

“Gloria Furman has a disarming way of connecting the most concrete stuff of our lives to the most glorious truth of the gospel. She’s doing it again here, as she peers into the realities of pregnancy and childbirth through the windows of Scripture. This book opens the windows wide. We do well to ponder this theme, of which God keeps reminding us in all kinds of painful and marvelous ways.”

Kathleen Nielson, speaker; coeditor, *Word-Filled Women’s Ministry and Resurrection Life in a World of Suffering*

“Gloria Furman has written devotions that will transform the way we view pregnancy from conception to birth and beyond. *Labor with Hope* magnifies the glory of Christ and all that he has done, and helps us fix our eyes on the one who gives eternal life.”

Trillia Newbell, author, *If God Is for Us; Fear and Faith, and God’s Very Good Idea*

“When Gloria Furman speaks about motherhood, I always listen. In *Labor with Hope*, Furman shows us how ‘every aspect of childbirth fuels our worship of Jesus,’ beautifully unpacking that statement as she takes us on a journey through Scripture, demonstrating how the birth pain metaphor illustrates God’s work in us. Each chapter in this meaningful devotional explores a different aspect of this mystery, leading the reader to a fuller understanding of our hope in Christ and the God who labors over us.”

Vaneetha Rendall Risner, author, *The Scars That Have Shaped Me: How God Meets Us in Suffering*

“Every part of life belongs to God, even the parts when we’re trying to combat the never-ending heartburn, struggling to find that elusive comfortable position, or panting and pushing to birth the long-awaited new addition to God’s world. My dear friend (and mother of four) Gloria Furman has crafted beautiful meditations for you to ponder as you labor through your pregnancy and wonder, ‘Why is this like it is?’ Dear sister, this book will help you understand what’s happening and why, and will give you hope for future days of joy in God’s good providence. I heartily recommend it!”

Elyse Fitzpatrick, coauthor, *Give Them Grace*

“In stark contrast to many of the childbirth books on shelves today, *Labor with Hope* offers gospel freedom from the burdens and guilt that often surround labor and delivery. With short, easy-to-read devotionals, Gloria Furman unpacks the spiritual realities of childbirth, offering hope and joy to women who pick up this book.”

Laura Wifler, Cofounder, Risen Motherhood

“Sin has blurred our vision of motherhood. In this book, Gloria Furman invites us to look through a gospel telescope that helps us focus our blurred, painful, and mundane perspective of pregnancy into a sharp, eternal, and glorious reality.”

Betsy Gómez, Blogger, Revive Our Hearts Hispanic Outreach

Labor with Hope

Other Crossway Books by Gloria Furman

Alive in Him

Glimpses of Grace

Joyfully Spreading the Word, coeditor

Missional Motherhood

The Pastor's Wife

Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full

Word-Filled Women's Ministry, coeditor

GLORIA FURMAN

WITH JESSE SCHEUMANN

Labor
with
Hope

GOSPEL MEDITATIONS ON PREGNANCY,
CHILDBIRTH, AND MOTHERHOOD

 CROSSWAY®

WHEATON, ILLINOIS

Labor with Hope: Gospel Meditations on Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Motherhood

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Published by Crossway
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover design: Crystal Courtney

First printing 2019

Printed in the United States of America

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Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4335-6307-2

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-6310-2

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-6308-9

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-6309-6

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Furman, Gloria, 1980– author.

Title: Labor with hope : Gospel meditations on pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood / Gloria Furman with Jesse Scheumann.

Description: Wheaton : Crossway, 2019. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018036644 (print) | LCCN 2018054102 (ebook) | ISBN 9781433563089 (pdf) | ISBN 9781433563096 (mobi) | ISBN 9781433563102 (epub) | ISBN 9781433563072 (hc)

Subjects: LCSH: Pregnant women—Religious life. | Pregnancy—Religious aspects—Christianity—Meditations. | Childbirth—Religious aspects—Christianity—Meditations. | Motherhood—Religious aspects—Christianity—Meditations. | Bible—Meditations.

