heart and a willing spirit. Open my mind to glean all the good things you have for me this day. Let my thoughts be focused and clear. Help me set aside the busyness of the day and forget for a time all that still needs to be accomplished. Hold my attention and keep my mind from wandering, I pray. I sit here in expectancy awaiting your presence and your truth to unfold before me. Guide me as I read and meditate upon your word of hope, encouragement, and instruction. Lead me to pray for those whose needs are so great. I ask that

SANCTUARY

you would lift the burdens from the weary and give instead a draught of healing refreshment to those in pain. Lord, protect your dear ones in whatever state they find themselves.

As I sit before your throne, I ask that you would continue to work within my heart. I am discovering how fickle my faith truly is. Help me set down a firm foundation so that I will not be tossed here and there by every wind that blows across my path. I hunger for a faith that is rock solid and secure. Will you brush away anything that would cause me to stumble and doubt? I feel compelled to pray for my own spiritual state as I contemplate becoming a mother soon. Truly, I am not prepared to face such a task on my own. I know all too well my own shortcomings. But I also believe you will make up for my lack. I count on this! Lord, continue to work within my heart. Let your ongoing process of sanctification never cease. Let me embrace the uncertain with a sure hope of your ever-present precious spirit, which leads me, guides me, and directs my every step. Amen.

When the babies came and it got more difficult to find time to read, I made a rule. I didn't have to open my Bible if I didn't want to, but I wasn't allowed any "me" time until I had read it. No sewing, no television, no chatting on the phone. The Bible came first.

—JEANNIE ST. JOHN TAYLOR IN How to Be a Praying Mom

Page 3

Double Duty

ith her tummy extending out, Trudy felt hard-pressed all around, literally. She tried moving from one angle to the next, but each time she sat down to nurse her elevenmonth-old son, it was tricky. As Luke squirmed while he nursed, Trudy simultaneously felt the baby kick. "Ouch, that smarted." Looking up, Luke smiled. I'd better be quiet myself or this is going to take all day. Trudy realized how distracted babies got whenever they heard a noise or saw something move at this age, but all of this off and on stuff was getting to her. Maybe it's because my body is trying to do two different nurturing acts at once, she surmised. I know my friends think I'm crazy to continue nursing while I'm pregnant. And I do see their point. But Luke only nurses in the morning and at bedtime now. I really do want to make it through the first year of his life. I know it sounds silly to some mothers, but everything I've read tells me how much benefit Luke is getting from my nursing him his entire first twelve months. And, Trudy realized with relief, we're almost there.

How could I have guessed that I'd get pregnant while nursing? I knew there was a risk, but it had taken over four years to conceive Luke, so I never gave it a thought. So I'm on tandem duty for a while. It won't be forever. I just have to ignore those doomsayers who tell me I'm jeopardizing my DOUBLE DUTY

health. Haven't I gotten the go-head from my OB? When another twinge interrupted Trudy's thoughts, she realized she was mentally counting down the days until Luke's first birthday arrived. Two reasons to celebrate, she thought happily!

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If any man has ears to hear, let him hear. And He was saying to them, "Take care what you listen to." —Mark 4:23–24A

Dear Lord, I am in awe once again at the way you've orchestrated the timing in my children's conceptions. What a surprise it was for me to discover I was pregnant, and so soon after the first. Lord, I'm not upset, I'm truly thankful for the blessing of another baby. Yet I admit to having been take unawares by this. I'm finding that I'm not so flexible as I once thought. This new development has me scrambling to alter my welllaid plans and make the appropriate adjustments. I am also finding myself second-guessing my past choices and wondering if you are thwarting them or fulfilling them. You alone see the future and all it holds, so I must continue to trust that your way is best.

