

## The changing scenes of life

# *Pregnancy: expectations, preparations and Scriptural lessons*

*This series, scattered throughout the pages of the Special Issue, looks at the various stages of child development, and the parenting skills and attitudes that may be required to navigate them. In this first article Shaun and Linda Maher (Stirling, UK) consider pregnancy and the months of preparation before the child is born.*

**B**ECOMING PREGNANT for the first time can open up a whole new range of emotions and experiences that we are not necessarily prepared for. In Western society most of us are far removed from the harsh realities of life most of the time. There are many layers of protection that distract us from the fact that we are frail creatures, wholly dependent upon the benevolence of our heavenly Father for our continued existence. However, there are experiences in life that strip away all those layers and expose us to this reality. Pregnancy can be one of these experiences.

### **Some issues to consider before trying to start a family**

- Why do we want children?
- What are our attitudes towards child-rearing and discipline?
- How would we cope with a child with a disability or learning difficulties?
- What would we do if we could not have children?
- How will having children affect our jobs?

### **Suffering and joy**

The first specific reference to childbearing in Scripture is found in the curse on Eve (Gen. 3:16). The words "pain" and "sorrow" (NKJV) figure prominently in this passage in describing the physical experience of pregnancy. The Hebrew word rendered "conception" here includes the entire pregnancy, and "bring forth" can be un-

derstood to mean both the beginning and the end of the process.

Historically there has been a high mortality rate associated with childbirth, and it is only in the last hundred years or so that better nutrition, hygiene and medical care have reduced this. A woman will, almost without exception, experience some kind of pain or unpleasantness during

the course of her pregnancy, and this can range from morning sickness and growing pains to the intense pain of labour contractions. The pain and suffering associated with pregnancy is inextricably linked with sin and the curse.

Having said all that, there is also a very significant element of joy and happiness associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Our Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul speak of this human experience and use it to illustrate a true perspective on the trials and sorrow of this life compared with the joyous prospect of the Kingdom age. In this light we can view pregnancy as a positive experience that can bring us closer to God and give us some insight into His character. Once we have prayerfully considered the prospect of parenthood, it is important to realise that some of the experiences that follow may be very positive, and others may leave us in the depths of despair.

Having children together is a wonderful way for a man and a woman to express their love for one another. There is often a strong desire between a husband and wife to have children. It seems like a natural thing to do with the person you love, and within the bounds of the instruction

### **Motives for having children**

#### **Favourable:**

- An expression of love
- To produce 'godly offspring'

#### **Unfavourable:**

- To try and improve a failing relationship

given to us in God's Word it is indeed the way He intended things to be.

Apart from being an expression of love, there is also a statement in Scripture that our heavenly Father desires "godly offspring" (Mal. 2:15, NKJV). God-fearing parents have a responsibility to have their children "under control with all dignity" (1 Tim. 3:4, NASB), as is fitting for followers of the Lord Jesus. The ultimate objective is that a child might grow up with a contrite, humble heart, receptive to the call of the gospel. Therefore attitude and strategy toward ecclesial life, family routine and discipline is something that should be discussed before the birth of a child.

### Difficulties and problems

While considering the expectations of pregnancy, it is worth mentioning the wrong idea that having children will improve a struggling relationship. Having children in the house, especially a new baby, brings additional challenges and demands to a relationship: less time for one another; less time to sit and read God's Word together; less time for a little self-indulgence; and less time to get to meetings and enjoy fellowship. The one very important characteristic that a parent will have ample opportunity to develop is that of self-sacrifice, and if that is then carried into all other relationships, the outcome can only be constructive.

#### Infertility in the Bible

- Genesis 25:21
- Genesis 29:31
- Genesis 30:22,23
- Judges 13:2,3
- 1 Samuel 1:5,6
- Psalm 113:9
- Luke 1:36

Whilst a pregnancy is an exciting time, it can often be fraught with difficulty. Problems in conception or in carrying a baby to full term are not uncommon. The issue of infertility looms large in the pages of Scripture, and without doubt we are shown that this is something that is not down to time and chance, but very much in the hands of God. Modern medicine offers various treatments for infertility, and the lengths to which a couple may be willing to go in terms of medical help is a personal decision. Regardless of the degree to which medical science is employed, we should

remember that the ultimate outcome remains in God's hands.