Classification: LCC BV4529.18 (ebook) | LCC BV4529.18 .F864 2019 (print) | DDC 248.8/431—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018036644>

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

LB 29 28 27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of all mankind.

Job 12:10

To Kim B. and Kris L., heroes of mine whose labor
with hope in the desert is producing fruit beyond
what they could ask or imagine. —G. F.

To my mother, Joyce, who tasted the
curse that I might see life.

To my wife, Merissa, who bore the burden of
childbearing that I might hold our precious babies.

To my children—Rebekah, Peter, and Abigail: may you know
and embrace the sufferings of Christ, being born again. —J. S.

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Acknowledgments

Many people supported me throughout the labor of publishing this book. From the very beginning stages to the end, my husband, Dave, was of great encouragement to me. As I write in the author's note, *Labor with Hope* would not and could not have been written without the expertise of Jesse Scheumann and his wife, Merissa. I'm deeply grateful, as ever, to the team at Crossway for their support of this project and their tireless efforts in spreading the gospel to all nations. Several friends in particular provided the fuel of enthusiasm and prayer over the years: Katie Jennings, Kathleen Nielson, Bev Berrus, Caroline Cobb, Victoria Wilson, and Shelley Reinhart. I'm thankful for Andrew Wolgemuth's consistent encouragement and careful guidance. —*Gloria Furman*

I would like to thank all of the faculty at Bethlehem College and Seminary, who equipped me to read the Bible more carefully and responsibly. I especially thank Jason DeRouchie, who supervised my thesis on birth pain. Your humility, rigor, and godly passion have left an indelible mark. I thank my co-author, Gloria Furman, for penning these theological truths

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for an audience I never could have reached on my own. Finally, thank you to Crossway for taking on an unexplored topic with an unconventional coauthorship. In all God is preeminent. —*Jesse Scheumann*

Author's Note

Books are like babies in many ways.

Writers often remark on how the work of writing a book carries with it an anticipation and labor that is not dissimilar to that which accompanies pregnancy and birth.

In keeping with this metaphor, it is appropriate to ask how a book was born. You have the conception of an idea for a book, and there's the test to confirm whether or not a publisher will publish it. The writer must wait for a period of time, and eventually a line appears in one's inbox—positive or negative—to announce whether or not there is a book that is going to be born.

Then the real fun (and periodic nausea) begins. Writers labor over their outlines and chapters and sentences and words and punctuation marks. Eventually the writer reaches the end of this literary gestation period and transitions to the stage where one is no longer certain one wants to write a book after all. Enter the literary agent, who cheers for you to “Write! Write!” and reminds you that all of the discomfort is worth it. Sometimes the book is born early, to the editor's delightful surprise, and other times the overdue book must be induced. Either way, at some point an expert editorial team receives your book, cleans

it up a bit, wraps it up, and hands it back to you. All the while, the marketing team busily writes book birth announcements, and everyone prays thankful prayers and asks the Lord to make this book a blessing to all who read it.

So, how was *Labor with Hope* born? I had been reading about the birth pain metaphor in Scripture and toying around with the idea of doing my PhD on it so I could have an excuse to research this metaphor even more. And then in 2014 I wrote a brief blog post mentioning some of the passages I noticed in Scripture. A few days later I received an email from someone who read my blog about birth pain because a friend of his sent it to him. Jesse Scheumann said that he had just defended his ThM thesis on the subject at hand, calling it “A Biblical Theology of Birth Pain,” and would I like to read a copy of it?

Well, anything that is named “a biblical theology of” sounds interesting already, and this topic in particular? Yes, sir, of course I’d like to read your thesis.

Jesse sent me his thesis along with the encouragement to consider using his academic work to help me write a popular-level book on a biblical theology of birth pain. I took this idea of writing a book seriously because I love the gospel hope in this subject and think it is great fuel for worship. It also has tremendous evangelistic potential for our everyday conversations about Jesus and what he has done.

