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BEFORE YOU WERE BORN, I KNEW YOU

PRAYING FOR YOUR PREGNANCY, BIRTH, AND BABY

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Whether you downloaded this book for yourself or for a friend, thank you!

I was inspired to write *Before You Were Born* when one of my blog readers asked me for a book recommendation. Expecting her first baby this year, she wanted some structure as she prayed over her pregnancy and child. When I couldn't come up with a satisfactory recommendation, I wrote the book myself!

Before You Were Born is designed as a guide. It is not an exhaustive list of prayer topics, but is intended to inspire specific intercession for your pregnancy, birth, baby, and self. I hope the ideas listed here will assist you in lifting up the challenges, fears, and priorities individual to your own life and journey.

The book is divided into **four topical sections**: Pregnancy, Birth, Baby, and Mama. In each of these sections there are **five focus areas**. These include a short discussion of the prayer topic and are followed by a list of "**prayer points**" for you to use in your quiet time. I hope you change, develop, and add to these points as your personal experience requires.

At the back of the book is the **Resources** section. This includes a list of books, websites, and podcasts I found helpful in my own motherhood journey. I have also included a list of verses and affirmations to use before and during labor. I personally compiled and used this list for my own labor and delivery.

This book approaches pregnancy, labor, and birth from a natural perspective. I did not come to pregnancy with this perspective – in fact, I was just the opposite! But after extensive research, interviewing veteran moms, and taking multiple classes, I was overwhelmed with the benefits of natural birth. But I was terrified. After my own experience (read more in the introduction), I became passionate about helping other first-time moms find the strength and confidence to do birth the natural way – *without* fear, but *with* the Spirit of God. *That said, no birth story is a story of failure.* All births result in new life, and this book is designed to celebrate that!

Pairing prayer and physical, mental, and emotional preparation will help you enter this experience with confidence. The more you educate yourself about your body, birth, and baby, the less fear has a chance to take root.

Finally, I would love to hear from you! **Share your pregnancy and birth story with me by using the hashtag #beforeyouwereborn**. Also visit my blog at www.phyliciadelta.com or follow me on Facebook (Phylicia Delta Blog) or Instagram (@phyliciadelta).

As you pray for your birth, I am praying beside you! May God abundantly bless you and your family through this new and exciting season of motherhood.



SET APART FROM BIRTH

Inviting in the Author of Life

Prior to pregnancy, if anyone had told me I'd give birth at home I would've laughed hysterically. I was a heeled and manicured diva with a pain tolerance of zero, convinced natural birth was relegated to those "crazy, crunchy granola moms" I'd only heard about. Life is full of surprises.

On our first wedding anniversary, my husband and I found out we were expecting. To educate myself in the midst of a hectic work schedule I bought some books to read in the airport terminal. Slowly, my perspective on pregnancy, birth, and motherhood began to change. To my utter shock I found myself planning a natural birth with a midwife, looking into cloth diapers, and taking several different birth classes. But despite all my research, I was terrified.

One day a friend invited me to a one-day Christian birth seminar, which I attended on a whim. The women there radiated joy and confidence. Most had multiple children; all had different birth stories. But as I relayed my fears, I will never forget what the speaker said: "You have the Spirit of the Living God within you. *You are the strongest you will ever be.*" She encouraged me to pray over my pregnancy and birth, submitting my fears to God. That's exactly what I did.

As I prayed, fears that had crept into my heart began to subside. I had a newfound confidence that I could achieve the birth I hoped for, and looked forward to Adeline's arrival with increased excitement. Despite having to drastically alter my birth plan only three weeks from my due date (more on that later), Adeline was born on September 20th in one of the most incredible moments of my life.

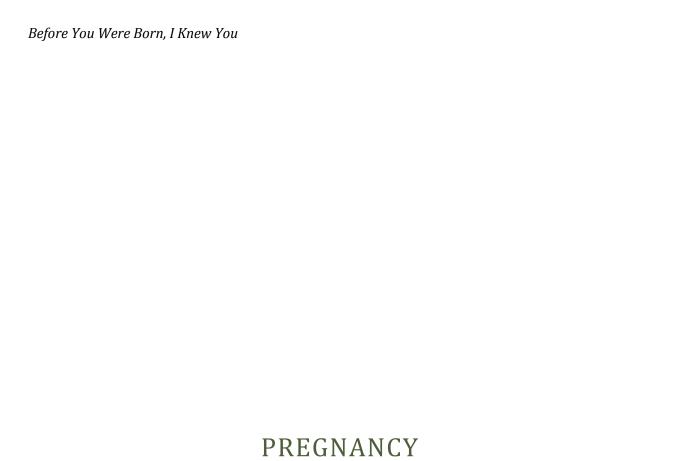
Midwives and doctors talk a lot about the baby bond; that sense of closeness between mother and child. While that bond exists in most women simply due to biology and human nature, I believe it is magnified exponentially when the Spirit of God is invited in.

Women are the only vessels in which human life can grow and thrive. God chose us to help Him create life in this world, bringing forth new souls from our humble bodies - souls He longs to know, love, and save. God has bestowed upon women an incredible honor: the honor of participating in His creative power.

As we intentionally pursue the Lifegiver in our own life-growing journey, we find a much deeper, more meaningful experience before and after these nine months. Prayer connects us with God's Father-heart. By uniting ourselves to Christ, we are better able to bond with our babies – even before they are born.