Lord, you know my heart's desires in all things. Will you give me a sensitive spirit that hears rightly your voice when you speak? Even now, I believe I am making a prudent choice, but others beg to differ. Am I mistaken? To whom should I listen? Will you intercede for me even now? Give me a wise and intuitive heart that truly hears the message you intend for me. Let 32 PRAYERS FOR NEW AND EXPECTING MOMS

me not give way to fear or to the worrisome meddling of those who do not understand the situation. Lead me to an understanding of your will for me, not only in this circumstance but in all areas. Do not let me stand confounded by myriad voices, but let me tune into your words alone. Lord, I pray that you would protect my children; surround them with your blanket of care. Give soundness and strength to their bodies and minds. Envelop them in your mighty arms, and let me rest in the knowledge of your sovereignty. I am so thankful that you are always close by and ready to intercede on my behalf. I am astounded by your unconditional love and your generous provision. Always at the ready, you are my lord, leader, and wisest counselor. To you, I ask for all that I require, both in wisdom and understanding, for this day. Amen.

Relating to Jesus isn't a one way street, but a thoroughfare of travel in both directions. —MARK D. ROBERTS IN Jesus Revealed

Stay-at-Home Mom

hristina had looked at the clock once, twice, three times within the last thirty minutes. She could hardly wait for her husband, Jim, to arrive home from a weeklong business trip. Christina made a last inspection around the house. Liking what she saw, she felt pleased, sort of. With the housework done, the laundry folded and put away, ironing complete, and dinner at the ready, Christina should have been satisfied. Instead, she was filled with an underlying nagging sense of incompleteness. At eight and one-half months pregnant, Christina seemed to be getting what other moms warned her about: the nesting instinct. But they were wrong. Christina wasn't nesting, she was fleeing—at least in her mind. "If this is what I'm experiencing," Christina muttered, "then I need to jump out of the nest."

Troubled by doubts about quitting her full-time job as a realtor, Christina kept wondering whether she'd made the right decision. I've worked so hard to get where I am today, she reflected. Am I making a mistake? Two months ago, it sure didn't seem like it. What with Jim traveling so much, I'd be the primary caregiver for our baby anyway. We didn't want to entrust our newborn to just anyone, so here I am. Awaiting the big day and not doing a very good job at the waiting, I'm afraid. Every day that passes brings new - And

34 PRAYERS FOR NEW AND EXPECTING MOMS

and different causes for concern. Will I make the adjustment from full-time career woman to stay-at-home mom? I thought I could, but now I'm wondering. Is it too late to change my mind? What would Jim think? We've already spent more hours debating this than I care to remember. Maybe it's just the hormones doing a number on my psyche. At least for the next eight weeks, I'll be here to stay, after that who knows?

I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you. —PSALM 32:8

Dear Lord, I am unsettled. I cannot remember a time when I've been so unsure of a choice as important as this one, Lord. I truly believed that we had come to a definite and final decision. Now, after having had a trial run, I'm not sure I'm fit to stay at home twenty-four/seven. I realize all this trepidation may fall away once our baby is born. Perhaps I'll feel nothing but gratitude for the indefinite adjustment time here at home. But then again, maybe not. Lord, will you still my fears? I'm finding myself getting all worked up about something that I cannot change at now in any case. I am committed to my family above all else, but if I start to feel unsettled and anxious to be out and about, will I cause my child harm with my divided affections? This, too, troubles me. I wish I knew that without a

STAY-AT-HOME MOM

doubt I could fulfill all my obligations without any regret. Naïve, aren't I? I suppose if I am very honest, I want the best of both worlds. I don't want to have to choose. Oh, Lord, whenever will I learn that life doesn't afford us all that we desire? Help me be content right where I am now. Let me learn how to live today. I experience nothing but discontent and frustration when I try to second-guess what tomorrow will bring. Ease my anxious heart and place your calming spirit deep within my soul. Prepare me to enter into the hard work of motherhood with a positive and joyful attitude. Let not selfishness or laziness hinder the good I can accomplish within the confines of my home. For the time being, I am here to stay. The coming months are still a mystery to me. Yet I am fully confident that as the days and weeks unfold, you will make the way clear to us. Lord, I commit my future into your hands. Continue your abiding work within my heart. I am yours always. Amen.

He knows all about you, inside and out, past, present, and future. And He recognizes the subtle symptoms of emptiness . . . symptoms such as dissatisfaction. —Anne Graham Lotz in Just Give Me Jesus

35

b 967726 Part 1.qxd 10/20/03 11:36 AM Page 36