I thought about this topic off and on for a long time, and though I did not end up starting my PhD, the book idea never went away. All along this journey, Jesse has generously allowed me to use his comprehensive academic work *and* helped tremendously in the architectural phase of the chapter outlines. He spent hours editing what I’ve written.

And so now, a book is born. I wrote in the original proposal that I thought I could have the manuscript delivered to the

publisher within nine months, just to be punny. But like some babies, this one was such a great labor to write that it needed to be induced in the last month.

That the Bible offers meaning and hope in our labor and childbirth does not mean that any preferences for delivery are right or wrong. Nor does our hope in Christ mean that we should dismiss the gift of modern medical care. Please read this book for its intended purpose—as a devotional—and regularly consult your physician for questions about care in pregnancy and childbirth.

I am happy to offer to you *Labor with Hope: Gospel Meditations on Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Motherhood*, and pray that God uses it to point you to his Son, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Introduction

Even the midwives were charmed. They don't often witness a birth in which the baby begins to cry before she is fully born. As a volunteer birth doula, this particular scenario was a first for me. Those bleating, newborn cries were music to her mother's ears while she waited for the next big contraction to help birth the baby's shoulders and the rest of her body. The labor had been challenging, and baby's cries helped to give mom the focus and hope she needed to push with everything she had. The big wave came, and as arms reached to catch the baby and the mother's groans turned to laughter, a child was born. Praise God for sustaining life and giving new life!

Chatting about the work they had ahead of them with the laboring woman down the hall, the midwives started to tidy up the delivery room. Traffic hummed and headlights twinkled through the curtains from the busy highway just outside. Meanwhile, the mom and dad were in awe, saying thank you to the Lord and gazing into their daughter's eyes. As she nursed her minutes-old daughter, my friend marveled at God's gentle care: "You'll have the grace you need when you need it." *Amen, sister.* I took an uneventful taxi ride home at two in the morning and crawled into bed. When I woke, my eyes smarted with a

tiny fraction of the fresh fatigue the growing family must have been feeling.

Childbirth never gets old. Whether I was the laboring mother with my four children or I am the doula at another mother's side, I weep every time. Childbirth is at the same time a painful trial and a matchless joy, a display of weakness and a feat of strength, a shadow and a reality. Even those who have not given birth can praise God for the fact that our own mothers tasted death in order to give us life. Indeed, God has shown us great mercy.

You may be asking a variety of questions right now—questions regarding the trivial and the concerning as well as the temporary and the eternal. *Is it normal to feel this way? Why are pregnancy and childbirth the way they are? Why is it all so profound? So common? So elusive? So exhausting and scary? So thrilling and hopeful? What will we name the baby? How can two little lines on a pregnancy test evoke our emotions the way they do?*

Just like everything else in life, we want our consideration of pregnancy and birth to be consistent with reality. Sometimes the way we think and feel about pregnancy and birth are more reflections of our misconceptions, cultural values, personal preferences, or even overt lies from the pit of hell. But no one wants to form opinions or make decisions based on false information. We desire to live in the light of truth.

Our bookstores, Internet forums, and colloquial sayings are replete with advice and knowledge for mothers concerning pregnancy and birth. Insofar as they correspond with reality, these resources can be helpful. After all, who doesn't love to see an illustration of how big the baby is in utero as compared to an eggplant? Finding practical tips is like picking up seashells

on a beach, but the jewels of wisdom we need for our spiritual well-being can only be mined from God's Word.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus, a man who was born of a virgin (yet is the uncreated Son of God), spoke of himself using these words: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). What does this man have to do with how we think about pregnancy and childbirth?

In *Labor with Hope* we will see how Jesus has everything to do with everything, including our spiritual nourishment in pregnancy and childbirth. We will walk together and examine the treasures we find in God's Word concerning many related topics—pregnancy, infertility, miscarriage, birth pain, new physical life—and how these common experiences point us to eternal realities.

