

Lesson 11

Pregnancy and Childbirth

I. Introduction

Pregnancy and childbirth are major season of transition and change in the life of a family. The goal of this lesson is to equip ministers to pastor couples (not just women) through pregnancy and child-birth and provide support where necessary.

A Biblical View of Children and Parenting

1. Children are a blessing from the Lord

"Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth."

Psa 127:3-4

"Children's children are the crown of old men, and the glory of children is their father."

Pro 17:6

2. The heart of a Godly parent is one that lays up an inheritance for his children

"A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous."

Pro 13:22

3. It is the responsibility of the parent(s) to train and disciple their child(ren).

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

Pro 22:6

4. Jesus, our example, set time aside to minister to and be with children

"Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Mat 19:13-14

II. Pregnancy

- The emotional and physical health of the pregnant mother is important as it will impact on the unborn child: vitamins; supplements; gynae checkups; spiritual support and prayer support from those close is NB.
- The child will absorb negative emotions – don't want to pass on rejection, etc.
- Important to craft prayers over your child. Be sensitive to God concerning the specific destiny and calling of this child. Craft prayers around it.
- Be prayerfully considering names, taking into account the sex of the baby and what God is saying about the child.

When pastors minister to people pregnant they need to consider:

- Circumstances of the birth eg single parent. Is there shame? Minister to that. Is there fear that they won't have help or support? Is there anger at the child because the child is seen as the cause of their life slowing down? Do both parents want the baby? Had they considered aborting? Is one of the parents (maybe the father of the child) irresponsible and disowning the child. Is there certainty of paternity? Even with married couples who have had kids before. They may have another at a time when they were not planning to do so. If they were taking precautions it might be a case of emphasizing the God factor in timing.
- Where is the couple going to live? Often with having a child, parents feel under pressure to move houses or buy bigger cars and this often requires money.
- Have an approach to shepherding pregnancy by asking questions and getting into their world.
- Who will be the care-giver?
- Is the mother a working mom? Discuss issues around maternity leave, paid or unpaid? Will she return to work? Who will look after the child.

A. Common fears

1. Husband

- Can I provide? Can I afford the baby? Esp. if the pg has been difficult with lots of unexpected scans, etc. Also can be exacerbated by the people around if they are full of fear

Don't go by the hype of what everyone is saying but come up with a budget that is based on facts.

- Will I pass out during delivery?
- Will my wife love the baby more than me? Will she become more of a mother than a lover? - Will our sex life ever return to normal?

You may need to give her a legitimate reason to come away from her babies. Minister to her femininity. Some women haven't felt attractive for a few months. Show her that you desire her and she is desirable to you.

There are different types of love.

- Will this baby take over my wife's passion?
- Who is this woman? Will I ever get my wife back? (hormonal changes)
- Am I ready to move into adulthood? For many men the mental transition into adulthood is not marriage, it's the responsibility of having children.
- Will I have no more fun? There will be other types of fun. It may look different. Hobbies may have to change (can't play golf all week).
- Will I be tied down? Yes. To some extent, but it will be a spacious place.
- Will I be able to protect the baby?
- Will I be able to work and still have time for a child(ren)?

Do your work and when you come home leave it there. Make sure you have boundaries and know when to come home. May have to change routine so that home coming is consistent time.

- Will I be a good father?

Mentorship; watch how others do it; realise that there are multiple ways of doing things and you don't have to be your day or someone else.

Realise that you are the one who has been uniquely called to father that child

- Will I be able to connect with the baby? Don't underestimate your part. Your voice, your presence, etc. Make a decision that you won't feel useless.

2. Wife

- Will I ever lose this excess weight?
- Will I be a good mom?
- Will I know what to do?
- Will my life change forever?
- Will my husband provide?
- Will I be able to cope?

B. Common strategies of the enemy during pregnancy

Depending on the personalities, natures, weaknesses, insecurities of the couple, the enemy can use different things. These are very common ones:

- Misunderstandings around sex. Sex will most likely be happening less. Especially if there are already children around. This is not abnormal.
- Misunderstandings around the fluctuating moods and seemingly irrational behaviour of the pregnant woman. The hormones of a pregnant woman are very different from a woman who isn't pregnant. She will possibly be emotional at times. This passes. (but only a while after birth). Mother's shouldn't use this as an excuse for flesh to manifest.

C. Preparation for childbirth

- Encourage the parent(s) to attend antenatal classes.
- Prepare meals in advance and freeze where possible for after baby has arrived.
- Do all major grocery shops beforehand.
- Make sure you will have enough toiletries and nappies for the first 6 weeks or so.
- Determine if the couple would like dinners to be arranged for them for the first week or two after birth. Help draw up a roster for this. This is especially helpful if the mother had a caesarean section and also if she does not have any family member coming to help her at home after the birth.
- Encourage the parents-to-be to discuss boundaries concerning parents and parents-in-law coming to stay. Don't have to be fair.
- Parents need to prepare themselves with regards to the gender of the child and accept the child's interests instead of forcing something else onto them.