In Jeremiah 1:5 God says, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart." The intimacy of prayer allows us to see our babies through the eyes of a loving God – the same God who put them in our wombs.

My hope and prayer is that this short devotional will help guide your prayers throughout pregnancy. I hope it brings you boldness and confidence for your birth. I hope it bonds you closer to your baby. And most of all, I hope you come into motherhood full of the confidence that can only come from the Author of Life.



STRETCHING AND SANCTIFYING

Pregnancy is hard.

For nine – really, ten – months, our bodies harbor the growth of a tiny being. Our bodies must not only perform their everyday functions, they are also working overtime to sustain the little one growing within us. It's no wonder pregnancy often comes with nausea, swelling, heartburn, and exhaustion - building a baby is a lot of work!

This stage of life tests us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Pregnancy puts us in a vulnerable state and pushes our limits in every area. Pregnancy is, in short, a sanctifying experience.

Our babies stretch our bodies as they grow. Some of us have marks to prove it. The stretching can be uncomfortable and even painful at times, but the end result is a beautiful, thriving life.

In the same way, the pregnancy experience stretches us spiritually. If we allow God to work His will during this season we will come out on the other side thriving and beautiful. The painful and uncomfortable parts of pregnancy become purposeful when we see them for what they are: part of God's sanctification plan.

In my own pregnancy, swelling and heartburn made me miserable. But as I viewed these difficulties in light of God's work in my life, I embraced their purpose for that season. The testing of pregnancy strengthened my marriage, my character, and my motherhood – but only as much as I depended on God.

As you pray through your pregnancy, remember that the uncomfortable times are the sanctifying times. You are being equipped to become the mother you were meant to be.

PRAY FOR PRESENCE

"And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Exodus 33:14

Pregnancy is a busy time. Whether you are expecting your first baby or your fourth, you most likely have your hands full with all kinds of responsibilities! In the busyness of day to day, it's easy to miss out on the miracle happening within us. Even though we *need* rest in this season, there is so much to do and so little time.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace: He promised that following Him would bring rest for our souls (Matt. 11:29). Ask the Lord to be completely present with you in this season. As you pray for God to be present, also ask for *presence of spirit*. Notice your baby's hiccups. Stop and smile when you feel his kicks. Don't miss out on the miracle by being too busy.

PRAYER POINTS

- ✓ Pray to acknowledge and embrace God's presence in this season.
- ✓ Pray to be present in mind and spirit throughout your pregnancy.
- ✓ Pray against distraction; pray for focus and intentionality in your daily tasks.
- ✓ Pray for a greater understanding of the miracle happening within you!

PRAY FOR HEALTH

"Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul."

3 John 1:2

Pregnancy comes with all kinds of lovely side effects. I don't think my feet have ever been as big as they were at 36 weeks, and a perpetual stuffy nose had me counting the days to my due date! While nausea, heartburn, and swelling may be inevitable, remember just how hard your body is working. Good health is something we often take for granted, and during pregnancy, our health has an impact on our babies as well.

As we pray for good health, we must also take responsibility for our choices in eating and exercise. Nutrition has a profound effect on the overall health of babies in the womb. While giving in to a few cravings is the pregnant lady's right, keep baby in mind as you eat these nine months. God provided us with a beautiful array of vitamin-rich foods from which to choose – vitamins your baby needs to develop and grow. These same nutrients will give you a much more positive pregnancy, better birth, and quicker recovery (see the *Resources* page for book recommendations on this topic).

Good health enables us to give the best of ourselves to our families and accomplish God's will for our lives. Even when we don't feel great, God's grace sustains us and supports us as we seek Him in our weakness.

- ✓ Pray against infection and illness in your own body; pray for protection and wellness so you can give the best to your baby and family.
- ✓ Pray for wisdom and strength to make the best nutritional choices during pregnancy.
- ✓ Pray for strength and energy when you feel exhausted.
- ✓ Pray for grace to sustain when you want to react negatively during those sick and tired moments. God knows your weaknesses and He will be present with you!

PRAY FOR PEACE

"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you."

Isaiah 26:3

Anxiety can be a regular visitor during pregnancy – especially for first-time moms. There are endless things worry about if we allow our minds to do so. Online mom forums can add to the stress with 842 different options for *absolutely everything!* How do we know if we made the right decisions for car seat, diapers, and sleep training?!

God delights to meet us in these anxious moments. *Anxiety is not God's will.* God's will for His people is peace. As you invite God to be present with you in pregnancy, ask Him for peace to reign in your heart and mind. The Enemy wages the war of anxiety on the battlefield of the mind. Satan uses doubt and fear to pull us away from God's presence.

When you recognize thoughts of doubt and fear, stop and acknowledge them. Then say aloud: "In the name of Jesus, I reject these thoughts." Satan cannot read our minds, but he can hear our words, and the name of Jesus has power – even in a whisper. You do not need fear in your life during pregnancy. Anxiety, when harbored, will negatively affect your health and can even make labor a much worse experience than it needs to be. By praying for peace on a regular basis, you are choosing God's plan while simultaneously rejecting the Enemy's work.

PRAYER POINTS

- ✓ Make a list of the doubts and fears that cross your mind. Pray specifically against them in Jesus' name.
- ✓ Pray that your mind will be focused on God's truth. Find verses to counter any fears you are harboring in your mind and post them where you will see them regularly.
- ✓ Pray for God's peace to surround you whether at work or home.
- ✓ Pray that God would increase your trust in Him. Increased trust leads to greater peace.

