

IT'S NOT A  
TOMB  
IT'S A  
**WOMB**

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It's Not a Tomb It's a Womb  
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# 1

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## CRUCIFIED

On the night of His betrayal—just hours before He would be crucified—Jesus endeavored to prepare His disciples for His excruciating death. He knew what was coming but they didn't. To help them process what they were about to witness, Jesus used a metaphor. In fact, He used metaphors frequently as a way for His message to penetrate more effectively.

Metaphors paint word pictures. The pictures play in front of our eyes like movies. We not only *hear* what's said, but we also *see* it.

To portray the intensity of His sufferings, Jesus used child-birth as a metaphor:

A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world (John 16:21).

The disciples didn't fully understand in that moment, but He was saying to them, "I'm pregnant."

What was Jesus pregnant with?

He was pregnant with Prophecy; He was pregnant with Purpose; He was pregnant with Possibility.

Things were about to get messy.

In essence, Jesus was alerting them, “I’m about to go into labor—into *hard* labor. You’re going to be distracted with the anguish, the sorrow, the travail, the birth pangs, the contractions, the pushing.”

At the cross, we’re looking at God in labor; at the resurrection, we see the baby being born. The resurrection was the birthing of our salvation, of the new covenant, of the Church, of a new and living way into the Father’s embrace. What joy—that now millions of children would be born into the kingdom of God!

Why was the labor so intense? Because it was a real big baby!

## **GOD’S PERSPECTIVE ON THE CROSS**

In one sense, the cross was a huge setback—in the sense that our Champion died. But God has consistently proven throughout history that every advance in the kingdom is preceded by a setback. He views our setbacks differently than we do; He sees them from an eternal vantage point.

When the disciples looked at the cross, they saw everything shutting down; but when God looked at the cross, He saw everything opening up.

When the disciples looked at the cross, they saw the end of everything; when God looked at the cross, He saw a new beginning to everything.

When the disciples looked at the cross, all they could see was a massive setback; when God looked at the cross, He saw a massive setup.

When the disciples looked at the cross, they saw Jesus getting crushed in the heel; when God looked at the cross, He saw Satan getting crushed in the head (Gen 3:15).

When the disciples looked at the cross, all they could see was a tomb; when God looked at the cross, He saw a womb (John 16:21).

## THE CONTRACTIONS BECOME FRIENDS

When a woman goes into labor, the contractions actually become her friends. They assure her that, after long months of anticipation and discomfort, the baby is finally going to come out. The birth pangs crash upon her being in waves of inescapable travail, and she knows the only way forward is to *push this thing out*. The pain helps her push.

When a woman goes into labor, her eyes change. Something comes over her, and she goes, “We’re not staying here.” A steely resolve comes upon her that nobody can soften. All the force of her soul focuses on one thing: *This must change*.

Everybody in the birthing room becomes her enemy. “Get out of my way. I’ve got some pushing to do.”

The contractions become her friends to help her complete the task of pushing and birthing a new life into the world.

In a similar way, the nails became Jesus’ friends.

Hanging on the cross, His eyes changed. Something inside Him went, “We’re not staying here.” The searing bolts of electricity that flashed from hands to feet placed Him in the inescapable stranglehold of childbirth. The pain became birth pangs that helped Him push.

## “GIVE ME MY NAILS”

I hear Jesus saying from the cross, “Give Me My nails!”

“Give Me My nails—I’ve got something to birth here.

“Give Me My nails so I can stretch My arms even further to show you how much I love you.

“Give Me My nails so I can earn My stripes as the Captain of your salvation.

“Give Me My nails and I’ll hammer out your redemption right here on this hill.” (The Carpenter from Nazareth knew what to do with His nails.)

“Give Me My nails, and I’ll nail every accusation the adversary uses against you.

“Give Me My nails, and I’ll nail the requirements of the law to this cross.”

Paul wrote about this in Colossians 2:14.

Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Moses’ law was laden with the requirements necessary to get close to God. To draw near to Him, we had to meet His standards of righteousness. The law contained a long list of dos and don’ts, and it produced a performance-based religion that was stifling and impossible to satisfy. No one could measure up. The requirements kept tripping us up, which is why Paul said they were “contrary to us.” Jesus nailed those contrary requirements to the cross, wiped them out, and ushered us into the rich domain of grace.

Now, instead of laboring feverishly to attain a righteousness based upon our personal performance, we receive the righteousness of God based upon the heroic performance of Christ on the cross. Let me say it another way. When we place our faith in the cross of Christ, God by His grace credits to us Jesus’ performance on the cross. By faith, we “become the righteousness of God” in Christ (2 Cor 5:21). The righteousness that God gives by grace through faith is arguably the most stunning benefit of Christ’s cross.

