



PRAYER JOURNEY INTO PARENTHOOD

Claire Daniel

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----- *Foreword* -----

Last week I went to my godson's confirmation service. It took place within the ancient, cool walls of Salisbury's stunning cathedral. Right at the heart of the building, in contrast to its traditional surroundings, sits a contemporary font, which was installed in 2008. Unusually, the waters in this font have been designed to sit perfectly still across the water's surface, with mini fountains flowing from each of its four corners.

As I walked around the beautiful structure, my very pregnant body reflected back at me in the glasslike water, I was struck once again by the promise of Isaiah 43:2, inscribed around the font's edge: 'When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you' (NIV).

When Claire asked me to write a foreword for this book, she was unaware that I was pregnant with our third child. Once again I am navigating the sometimes literally sick-making and at other times heart-bustingly joyful open waters of pregnancy, with childbirth and the excitement of meeting our newest family member just weeks away.

There's nothing quite like pregnancy to put your faith to the test. A life-changing, history-altering event takes place within your own body for a whole nine months—yet it is entirely outside your control and entirely unseen (apart from the bump and the selection of strange pregnancy symptoms that, admittedly, do tend to give the game away).

Then there's the birth—transformative, all-encompassing, mind-blowing—which takes place on a day, sometimes in a place and often in a way almost entirely outside your control.

Beyond this lie the wonderful days of starting to get to know the unique person with whom God has gifted you, who you have carried faithfully for months. And yet, mixed in with the wonder and praise for this miracle come the sleepless nights, anxiety and sometimes even depression.



The presence of God, real communication with him through prayer and the power of his Spirit at work in our everyday lives are needed like never before.

It's in your quest for a life-giving, sustaining relationship with Jesus, through this season of your life, that this book will help you. Claire has thoughtfully drawn together relevant Bible verses and prayers, alongside her own honest, real and thoughtful reflections on becoming a mum of two. Becoming a parent was not an easy journey for Claire and her husband, and she has graciously and sensitively woven her story and learning into the words on these pages.

I commend this book to you and pray it will touch your heart as it has touched mine. Whatever lies ahead for you and your family, may you remember the promise of Isaiah 43:2—that as you pass through the waters, our faithful God will be with you. He will never let the waters overwhelm you.

Lucinda van der Hart
Journalist and editor

----- *Introduction* -----

The road to parenthood may be far from straight. For many couples, it is fraught with difficulty, uncertainty and a good deal of heartbreak. The journey to that positive pregnancy test result alone can be a long and complicated one, with plenty of bumps in the road, yet this is just the beginning of the story. For some, there might be a very different path to travel, one that leads to fostering or adoptive parenthood.

Our own journey into parenthood was not straightforward. We went through plenty of heartache, prayers and anguish before we had even conceived. Unaware that I had polycystic ovaries, we endured several years of unexplained infertility until the condition was diagnosed. Then began the path of medical consultations and treatment. There were so many times when we needed great patience and strength from God, while also crying out to him and asking, 'Why isn't it happening, Lord? When will it be our turn?' It was a time of testing, both medically and spiritually, as individuals and as a couple, and of seeking the love, support and prayer of our family and friends when we finally shared our struggle.

Amid our longing for a child and the monthly disappointment and questioning, we somehow managed to become stronger as a couple. We resolved, with a conscious effort, that the huge potential for ongoing stress would not overtake our lives or break us apart. We remained adamant about this, even at our lowest points, even though the strong desire to become parents remained very much in the forefront of our minds. We had countless moments, as we went through this time of waiting and hoping, when we felt powerless and all we could do was rely on God's strength and grace. We knew that we couldn't let our sense of lack steal our joy or prevent us enjoying all the other blessings in our life and our relationship as a couple.

We tried (with varying degrees of success) to maintain this balance when our journey into pregnancy and parenthood finally began. We even had some amusing moments along the way, as we were so resolutely determined not to let the very real stress of the circumstances overwhelm us. One of the most amusing, yet terribly serious, moments that we still smile about



was the delivery of a certain sample to be tested (which came back with no irregularities, before the root of our problem was discovered to be my polycystic ovaries). With all the poignant drama and hilarity of a scene from a romantic comedy film, we made the dramatic dash to drop it off on Comic Relief day, of all days. Upon arrival at the fertility department, I was greeted by a lady who was utterly professional and appropriate in her manner. However, she looked uncannily like Dawn French and, in addition to her white lab coat, was wearing red-nose glittery deely-boppers.