PRAY FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

"Let marriage be held in honor among all..." Hebrews 13:4

In the midst of the excitement for your newest addition, the exhaustion that accompanies pregnancy can take a toll on the most important relationship beside your walk with God: your marriage. Babies bring a whole new dynamic into marriage! It is very easy to get lost in *What to Expect When You're Expecting* and forget about your husband's role in this new adventure.

Though it seems counterintuitive, by tending to your marriage you are making an investment in your baby's future. The security of a God-centric marriage provides an example of love for children to follow. As you pray for your marriage and husband, you will be drawn closer to him, but also to God and to your baby.

Sometimes our husbands don't understand just how taxing pregnancy can be. Other times they feel helpless and don't know how to make life easier for their wives. We can pray for an understanding heart for our husbands, as well as improved communication and unity, so pregnancy remains a happy season for both mother and dad.

PRAYER POINTS

- ✓ Pray for God to guard your marriage from the attack of the enemy in any form: bitterness, anger, dissension, disrespect, or a lack of love.
- ✓ Pray for compassion and understanding for both you and your husband during the hard moments of this season.
- ✓ Pray for unity. Family members may have opinions about all things baby-related, but pray that you and your husband will be on the same page.
- ✓ Pray for continued (or renewed) intimacy and desire for one another. Sex during pregnancy is physically and spiritually healthy!

PRAY FOR REST

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

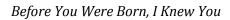
Matthew 11:28

Whether you're working full time or home with your two-year old, life responsibilities don't stop for pregnancy! Even when we're tired and just want to lay down there will still be things to do, people to see, and lists to check. Sometimes we have to press on and push through. But we also need to be intentional about choosing rest.

Jesus offered rest to those who "labor and are heavy laden". That sounds like pregnancy to me! But even when we're exhausted, we often try to do more, more, more – never taking the time to refresh ourselves physically or spiritually.

Rest is *so important* in this season: Important enough to schedule it into your day however you need to do so. Even if it's fifteen minutes with your feet up on the couch, or saying no to Bible study one week so you can take a much-needed nap – do it! Your body needs you to take a break now and then. Just as God rested after the creation of the world, you need rest to create the baby in your womb.

- ✓ Pray for God to help you identify places you can create space in your schedule for rest.
- ✓ Pray against guilt for the times you *do* rest. Your body, family, and soul benefit from rest it is God-designed!
- ✓ Pray for a restful mind. True rest is not sitting down and worrying about everything you need to do. If you struggle with this, keep a notepad by your chair, bed, or tub and write down your thoughts so you can fully relax.



BIRTH

A BOLD AND BEAUTIFUL BIRTH

Birth: it's both the climactic conclusion of pregnancy and the incredible beginning of a brand new life.

As a first-time mom I heard some frightening birth stories: Tales of episiotomies and stitches and sixty-hour labors. The fact that every woman's labor and delivery is different was not so much comforting as it was terrifying: I had absolutely no idea what to expect.

In today's culture, a curtain has been drawn across birth. Until you become pregnant you don't see or hear much about the details. Most of us don't grow up in homes where mothers give birth in their bedrooms, nor do we attend the births of friends and siblings. Like me, many women don't know what to expect when it comes to labor and birth. This makes it a very frightening prospect.

Birth does not have to be frightening. In fact, God designed women's bodies with unique abilities specific to the labor and birthing process. A good birthing class (such as the Bradley Method) will teach you just how well-equipped you are to deliver a baby. You were *designed* for this! Not only are you completely capable, but God is present with you through it all.

No matter what kind of labor and delivery you have – natural, medicated, or C-section – the key to a peaceful, purposeful experience is *confidence*. Confidence cannot coexist with fear. To defeat fear in labor, we must be spiritually and mentally prepared. Prayer is a wonderful way to accomplish this.

I can't imagine what my own birth story would have been apart from prayer. Five days before Adeline was born, my husband and I moved to an entirely new state. None of the birthing centers in the area would take me so late in pregnancy, so I had to change my original plan – laboring at a hospital with a midwife – to a home birth. Though I had planned on attempting a natural birth, now I had no choice! Moving at 37 weeks pregnant and delivering five days later was not in my plan. But because I covered my labor and birth in prayer, I had complete peace and presence during the experience. It was difficult, but it was manageable. It was intense, but it was amazing. And I would do it all again – with God by my side.

Pray with boldness for your birth. Pray for confidence in who God made you as a woman. And pray for the "peace that passes understanding" (Phil. 4:7) as you approach the big day!

PRAY FOR YOUR LABOR

"I will not be overwhelmed, because the Lord holds my hand."

Psalm 37:24

If there is any subject on which fear can settle, it's the subject of labor and birth. That's why we must be intentional about praying over our birth long before it happens, submitting our fears to the throne of grace.

Fear may be general, but prayer should be specific. Think about the things that scare you the most about your labor. Make a list of them. Now pray that list to the Lord - daily! My own fears included tearing, needing an episiotomy, and an extremely long labor. I prayed specifically over these fears,

asking the Lord to provide me with little tearing, no need to be cut, and a short labor – or at least one that progressed without stopping. The Lord answered my prayers abundantly! Sometimes we think that praying specifically is asking too much of God. But God delights to hear our prayers, and His Father's heart is pleased to take the burdens we are carrying. Be honest with Him. Ask Him. Holding onto fear only leaves us overwhelmed – the last thing you need during labor. Instead, hold onto the hand God extends to you. He is with you through every contraction, beginning to end.