Again, Jesus nailed the requirements of the law to the cross. When you look at the cross, your first impression is that they’re



nailing *Him*; but He's like, "I'm nailing *it*." It was The Great Reversal. When they nailed Him, He nailed it.

"Give Me My nails. I've got some pushing to do."

## **PAIN CAN BE A FRIEND**

Pain can actually become your friend. "How so?" you might wonder. Because of the way it can move you. Pain can move you to take measures you would have never taken under normal circumstances. For example, pain can cause a parent to exert heroic effort to save an endangered child.

Pain can also become your friend in your spiritual life. Sometimes God uses pain to cause us to reach for things in the kingdom we would not have otherwise pursued. Just as hunger drives someone to work hard, fiery trials can produce spiritual hunger within us that makes us reach for the release of His power and purpose (Prov 16:26).

When pain moves you to new places in God, you'll come to see it as your friend.

Pain will take you on roads you would have never traveled. Pain will take you to places in God others wouldn't dare to venture. Pain will make you desperate to hear God's voice. Pain will help you change.

Some people haven't changed because they're not yet in enough pain.

Suffering will wash from you the fear of man and immerse you in the fear of the Lord. When you get in enough pain, you won't care about the opinions of people anymore. All you'll care about is the opinion of One.

In a sense, a woman in labor becomes grateful for the painful contractions because, after months of carrying her growing baby, the birth pangs announce, "Finally! Finally, this baby's coming out!" In gratefulness, a woman's response is like, "Let's do this! Bring it on!"

There are some things in the kingdom of God you'll never birth until you're in enough pain.

## FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD

Scripture calls Jesus “the firstborn from the dead,” which means that at His resurrection He was born from the dead (Col 1:18; Rev 1:5). As Acts 13:33 says, at the resurrection He was *begotten* of the Father. Never before had such a thing happened. Others—such as Lazarus—had been resurrected from the dead, but their resurrections were only temporary, and they eventually died again. Jesus’ resurrection was different. He will never again die, as He said to John, “Behold, I am alive forevermore” (Rev 1:18). To describe this unprecedented resurrection, Scripture uses the words *born* and *begotten*. He was born from the dead, never to die again.

Furthermore, He was the *firstborn*. In other words, He was the first of *many* to be born from the dead. His resurrection cut a path for others to follow, including many who are reading this book. When you believe in His death and resurrection, you get on the same course He charted. Like Him you’ll die, be buried, and then be born from the dead. He promised emphatically that He will raise you up on the last day, and you will never again die (John 6:40).

I’m going to tell you something about the firstborn that I didn’t discover until I had children of my own. I have three children—Joel, Katie, and Michael—and at the time of this writing six grandchildren. The world’s six *cutest* grandchildren!

Joel is my firstborn. He was born in the 1900s, way back in time when you didn’t know the gender of your baby until they came out. I still remember that day vividly because it was such a holy, spiritual experience.

When the pangs of hard labor gripped my wife, her eyes changed. She became entirely focused on one thing: *pushing*. She

pushed with every fiber of her soul and with every ounce of her strength. Hour after hour. Contraction upon contraction.

It seemed to me like she was trying to push a head the size of a soccer ball out of an opening the size of a pinhole. I looked at the undertaking and thought to myself, “Impossible. This will never happen.”

Her battle to birth the baby was such a struggle that, as I stood before her and stared at the proceedings, I literally thought to myself, *I can't believe that seven billion people have come into the world like this!* It was just *that* intense.

Then, when my second child—Katie—was born, she just slid right out! I was stunned at how quickly she came out because I was anticipating an encore. We barely got set up in the birthing room and *whoosh*, it was over. That's when I learned something about the firstborn—theirs is often the most difficult delivery. Why? Because the firstborn is opening a birth canal for the first time.

Jesus Christ was the firstborn from the dead. As such, He opened the birth canal of resurrection for the first time. That was the hard one. He took on the big boys—death, hell, Satan, the grave—and rose victoriously over them all. Following His steps, we now have the privilege of passing through the same birth canal of resurrection and rising with a glorified body to be with Him forever.

Gratefully, our passage through the birth canal of resurrection is so much easier than His was. He did the heavy lifting for us. Even though we will pass through the same birth canal, it's going to be a lot easier for us because of the passageway He opened. We will still die, but the sting of death has been removed (1 Cor 15:55), and we'll rise together with our mighty Forerunner into eternal life.

This is the great hope of our Gospel. May all praise and honor be lifted to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

And yet, even though our passage through the birth canal is much easier than His, it still seems really intense to us. Why?