III. Birth and Beyond

A. Birth to Two Weeks

This is a period of major adjustment, and can sometimes be an intimidating process for first time parents. Coping with the physical after-effects of childbirth (natural or caesarean section), producing adequate breast milk, as well as learning to get by with much less sleep all begin to take their toll. Each new day may present a new set of questions and concerns and some parents may feel quite overwhelmed at this stage.

The heart of pastoral help should be to affirm and encourage confidence in the new parents and their abilities with their new baby.

1. Hospital visits
Gender sensitivities

2. Visitations and Meals

It is very important that visitors, pastoral or other, are sensitive to the needs of the couple at this point. Yes, it may be tradition to visit in the first few days after birth, but it is important to check with the parents when will suit them.

When visiting or dropping off meals, be sensitive concerning:

- Duration of visit, mom may be very tired
- Food - It is quite common that breastfeeding moms have to avoid foods such as onions, garlic, sulphurous vegetables (broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, etc., orange juice, chocolate, etc.). This is to alleviate gas and consequent stomach cramps in the new-born
- Etc. If in doubt ask.
- Remember the uniqueness of each and every women. We are all different! Some will experience cabin fever, others will appreciate their space. When you want to serve and bless someone, you have to find out what will bless them and how to serve them best.

3. Husbands

- Play a buffer role with visitors and family.
- Need to ask wife what their needs are. Domestic help?

4. Sensitivities around new born babies

- Washing of hands
- No kissing and heavy breathing over new born babies
- Don't visit with your own children!
- Be sensitive
- Up till 6 weeks not supposed to go into v public places.

5. Encourage the perusing of balanced books to assist new born mothers understand the baby's sensory world, feeding schedules, how many nappies per day, etc.

6. Crafted prayers.

The role of prayer at this life stage.

Develop some powerful crafted prayers to pray for child(ren) and also for self as a parent.

B. Two Weeks Old and Beyond

1. Bonding

- Baby needs to bond to mom and dad but ok to get relatives and other help to come in to help with the daily routine.

- The baby is yours and your husband's. It's important to establish your way, using the basic principles gleaned from others and different places. Let each other do what needs to be done to bond. If it is not harming the baby then it is ok. Husbands and wives should be gracious to each other. Allow the other to learn as well.
- Grandparents and other people don't need to always dictate/control how things should be done as it can cripple the dynamic between mother, baby and father. Each parent will have a unique way of doing things and styles of doing things.
- Parents should be gracious with themselves and realise that every baby is different. Need to give mother, father and baby time to learn each other.

2. Speak about Dedication

Remember that dedication of a baby is dedicating the baby and also parents to raise the child in the ways of the Lord. Parents should make a commitment to raise the child not just as a Christian but to protect their moral innocence (by doing things like parental blocks on TV; watching over their children). It's a commitment by the parents not only prepare the child but to also to protect the child.

3. Feeding, sleeping and routine -

- Depending on the philosophy of parenting (routine or attachment parenting) this may differ.
- "methods are many principles are few, methods many vary but principles never do" Kevin Connor.
- Flexible routine is a good route to go.
- Feeding and demand feeding

4. Support for tired moms

Mom can be encouraged along the following lines:

- Mom naps when baby naps. We can take on a whole new personality when tired from being up night after night.
- Establish nap boundaries if other kids are already around.
- Ask for help when it is needed. We can't do it all alone!
- Offer to help, or organize help to give the mom a break, or to give mom and dad some bonding time.
- People like to help and be used in a purposeful way. Ask and let them but guide them in the ways they can help. Use your support system and you will see who are there for you. Let others take your other children where they can do fun things.

Very good books to recommend:

Baby Sense – Megan Faure and Ann Richardson

On becoming baby wise - Garry Ezzo.

IV. Conclusion

Parenting is one of the greatest honours we have on earth. It is a joyful and fulfilling privilege to be given a life to steward and disciple, love, cherish, shape and train. It is a responsibility to have so much influence over another's life, not just temporally but for eternity (the choices we make and how we relate to them will impact them for the rest of their lives). It is also a daunting task, one in which we need God's wisdom in every different stage of growth. There is no cookie cut single answer that will fit every child, parent or situation. However, there are Biblical principles, philosophies and attitudes that we need to draw from in our roles of parenting and assisting others in the same. We are the stewards of these children, we have them for now.