PRAYER POINTS

- ✓ Make the list I mentioned above: a list of your fears about labor and birth. Counter these fears by praying over them every day, or every time they enter your mind.
- ✓ If you can, take some time each day to relax and pray over your birth plan. You could do it during your daily shower or if you have more time, during a bath.
- ✓ Pray for your body in labor. Pray specifically for your mind to be relaxed and confident in the process.
- ✓ Visit the *Resources* page for some wonderful books about labor and birth and a list of verses and affirmations to memorize.

PRAY OVER THE ENVIRONMENT:

"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?"

Psalm 139:7

Whether you give birth at home or in a hospital, the environment in which you labor will be important to your peace and progress. Just as we invite God into our lives, hearts, and pregnancies, we should invite Him into the delivery room.

Pray for your practitioners' hands. Pray for wisdom, guidance, and peace. Pray against any disruptive spirit or contention in the room. Some women have their husbands pray over the room as they enter so they can begin the delivery knowing that Christ has been invited in! Anywhere God is present, that place is made holy. By inviting God to join us in prayer, the place we labor becomes holy ground.

- ✓ Pray for God's presence with the practitioners; that they will have wisdom and guidance for whatever happens.
- ✓ Pray that your doctor/midwife would be receptive and willing to listen to your needs and desires.
- ✓ Pray for God's spirit to overwhelm the room, bringing peace to everyone within it.
- ✓ Pray to be completely "present" and able to appreciate the experience without fear and anxiety.

PRAY FOR CONFIDENCE

"For the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught"

Proverbs 3:26

Whether you're going in blind as a first-time mom or you're a veteran mom of four, the variables that come with birth can do a number on the nerves. Every birth is as unique as the baby being born, and the list of possible problems, conditions, and emergencies is long. It leaves us wondering how *What to Expect When You're Expecting* could even be written, given the unpredictability of it all!

But God is not a God of fear. He is stable, secure, and present in the difficult things we are called to do. As previously discussed, women's bodies were designed for birth! God meticulously created every system to work together, in unison, to bring forth the child you are soon to meet. You can have confidence in your body, your ability, and your strength as a woman. You are strong, and God is with you!

Even in the event there *is* an emergency, God's presence is your confidence and comfort. You just prayed over your providers and the very room in which you will be laboring. Remember that Christ – who is the Creator of both you *and* your baby – conquered death, fear, and shame when He died on the cross. **The power of God is with you because the Spirit of God is within you.** You can trust Him with each contraction.

PRAYER POINTS

- ✓ Look at your list of fears about labor. Find verses about God's strength, power, and presence, and pray these over those fears.
- ✓ Pray to embrace your capability for birth. Pray that God would help you realize how He designed and equipped you for the task you are soon to complete!
- ✓ Pray for confidence in God's power and strength. Pray for faith to believe that He is both able and willing to help you.
- ✓ It is not prideful to recognize that you are a strong woman made capable by God. Embrace this identity and repeat it to yourself as your due date approaches.

PRAY FOR STRENGTH

"The Lord is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation." Exodus 15:2

Labor is just what it sounds like: hard work. Contractions are the muscles in your body working together to push your baby into the world. Labor is a *good thing!* But it is difficult, and it takes strength and training – much like running a marathon.

We often refer to labor as "pain", citing the curse Eve received following the Fall of Man in Genesis chapter three. But the Hebrew word used in that passage – *etsev* – literally means "toil" or "hard labor". It is the same word used to describe Adam's curse: "Cursed is the ground for your sake;

In toil you shall eat of it." (Gen. 3:17). Before the Fall, the earth brought forth life freely and with abundance. But sin corrupted this perfect design. Adam and Eve received the same punishment in two different contexts: Adam would labor to bring life from the earth, and Eve would labor to bring life from her body. **Labor is hard work, but it is not impossible**. God designed woman's body specifically to bring life into the world. As we study and recognize that design, we are able to work *with* our bodies rather than fight against them in the labor process.

There are many things you can do to prepare for labor: take a birthing class, exercise, do Kegels and study relaxation techniques. But in the moment you will need more than just physical strength to complete the task ahead of you. You will need emotional and spiritual strength as well.

As Christians we know our God promises to provide these things to us! God is the epitome of strength. He is God *Almighty*. His name alone is a refuge and a shelter; a 'strong tower' we can rest within (Prov. 18:10). I repeated that verse over and over during my own labor. Knowing that God's name was my strength, and that God was present in the room with me, gave me the energy to continue when I was exhausted and overwhelmed.

The beautiful thing about God's strength is that it also comes with a song (Ex. 15:2). God's strength brings joy and His presence is our salvation – no matter what the circumstance.

PRAYER POINTS

- ✓ Pray for physical strength. Take time to pray over each part of your body that will be working together during birth. Also look into exercises and techniques you can begin during pregnancy to strengthen your body for your labor (the Resources page will help you with this).
- ✓ Pray for emotional strength. Your body will follow where your mind is focused. Pray for strength of heart and mind, and fill your mind with positive birth stories, verses, and affirmations to lean on during labor.
- ✓ Pray for spiritual strength. God's presence is your sustaining power. Lean on Him now and it will come naturally during your baby's birth!

PRAY FOR ACCEPTANCE

"Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."