Having discovered the cause of our infertility, our prayers were answered after nearly four years, when I became pregnant within a month of having an operation on my ovaries. Our journey to pregnancy had been a rollercoaster and our path into parenthood was only just beginning.

Pregnancy is often not the idyllic or serene time we envisage. Even through illness, anxious times and all the uncertainty we experience as we await our new arrival, we can find God and draw near to him in a new way. The thoughts and reflections that you read in the pages of *Prayer Journey into Parenthood* began life as a series of letters, written throughout my first pregnancy, to our unborn baby 'Pip' (so called because when we found out I was pregnant, after four years of infertility, he was the size of an apple pip). These letters were followed by the reflections I had as a new parent, when I found I was discovering new ways to meet with God in my changing circumstances.

When my first baby was born, I felt an increasingly strong sense of the parallels between my experiences of parenthood and my faith journey. I connected with God in a very different way in those early days of parenthood, and he spoke to me through the daily experiences, despite my extreme tiredness—or perhaps because of it. With hormones and emotions upside down, I somehow managed to find God in powerful words, thoughts and small yet significant moments. In the midst of new circumstances, I had moments when I felt incredibly creative and inspired by God. However, far from being a 'superwoman', I also went through huge trials as I recovered physically, adjusting to parenthood and the emotional turmoil of new choices and responsibilities. It was far from plain sailing.

When I was writing the first draft of this book, in the early days of parenthood the second time around, I felt as inspired and as exhausted as I think it was

possible for me to feel, experiencing many moments of utter joy and great trepidation at the same time. God definitely gave me the words I needed as I developed these ideas, when I couldn't have done it in my own strength. Looking back over the writing I did then (often at some very random hours of the day and night, between baby feeds), I genuinely do not recollect composing some of it myself. I can only think that God guided and inspired me at this time, and I give him full credit for his grace at work through me in these pages.

There are many wonderful books already written on parenting or raising your child in faith. The idea behind the development of this book was to offer a different focus, as a devotional aid for parents-to-be as they journey into parenthood. Each of my reflections on the prayer journey parallels the changes, joys and concerns of this season in our walk with God. The book moves stage-by-stage from the positive pregnancy test through to the early days of parenthood, including Bible verses and prayers to support you as you struggle to find quiet moments with God. It is deliberately undated, not to be approached as daily readings but to be picked up whenever you have the time.

How to use *Prayer Journey into Parenthood*

Prayer Journey into Parenthood is designed to be a gentle, supportive companion through your pregnancy and into the early days of new parenthood. It includes chronological devotionals for each stage of the journey, to be read and used to help you along, as and when you feel able, with no pressure. It can be used by expectant mums or those taking steps towards fostering or adoption, and it can be explored together by a couple, to support them both on their shared path into parenthood in relationship with God. The book is written primarily to be read by new mums but is certainly not intended to exclude husbands or partners. It would be an ideal way for expectant parents to reflect together on the way to parenthood and to share precious time as a couple, drawing close to God and seeking him.

If you are using the book with a partner, where the wording says 'I', simply read it as 'we', and consider the devotionals in the context of a partnership. When and how you use the book is up to you, whether you set a particular



time aside together or alone, whether you read the chapters in order or dip in and out when you want to reflect on a particular theme.

Devotionals

These begin from the positive pregnancy test and cover a range of experiences, throughout the journey of pregnancy or preparation to foster or adopt, into early parenthood. They also give the opportunity to focus your thoughts back on your continuing faith journey with God, with a parallel Christian theme that allows you to draw near to him.

Bible verses

Each entry suggests some relevant Bible verses to look up and consider. You can read around these verses or look up your own favourite scriptures that spring to mind. You may want to look into further Bible study on some of the themes, if you feel so led. The verses are intended as an encouragement to read God's word and find strength or develop in knowledge, even in the middle of this busy season of change.