At times our pace will be quick, but on some themes we will take our time so you can catch your breath a bit (after all, pregnancy can make one winded!). We'll go back and forth in the Bible's storyline, meditating on the concept of laboring with hope. Worship was my goal in writing this devotional book, and it remains my hope and prayer for readers. "Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!" (Ps. 34:3). Let's marvel together at the God who created life and grants us new life in his Son.



In the Image of God He Created Them

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:26–27

“It was a dark and stormy night. Then your mother announced, ‘The baby is coming!’” And so begins my own birth story in which my parents had to drive across a bridge to reach the hospital while a snowstorm was brewing (we made it).

Your birth story is no doubt different than mine. After all, the end result of the birth story is *you*, a unique human being. There is a birth story we all share, however. It's the story of the birth of mankind. It starts like this . . .

Once upon a time, before there was time, there was God.

Independent of everything and everyone—God exists. In perfect holiness, diversity, and love, the triune God lives forever.

And then, in the beginning, God created everything you can see and everything you can't see . . . out of nothing. We read the story of creation in Genesis 1. God spoke things into existence: "Let there be . . ." He made the earth, space, time, light, land, and plants. And then he filled it all in—sun, moon, stars, sea and flying creatures, and land animals. It was all good.

Then the Creator did something different. With intimate care and attention, he "formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature" (Gen. 2:7). But a helper fit for the man was not found among everything God had made. "So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man" (Gen. 2:21–22). When the man awoke and saw her, the man burst into song:

This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man. (Gen. 2:23)

There they were—two complementary imagers of equal dignity and value—distinctly designed to fit together in unity with a procreative purpose (Mal. 2:15). God saw everything that he had made, and it was *very* good. From the outside in, God

created and filled the cosmos, and the epitome of his creative work was his image bearers—man and woman.

A Wonder-Full Thought

Whether you are a brand-new mother or a mother of twelve, it is astonishing that God would grow another one (or more!) of his image bearers in your womb. Though the child is made up of your DNA and bears resemblance to you, he or she is foremost an image bearer of the triune God. As are you.

Pause for a minute to notice the swirling arcs on your fingers. Be conscious of your lungs filling with air, your heart pumping blood through your blood vessels, and your brain controlling your body's functions (even as you sleep). Your life is no accident. Someone is purposefully holding you together (Col. 1:17). Both you and your unborn child belong to the Lord, you are his imagers, and you exist for his glory. As God's imagers we have the unparalleled privilege and responsibility of representing him to the watching cosmos in every capacity he has designed for us.

I know all of this can be hard to understand on a Thursday afternoon. You've got a dozen things on your mind right now, and besides, God is infinite and his ways are above our ways. How can humans think about such things? After all, we are merely physical creatures who are earthbound in our limited comprehension. *But is that all we are?*

Could it be that the Creator of all things had something wonderful in his mind when he made man and woman? Something that shows us how glorious *he* is? God could have charged the six-winged seraphim with representing him to the watching cosmos, yet he fashioned a man out of dust and a woman from the man's rib. Our mammalian lungs could have just simply filled with oxygen like those in the animal realm, yet the Lord

chose to breathe into the man his breath of life. Something profound is going on here—something beyond what we can see with the retinas and corneas in our eyes. We would do well to take more time to think about such things, following the dust in the sunbeams up to the sun.

All-You-Can-Eat Truth

Where else can we go to learn about the One for whom we were made but to God's very Word? Through God's gift of medicine, a world of knowledge about fertility, pregnancy, and childbirth is at our disposal to help us nurture both our own bodies and those blooming within our wombs. But when we are looking for spiritual nourishment, we have to dig into the Bible.

And so that's where we will continue to look. The Bible is a buffet with plenty of soul food for those who are eating for two. As the Lord wills, I will use the pages that follow to explain how the entire human experience of childbirth is a signpost for overwhelming joy and realities that will endure forever.