Luke 22:42

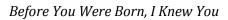
God tells us to "ask, and you shall receive", and we *should* pray boldly and confidently. God is both able and willing to help us. However, God's thoughts are not always our thoughts, and there are times the birth story isn't written the way we wish. God gives every woman and child a unique story, sometimes with details we wouldn't choose. In these cases we must pray for acceptance, just as Jesus did before going to the Cross.

If you hoped for a specific birth experience and it didn't go that way, rest in the knowledge that God knows your body and baby better than you. He knows the best timing. And He has an ultimate plan for your life and your baby's, no matter what happens in the labor room. We can't always see the

end from the beginning, but God's will is the product of His good and loving heart. He is doing a great work in and through you.

No birth story is a story of failure. Whether you have your baby naturally, with an epidural, or by C-section, a life was brought into the world – and that's what matters!

- ✓ Recognize that God is working even when we can't see the end result. Read the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, or spend some time in the book of Job. Each of these characters played an integral part in God's plan, but often required sacrificing their own hopes and expectations to achieve it.
- ✓ Pray for a heart that accepts God's will for your birth.
- ✓ Pray boldly but with "open hands". God loves when we present our requests to Him, but sometimes our requests don't fit into His greater plan. We can work with God's plan by submitting our requests with a willing heart.



BABY

FOR I KNOW THE PLANS

Where do we even begin to pray for our children? We could pray for health, protection, a willing heart; wisdom, strength, kindness; future plans and goals, and even his future spouse. It can be hard to decide prayer priorities before the baby is born.

It is a blessing, then, that God knows our prayers before we utter them (Matt. 6:8). Our requests will grow more specific as our children grow and develop, but even now we can pray over five points that have the most profound effect on a child's future: the soul, spirit, mind, body, and future.

God knows the plans He has for this world and every person in it (Jer. 29:11). By joining Him in prayer, we submit our children to His plan – the ultimate place of security and hope.

PRAY FOR BABY'S SOUL

"Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it."

Proverbs 22:6

None of us birth little Christians into the world. Each child born on earth has an everlasting soul and the freedom to choose where that soul will spend eternity. This can be an alarming realization for any loving mother.

There are thousands of parenting books written to guarantee our children turn into upright citizens and overall "good people". But who is good except God? For our children to succeed in life they must understand the purpose of it, and that purpose is found with their Creator. Our job as parents is to guide these babies into a knowledge of and love for Christ, whose purpose for them exceeds anything the world can offer.

Teaching an everlasting soul is a huge responsibility. But in the end, our children must choose whether or not they will listen to our teaching. They must choose whom they will serve. We can be praying over that decision long before it is made, asking God to cultivate a receptive heart in our children, to both hear and receive the gospel.

- ✓ Pray that your child's soul would be prepared to receive the gospel. Pray for receptiveness and a willingness to hear God's Word; to be fertile soil for the truth.
- ✓ Pray that your baby would understand the true meaning of success as the product of Christ-centered purpose.
- ✓ Pray for wisdom and guidance as you share the gospel with your baby as he grows.Ask God how you can begin living out the gospel even as your baby grows within you.
- ✓ Pray for opportunities to share the gospel with your baby as the time comes!

PRAY FOR BABY'S SPIRIT

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

2 Corinthians 3:17

I've often considered a person's spirit the defining quality of their person. It is the spirit that makes someone individual, whether they are an extrovert or an introvert, bold or quiet, creative or analytical. The varied personalities within even one family is a testament to God's design!

While we are born with certain tendencies and predispositions, other personality traits are developed through childhood. Our experiences color our behavior and worldview. These experiences, if not seen through the lens of God's ultimate plan, have the power to alter the trajectory of our lives. They can add baggage to our spiritual journey. They can break hearts and jade hope. As mothers, we cannot protect our children from all hurtful experiences, but we can pray that God's purpose is accomplished through them.

A child whose spirit is grounded in the truth of God's Word will not give up when he is faced with hard things. He will not lose hope when his path takes a bad turn. He will stand on the foundation of faith built beneath him. We must vigilantly pray for our babies' spirits to be united to the truth of Christ – then give them an example to follow.

PRAYER POINTS

- First, pray for yourself. If there is anything you are carrying in your heart, leftover from your own childhood, bring it to the Lord. He already knows it is there. Give it to Him to carry and ask Him to guard you from taking it back and handing it to your own child.
- Secondly, pray that God would protect your child from any of your own insecurities. Pray that he or she will have a spirit that is free and confident.
- ✓ Pray that even when your child faces hard things, they will see God's purpose and plan through them. Pray that their spirit will not be broken but strengthened through whatever life experiences lay ahead.

PRAY FOR BABY'S MIND

"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house..."

Deuteronomy 6:6

The enemy fights on the battlefield of the mind, which we know from praying through pregnancy and labor. Just as we pray over our own minds, we can be in prayer for the minds of our babies even before their thoughts have moved beyond tummy-time!

Because no parent is perfect, it is easy to pass our personal insecurities on to our children by the example we set. Perhaps you have taken on your mother's negative body image. Perhaps you struggle with financial responsibility like your dad. These things may be the product of life experience and the reality of a sinful world, but they do not need to be your baby's story. Pray for

your baby's mind to be guarded from the things you personally struggle to conquer. Pray to break whatever habits may be passed from generation to generation. Pray for your child to have a mind that is free, clear, and bold.