Children are described in Scripture as a gift from God, but sometimes little gifts come as big surprises! Depending on circumstances, an unplanned pregnancy can throw life into turmoil. Feelings of helplessness and despair, inability to cope with what may follow, and concern about the financial implications, can be overwhelming. For those who like to plan things and to be in control, an event such as this can be challenging. However, we must remember that every life is a blessing from God, and the trials and tribulations of this life mould our character and shape us for our future role. Like the child being disciplined, we may not always understand why things have to be the way they are, but we must put our trust in the wisdom and love of our Father.

### As the baby develops

The first few weeks of pregnancy can feel very strange, and the reality of the situation can take time to sink in. A range of different feelings can be experienced, ranging from unusual tiredness to severe nausea and vomiting. Often it is not until the first scan that it really hits home that a new life has begun within us. This can be a truly amazing experience, to see a new God-given life and to realise that it is entirely dependent upon you. Physical preparation is therefore important too. Our bodies are not our own, they belong to God and should be treated as such. It is important to give careful consideration to diet, and avoid exposure to substances that can be harmful. Some pregnancies don't continue beyond the first few months, and others don't end in the way we may want or expect. These sad experiences remind us of the frailty of life, the fine balance that exists and our need to put our trust in our heavenly Father's purpose.

The first feelings of movement are very exciting, and confirm the baby's development. We may think of how Mary must have felt when she reached this stage in her pregnancy. This would have reinforced the fact that the words the Angel Gabriel had spoken to her were being fulfilled. She was indeed going to be the mother of God's only begotten Son. She must have been a remarkable woman.

As her body grows and changes, a mother is reminded of the need to make preparations, and to plan ahead for the arrival. This mirrors our spiritual life, where we are in a state of 'pregnancy'; in fact the whole creation is in a state

of expectancy, waiting for the birth of “the sons of God” (Rom. 8:19). This process is happening in miniature within each of us (v. 23) until that new creature is fully developed and ready to be delivered. We have time to prepare and grow, nourished by God’s Word, remembering that time is marching on and the day of the birth is approaching. Are we ready for the arrival of the King and our full deliverance?

As the baby gets bigger the mother becomes more uncomfortable and tired. Those in this position cannot imagine first time round just how exhausting it is to have a new baby in the home. Nothing can prepare us for this, but the time we have during pregnancy should be used to prepare ourselves spiritually so that there are some reserves during what will be a challenging period of life.

#### **Keeping spiritually healthy**

As brothers and sisters in Christ it is essential for our spiritual health that we spend time reading God’s Word, praying and in fellowship with others of like mind. The ability to do these things will not normally be affected during pregnancy, but certainly will be once the baby arrives, especially in the first few months. This being the case, it is important during pregnancy to plan ahead and minimise the impact of this by thinking of ways to create time to get some spiritual food, pray and meet with other brothers and sisters.

Sharing attendance between husband and wife at evening meetings and Bible Class is a good start, although this may not be possible during the early months if the new baby is being breast-fed. A daytime reading group maybe something that others in your ecclesia would find beneficial.

#### **Strategies to help compensate for tiredness, lack of time and fellowship:**

- Recordings of Bible talks
- Feeding back to one another
- Sharing attendance at meetings
- Ecclesial parent and toddler group
- Daytime Bible reading group

Setting time aside for prayer and reading can be a difficult challenge too. Recorded Bible readings or the use of some web-based reading aids may help to stimulate a tired mind or fit in with the feeding régime of a new baby. Most importantly, it is essential that husbands and wives work as a team during this period, and indeed throughout the child’s life, supporting one another spiritually as well as physically.

Everyone knows that when a woman is pregnant changes begin, and her body begins to show the evidence of the pregnancy. This typifies beautifully the process at work in the disciple. Through our contact with God’s Word and association with our brothers and sisters, changes in our way of life become evident. Perhaps to start with this is just in small ways that only we notice, as with the first feelings of the baby moving and growing within the womb.

In time you can see that a woman is pregnant, and this typifies our spiritual growth. The result of the spiritual pregnancy in us will be evident as the spirit of Christ grows in our life and bears fruit. Just as a father longs to see his child finally born after waiting so long during his wife’s pregnancy, so God desires to see us perfected, fully developed, and born into the joy and everlasting glory of His Kingdom.

#### ***Some Bible passages linking pregnancy and childbirth with spiritual life***

“Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children. Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the LORD: shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb? saith thy God” (Isa. 66:8,9).

“A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you” (Jno. 16:21,22).

“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:22,23).