Prayer

There is a short written prayer at the end of each devotional. The prayers are intended only as a suggestion, but you may find them helpful. You can read them in silence or aloud. I would encourage you to use them as a springboard for your own prayers for your baby, bringing to God your own journey of faith as you contemplate the themes raised.

Journal space

You may be used to keeping a journal to write down your thoughts and prayers, or it may be something you've never tried. At the end of each devotional, there are several lines left blank, and the way you use them (or not) is entirely up to you. You might find you want to record some details about your current stage of pregnancy or parenthood, as a diary entry, or perhaps you will write a message or letter to your baby. The space can be used for writing down a prayer, your hopes, worries or joys, or Bible verses.

You can even do some doodling if you feel inspired. If you are a prolific writer, you could keep a separate notepad, in order to journal further.

Whether you use *Prayer Journey into Parenthood* by yourself or share the experience with your partner or a family member, it can then be kept as a keepsake. It will be a record of your prayers and thoughts, hopes and concerns as you journeyed through pregnancy, preparing to meet your child, into early parenthood. Looking over your journal notes later can be a wonderful way to remind yourself of prayers that were answered and worries overcome, and of the ways in which you developed in this season, both as a parent-to-be and in your walk with God.

Plenty of trial and error is involved in growing into the role of a parent. Much of the wisdom in this book was picked up as we went along, often worried that we were not doing the right things at all. At times, we genuinely had no idea what to do, and we still feel like that quite regularly, even having done it all again with our second baby. In writing these devotionals I am certainly not suggesting that I am an expert on parenting or that pregnancy or having a newborn baby is easy. The inspiration for this book and the heartfelt reflections I share are firmly rooted in quite the opposite feeling, and a passionate belief in the great need to encourage one another in the journey.

It is my prayer and hope, as you use this book, that it meets you in your need and elation, reassures you and helps you remain close to God as you travel your own amazing, bewildering and joyful road into parenthood.



----- *A positive* -----

Your journey into parenthood begins with that nervous, exciting moment as you wait to see a positive pregnancy test. For us, it came after many years of monthly discouragements and a few negative tests taken in hope, before we finally got that long-awaited +.

Take some time to savour the joy of discovering you are pregnant. The huge range of emotions at this precious moment is something to remember and treasure, even if you are also feeling overwhelmed as the reality of the news sinks in.

You may have finally begun the process of moving towards adoption or fostering. Take a moment to appreciate the significance and sense of anticipation that this news brings. It may well have come after many struggles and disappointments, false alarms, medical treatment and possibly even loss. Allow yourself some precious time to stop and revel in this positive news.

Do you remember the joy of first knowing God in a real way, or the moment you gave your life to him and began afresh? You probably felt a similar sense of the enormity of the life-changing experience. Reflect on that positive moment and the powerful emotions of elation and joy that it held. Then consider other pivotal moments in your life and journey with God. Recollect that joy again now, as you praise him for this news and the gift of new life.



----- *Patience* -----

Now that you have discovered you are pregnant, there begins a time of waiting. A joyful, yet sometimes anxious first trimester has already begun, a time of great anticipation and wonder. The reality of your pregnancy may not fully have sunk in; alternatively, you may be getting symptoms that make it very apparent, even in these early days.

As you wait for the first scan, it can seem a lifetime away, and it can be hard to imagine the developments going on inside you, if you still feel unchanged. You might have begun to read about the miraculous growth your tiny foetus is experiencing, even though you have yet to show any dramatic outward signs of its presence. This can be a quite surreal stage. It is also a time when you need to find peace and patience as you ponder the unseen miracle forming inside you.

I had a strong sense of wanting to enjoy the pregnancy journey and the moments along the way, yet twelve weeks seemed such a long time to wait for that first glimpse. In this initial stage, you can feel as if there is a long road of uncertainty between that positive test and your baby's arrival.

Reflecting on the growth of your unseen baby before the first scan, this is a good time to think about the incredible, unseen growth that has happened within you as you have journeyed with God. From the germination of the tiniest mustard seed of faith, contemplate the ways you have grown and the changes God has made in your heart. Take some moments to ask him to help you to trust him afresh. Seek him for patience as you wait for your baby and for patience in those other life-situations where prayers have not yet been answered. Trust in God's care, in the unseen miracle of your pregnancy, in the road ahead to parenthood and in the path of your whole life. God has it all mapped out, but sometimes we need to rest in this knowledge, enjoy the blessings and experiences of today, and pray for patience as we wait.