PRAYER POINTS

- ✓ Pray for your baby's mind as it develops, both in the womb and outside of it. Pray that God would develop his intellect and help him navigate the world with clarity.
- ✓ Pray for God to guard your baby's mind from impurities as he grows. Most children that are exposed to pornography see it by age eleven. Pray that God would protect your baby's mind as he or she grows, and that their curiosity could develop unhindered by sinful influences.
- ✓ Pray for your child's thoughts to be true, pure, admirable, noble, excellent and praiseworthy.

PRAY FOR BABY'S BODY

"I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."
Psalm 139:14

When you're finding out the gender of your baby, you'll often hear: "Well, it doesn't matter, as long as it's healthy, right?"

But what if your baby is *not* healthy?

Just as we pray boldly and specifically over our birth stories, we should do the same over the health of the little one growing within. And as we open our hands to accept God's will for our labor, we must also open our hands to His will for our babies' bodies.

This doesn't mean we cease to pray for health. Pray over your baby head to toe! But when babies are born with conditions and complications, we must also remember that God is *still* present and powerful. He still has a purpose.

Read a personal testimony on this topic by Lisa Hensley, linked in the Resources page.

- ✓ Ask the Lord to grant you a baby free of complications, conditions, and disease. Pray over each part of your baby's body from little fingers to tiny nose!
- ✓ Pray also for God's support and strength if your baby is *not* born healthy. Pray that you would be able to see God's purpose in the pain and difficulty. Pray for support of friends, family and doctors if this is the case.

PRAY FOR BABY'S FUTURE

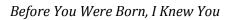
"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:21

It can be overwhelming to think about our babies' future: high school, college, marriage, jobs – where do you start?

In truth, all these life decisions and details boil down to one thing: a love for Christ and His mission. When we love Christ, we love what He is doing in this world. That love is the guiding principle to all of our decisions. We view the world through the lens of the gospel, and that worldview alters how we act in college, how we work our jobs, and how we choose our spouses.

As you pray for your baby's soul – to come to salvation by Christ Jesus – you are simultaneously laying the foundation for his future. Where his treasure is (where his values rest) is where his heart will be. And where his heart is grounded is where his life will begin.

- ✓ Pray for what lies ahead for your baby. Ask the Lord to guide you into specific prayers for your baby's future, whether a specific skill or talent, or a calling you feel he might have. Perhaps journal your ideas and thoughts to save for later and see if your baby actually develops those interests!
- ✓ Ask the Lord to open your eyes to your child's abilities and cultivate opportunities for those to grow.
- ✓ Like Hannah, dedicate your child and his future to the hands of God. In a sense, God "lends" us His children to nurture and raise. All of them are His first!



MAMA

NO GREATER WORK

C.S. Lewis wisely said, "Children are not a distraction from more important work. They are the most important work."

The first six weeks after your baby is born will be difficult. You will be in recovery at the same time your little one is waking every two hours to feed. You will be establishing a routine, learning new rhythms, and discovering what works for you and your family. You will be tired. But this – this is the *most important work*. And though it is at times physically and emotionally taxing, it is also a wonderful, fulfilling, and beautiful life calling.

Your role as mama to your baby is one that God blesses with great honor. You are the primary teacher, discipler, and nurturer of your little one. And no matter how unqualified you feel, you are equipped by God for this role. God chose *you* to mother your child – no one else. He will equip you for the task ahead: this great work He has called you to do.

PRAY FOR PATIENCE

"For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him."

Genesis 18:9

I've never been a patient person. I knew this going into motherhood. I knew it would be challenging because of my impatient nature, and I was *more* than right about that!

But for this very reason, motherhood was the best thing to happen to me. The challenges and interruptions that try my patience have taught me to depend on the Lord, who is *always* patient with me. We often joke, 'Don't pray for patience, because God always answers that prayer!' He does – abundantly! But patience is a virtue so unique to God's character it is an integral part of becoming like Christ.

Let's be real: it's frustrating when Adeline wakes three times a night during a sleep regression. It's annoying when she can't be set down for two minutes without crying. But how often do we try God's patience with our sinful thoughts, our selfish actions, and our wandering hearts? Yet God promises never to leave or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). As we pray for patience and cultivate it in our lives, we reflect the love of God into the lives of our children.

- ✓ Many of us already know what areas of life try our patience the most. Begin praying over these areas or times of day.
- Remind yourself of all the ways God is patient with you. Thank God for these in the moments you feel impatient and overwhelmed.

PRAY FOR FLEXIBILITY

"For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Philippians 2:13

As someone who loves routine, motherhood didn't just try my patience – it turned me into an emotional Elastigirl. My career required a certain amount of flexibility, but my boss wasn't calling me four times between 5:00 and 7:00 AM – which is precisely what my daughter did the entire third month. With each child, we must adjust our expectations, routines, and schedules to keep life running - without also running mad!

Lack of order can produce an enormous amount of stress. Stress destroys peace, and that in turn creates an unhealthy family atmosphere. But how do we create order with a needy baby and tired self?

Flexibility.

God gives the wisdom to create a routine based on your family priorities. We may have to rearrange our days to accommodate a sick child, or do the laundry during naptime, or read our favorite book once they go to bed, but by living life with a flexible attitude, we bless our husbands and children with the peace God desires for every family.

Read more about creating a daily routine as a first-time mom on the Resources page.

PRAYER POINTS

- ✓ Pray over your schedule. Are you expecting too much of yourself and your baby in this season? Evaluate what could be changed to give you more space and less stress.
- ✓ Pray for peace in your home. Visit <u>www.womenlivingwell.com</u> for ideas about creating a "haven" in your home.
- ✓ Evaluate your daily routine. Pray over changes that would produce more peace.

PRAY FOR GRATITUDE

"This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Psalm 118:24

Remember Adeline's three-month sleep regression? I had a hard time being grateful for that. In fact, I was anything but grateful to be waking up at 2 AM and every hour after! But at 3 AM in the glider I looked down into her little sleeping face and was convicted of my ingratitude.

She could be taken away in a moment. Some babies are.

When we dwell on our circumstances we tend to forget the blessings hidden within them. Gratitude lifts our eyes to the hand of God, full of gracious gifts, and helps us see the big picture. Giving thanks opens our hearts to love our children in the difficult moments and the dark hours. Grateful people recognize how much God has poured into them and are thus able to pour into others.

PRAYER POINTS

- ✓ Start a gratitude journal or a "gifts" list (read Ann Voskamp's 1000 Gifts for a great study on this topic). Keep it in a basket by your glider or chair and write down what you are grateful for while you feed your baby.
- During those late night feedings, look around the room and think of ten things you can thank God for in that moment. Do this whenever you feel frustrated or upset.

PRAY FOR CONSISTENCY

"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

1 Corinthians 15:58

During that three month regression, I was still sleep training Adeline. Those three weeks she woke multiple times a night I wanted to give up and bury myself in bed. But I persevered, and at the end of the three weeks she was back to her normal sleep schedule, and even doing well for her naps! Consistency is the union of time and diligence; it is a commitment to *do the work*.

I often heard my parents say, "Consistency is key." Follow-through is essential to every area of life – especially motherhood. We can take our example from God Himself. God is the most consistent Person we could ever know. He is faithful to His Word, He does what He says, and He is able to be trusted. As such, He is the perfect Person to teach us commitment and diligence in this journey of parenthood.

I love the above verse from 1 Corinthians 15. There are moments when motherhood feels like a "labor in vain". But we must stand "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord". Motherhood is *the Lord's work*. It is a ministry, a calling, and a mission! As we consistently do this work well and to God's glory, the results will speak for themselves.

PRAYER POINTS

- Ask God to cultivate an ethic of diligence in your character. If you struggle to follow through with things in your daily routine, make a list of problem areas and come up with practical solutions to help you become more consistent.
- ✓ Ask God to help you see the purpose in motherhood when it feels like a "labor in vain".
- ✓ Never underestimate the power of simply *doing the work!*

PRAY FOR WISDOM

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."

James 1:5

The Book of Proverbs talks in depth about wisdom. Wisdom is found in "the fear of the Lord" (Prov. 1:7); wisdom protects us (Prov. 4:6); wisdom builds a house (Prov. 14:1); wisdom blesses those who seek it (Prov. 3:13). God is the wisest of the wise. Wisdom is often defined as "knowledge applied". By seeking Christ, we learn how to apply His Word to our lives.

In the span of life, pregnancy and birth are truly the easy part. Though physically and emotionally demanding, these seasons are but the beginning of a journey we'll walk with our husbands, children, and Lord. The journey will test us. Sometimes it will bring us to our knees. But as we kneel in dependency we find ourselves in a posture of praise, hands open to accept the wisdom God delights to give.

PRAYER POINTS

- ✓ God promises to give wisdom to those who ask. So ask Him! Ask Him to help you apply the knowledge you have received from His Word.
- ✓ If you haven't been in God's Word, set a time today. Wisdom comes from Scripture, so make time for it when you can at bedtime, during naps, or in the morning during breakfast.

CONCLUSION

Christian women are *so strong*. I believe this is partially because we are physically and spiritually equipped to carry out God's life-giving plan. No matter what challenges you face, pregnancy and birth have prepared you for what lies ahead. Women who embrace God's design – realizing the reservoir of strength within themselves – are equipped with a tenacity of spirit the world can only imitate in cheapened form.

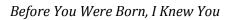
I love what Exodus 1 says about the midwives who delivered Hebrew babies:

"[Pharoah said], "When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live." ¹⁷ But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live. ¹⁸ So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?" ¹⁹ The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife can get to them." ²⁰ So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. ²¹ Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them" (Exodus 1:16-21)

Women who fear the Lord will be praised (Prov. 31:30). But women who fear the Lord are also vigorous with physical, emotional, and spiritual strength (Ex. 1:19). God blesses those who fear Him and exalts women who place faith in His design. You are that woman.

"He makes the barren woman abide in the house as a joyful mother of children. Praise the Lord!"

Psalm 113:9



RESOURCES

Below is a list of books, classes, and websites as you prepare for your baby's arrival. The resources marked with stars are my personal favorites.