----- *A wonderful secret* -----

Since finding out that you are pregnant, as the weeks progress you are probably starting to get some symptoms and to feel 'different'. As I've mentioned, I named my tiny miracle 'Pip', having read that, at five weeks' gestation, our baby was the size of an apple pip. This name stuck throughout the pregnancy, as we'd decided to wait until the birth to find out the gender, and it felt so much more personal to use a name rather than referring to our unborn child as 'it'.

You may have been bursting to tell your friends, your family and the rest of the world ever since you've known. However, like us, you may have chosen to wait until you've had your first scan and are through the first trimester before sharing your exciting news. This can be a time of much anticipation, anxiety and even guilty feelings, as you keep your wonderful 'secret'. You may have to avoid questions from your nearest and dearest, those you would usually share everything with. Some eagle-eyed friends and family members may guess or at least suspect your condition and will need to be sworn to secrecy, as you begin avoiding certain foods or opting for soft drinks and decaffeinated alternatives. You may be unusually tired, uncharacteristically emotional or looking rather green around the gills. Quite frankly, you may be simply terrible at keeping a secret and give the news away by a look or smile, or because you just want to shout it from the rooftops. It can be such a special time as you reflect on this greatest piece of news.

When Mary heard the news that she was going to be the mother of Jesus, she took time to reflect on this enormous secret and all that it implied. Do you remember how you felt when you heard the good news of Jesus or experienced God in your life in a real way for the first time? During this period of great anticipation and joy, take some time to reflect on the excitement of knowing God. How do you share the amazing news of God's love with others? Are there times when you keep your faith secret or are you bursting to tell the world the amazing news of salvation?



----- *First sight* -----

Seeing your baby for the first time at your first scan is awesome; it is quite incredible to see that tiny person beginning to take shape. However many times you have seen it on television or in films, to look at a scan of the tiny human being who is forming inside you seems miraculous. Although it is not the clearest of images and the baby is a long way from looking like a fully formed person, this remains one of the most significant and emotional moments to treasure during early pregnancy. It is amazing to think how much the baby has grown already in twelve weeks, and to imagine the changes still to come.

You may have felt a whole range of emotions as you finally saw the scan image—relief, joy, excitement and perhaps some degree of anxiety or fear at the enormity of this event and the implications of the journey ahead. You are likely to be feeling overwhelmed, praising God for the miracle you have now seen with your own eyes, the miracle of creation now really visible in its early stages of growth. The relief and joy at seeing our baby for the first time, being reassured that all was OK and seeing that tiny heart beat, was breathtaking. It was after our first scan that I began to write a series of letters to Pip, our long-awaited first child, recounting how he was already showing signs of being a little individual—such as refusing to lie the ‘right’ way up for the sonographer.

Think about a time when you have seen God at work in your life or the lives of others, perhaps for the first time. When have you seen with your own eyes a clear manifestation of his power, presence and grace in your life? When have you had a significant realisation of the awesomeness of his creation? Reflect on the early days of walking with him, perhaps remembering afresh the life-changing moment when you saw clearly for the first time and began your journey with God.

Pregnancy and new parenthood are some of the most exciting and challenging times of life. They seem to last an age and yet are over so quickly!

This unique book forms a gentle devotional guide for that journey. Providing undated Bible reflections and prayers, and space for personal journalling, it can be read chronologically or thematically, making an attractive gift for an expectant mother and an easy-to-use resource for couples as they prepare for parenthood.

Claire Daniel is mum to two busy boys and lives in Water Orton, Birmingham. She is author of *80 Creative Prayer Ideas*, is passionate about supporting other parents, and speaks at conferences, churches and workshops on prayer.

‘This wonderful set of devotionals are a must-have for any new parent who wants to journey with God from the first pregnancy test to the early days with a newborn. I wish I’d had this book to guide me through those precious but challenging days. I’m confident this book is going to be a real lifeline for many.’ **Becky Drake**, worship leader, **St Paul’s Church, Hammersmith, London**



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