Books and Classes:

• For Pregnancy and Health:

- What to Expect When You're Expecting (book and/or app)
- WomanCode by Alisa Vitti*
- o Trim Healthy Mama by Pearl Barrett and Serene Allison*
- o Beautiful Babies by Kristin Michaelis (nutrition guide)
- Bradley Method Birthing Class*
- o Full Circle Birthing Seminar (Christian birthing seminar; limited locations)*
- Centering some hospitals & birth centers offer this small group class for women due in the same month in place of regular monthly visits*

• For Your Marriage:

- Prayers for New Brides by Jennifer Odom White*
- o Romancing Your Husband by Debra White Smith*
- o *The Meaning of Marriage* by Tim Keller

• For Birth:

- o Husband-Coached Childbirth by Dr. Robert A. Bradley*
- o Ina May's Guide to Childbirth by Ina May Garten*
- o Active Birth by Janet Balaskas
- o Supernatural Childbirth by Jackie Weisz
- o Childbirth Without Fear by Grantly Dick-Read

For Baby:

- o BabyWise by Gary Ezzo*
- o What to Expect In the First Year
- o *The Vaccine Book* by Dr. Robert Sears

For Motherhood:

- o Glimpses of Grace by Gloria Furman*
- o 100 Days of Blessing I & II by Nancy Campbell*
- Women Living Well by Courtney Joseph*
- Strong and Kind by Korie Robertson
- o Genesis of a Legacy by Ken Ham
- o *Give Them Grace* by Elyse Fitzpatrick

Websites and Podcasts:

- Lisa Hensley: Why I Quit Saying, "As Long As He's Healthy"
 - o http://www.lisahensley.me/2015/02/26/rare-disease-day-why-i-quit-saying-as-long-as-healthy/
- Cloth Diapering:
 - o Green Mountain Diapers: www.greenmountaindiapers.com
 - o Diaper Jungle: www.diaperjungle.com
- God-Centered Mom Podcast
- Inspired to Action Podcast

VERSES & AFFIRMATIONS

Two days after we moved (and two weeks before my due date) I had the presence of mind to write a bunch of verses on a spiral-bound set of index cards. I read these the next three nights in preparation for labor – with no idea I'd go into labor so soon! I highly recommend writing these verses in a little notebook or, like me, a set of index cards. Read them while you take a bath or before bed. Memorize them and write them on your heart. Put them in your hospital bag! I had my husband read these aloud as I labored.

Psalm 37:24 – I will not be overwhelmed, for the Lord holds my hand.

Exodus 15:2 – The Lord is my strength and my song, He has become my salvation. This is my God, and I will praise Him.

Psalm 18:1-2 – I love you, Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer.

Psalm 28:7 – The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him and I am helped. Therefore my heart rejoices and I praise Him with my song.

Psalm 40:17 – I am afflicted and needy; the Lord thinks of me. You are my help and my deliverer, my God, do not delay.

Psalm 46:1 – God is our refuge and strength; a Helper who is always found in times of trouble. Therefore I will not be afraid... God will help me when morning dawns.

Isaiah 40:29-31 – God never grows faint or weary... He gives strength to weary and strengthens the powerless... Those who trust Him will find renewed strength – they will rise up on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary – they will walk and not faint.

Psalm 59:16 – As for me, I will sing about your power. Each morning I will sing with joy about your unfailing love. For you have been my refuge, a place of safety when I am in distress.

Zechariah 4:6 – Not by strength or by might, but my Spirit, says the Lord.

Ephesians 6:10 – Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength.

Hebrews 12:11-12 – No trial is enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the fruit of peace... to those who persevere through it. Therefore, strengthen your tired hands and weakened knees, and make straight paths for your feet.

Psalm 37:20 – We wait for the Lord, for He is our Help and our Shield.

1 Samuel 7:12 – Samuel took a stone and set it upright... He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the Lord has helped me."

Psalm 56:3-4 – When I am afraid I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise; in God I trust, I will not fear. What can {pain} do to me?

Psalm 55:22 – Cast your burden on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be shaken.

Psalm 41:3,10 – The Lord sustains me on my bed; you will heal me on the bed where I lie... You, Lord, be gracious to me and raise me up.

Psalm 38:21-22 – Lord, do not abandon me; my God, do not be far from me. Hurry to help me, Lord my Savior.

Proverbs 18:1 – The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe.

Psalm 24:8 – Who is this King of Glory? The Lord, strong and mighty; the Lord, mighty in this battle.

Psalm 34:4 – I sought the Lord and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fear.

Psalm 139:13-16 – God created [your baby's] inmost being; He knit her together inside you. All her days are ordained, written in His book before any came to be.

Psalm 22:9-10 {paraphrase} – He is taking your baby out of your womb; from this day forward He will be her God.

Isaiah 54:17 – Nothing coming against you shall prosper; everything that rises against you you shall condemn. This is your heritage as a servant of the Lord.

2 Chronicles 20:17 – You do not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf.

Acts 26:22 – To this point I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand.

Psalm 73:28 – But as for me, the nearness of God is my good.

1 John 4:18 – There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.

Psalm 23:4 – Even in the darkest valley I have no fear, for you are with me.

Isaiah 41:10 – Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will hold onto you with my righteous right hand.

Jeremiah 1:5 - Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

Affirmations:

Visit my Pinterest baby board for some cute printable affirmations: Pinterest handle - @phyliciadelta

With every contraction I come closer to holding my baby.

Every contraction moves the baby down. I am making progress!

God's perfect peace keeps my body functioning perfectly for delivery.

God's Holy Spirit is present right now, in this room, with me.

I must only endure one contraction at a time. I can handle anything for sixty seconds!

I will welcome each contraction by completely relaxing. This helps the baby move.

I am working with my body every time I relax into the surge. I will relax; I will not resist it.

The stronger the contraction, the more I relax.

Listen to your body, exit fear, and allow God's design to work.

I am not escaping the "bad" but embracing the GOOD. Labor is a GOOD thing. My baby is getting closer every minute!

My job is to stay in peace, rest in God's presence, and allow my body to do what God designed it to do.