Because our capacity for enduring difficulty is so small. But here's the thing. Our participation with Jesus in His crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection is incredibly dignifying for us. We have the honor of experiencing the same thing He experienced, even if it's at just a fraction of the intensity. Thus, our sufferings actually become our greatest dignity. By experiencing death and resurrection together with Him, our intimacy with Him takes on new realms of understanding, identification, and delight. He navigated the hardest part and now has given us the dignity of following His steps (1 Pet 2:21).

## EPICENTER OF LABOR

I began this chapter quoting John 16:21, where Jesus indicated His labor on the cross was like childbirth. He was doing something from His belly. At first glance, we might suppose He was laboring on the cross from His hands and feet. But He tipped us off in John 16:21 that He was actually doing it from His spirit. He travailed with His spirit on the cross in order to birth our redemption.

I have found it helpful to identify the seat of the human spirit. In fact, I've found it helpful to identify the seat of a variety of functions within our being. Here are some of the places from which we operate:

- The seat of the human mind is the cranium.
- The seat of the human will is the neck. (Those who resisted the will of God in Scripture were sometimes called *stiff-necked*.)
- The seat of our convictions and values is our heart.
- The seat of our emotions and feelings is down in our lower intestinal or abdominal area.
- Somewhere between our feelings (intestines) and convictions (heart) is the seat of our spirit. It's in the

vicinity of our solar plexus. Jesus pointed to this when He said that the living waters of the Holy Spirit would flow out of our *belly* (John 7:38 KJV).

Locating my spirit's resting place helps me relate to God. Here's what I mean. When I want to activate my spirit and connect with the Holy Spirit, I don't find that my spirit gets activated by focusing on my mind, or even centering on my heart. When I want to engage my spirit, I go to my belly.

That's how Jesus did it. He labored on the cross *from His spirit* so He could bring to birth the purpose for which He came into the world.

Let's follow His example. When you find yourself in excruciating trouble, do your trial from your spirit. Your fiery trial is an indicator that God has impregnated you with something deep on the inside. Grow the good thing He's placed within you, bring it to full term, and then *push*. God wants to birth something through your life that will enrich many others around you. A generation will be strengthened to believe God for great things because of the way you endured in faith.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT LABORS

On the cross, Jesus groaned with intense birth pangs. Then, when He ascended to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit, Jesus passed the torch to Him. When the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), He took up Jesus' groaning ministry. In other words, the way Jesus travailed on the cross is the way the Holy Spirit continues to travail today.

Why is the Holy Spirit in groaning birth pangs right now? Because things aren't right in the world (see Rom 8). Jesus paid the price for the fullness of the kingdom of God to be established on earth, but what we see today is only a partial manifestation

of kingdom fullness. While we're in this partial manifestation, the Holy Spirit continues to travail for the completed work of Calvary to be fully manifest in the earth.

In Romans 8, Paul explained that three things are groaning right now in the throes of distress and intercession. First, all of *creation* is groaning in birth pangs because things aren't right in the world (v 22). Second, *believers* groan within themselves and for the same reason—because things aren't right in our world (v 23). And third, the *Holy Spirit* groans—because things aren't right in this world (v 26).

The Holy Spirit's groans join with ours almost in a symbiotic manner to accelerate the purposes of God in the earth. As He helps us pray, we learn to partner with the Spirit's groans of intercession. This traving partnership with the Holy Spirit makes our prayers much more effective (Rom 8:26–27).

Paul was describing a kind of prayer that happens only when we groan together in partnership with the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26). If I'm reading Romans 8 correctly, the Holy Spirit doesn't groan independently of us. In other words, He's not somewhere over on the side, groaning to the Father on our behalf. Rather, He's waiting for us to initiate and engage His groaning ministry with our own spirit. He starts only when we start. When we go to our spirit and engage with His Spirit, His groans of intercession are released through us. If we don't engage with Him in this way, His intercessions for us are paused. The only time He intercedes for us in childbirth is when we engage with Him from our spirit in groaning prayer.

Why is this important? Because when our spirit connects with His Spirit, and when we become the conduit to release His intercessory groanings, we get the Spirit praying God-sized prayers for us according to the will of God (Rom 8:27). The potential of this kind of praying is limitless because of the Holy Spirit's unrestricted power to change anything and everything.

Practice this kind of praying. Go to your spirit and learn how to release the groans of the Holy Spirit. Ask Jesus to teach you how to groan in intercession, together with the Holy Spirit, until kingdom realities are birthed in our generation.

## PREGNANT WITH PROMISE

You're pregnant with Promise. That's why you're so hungry right now. That's why you can't seem to get enough of God's word right now. You're eating double. When you're growing a Promise in your spirit, it's *never* enough of His word, promises, assurances, and truth.

When you get a Promise from God, you don't kick back and chill as though it's all in the pocket. You don't *relax* your word intake; you *ramp up* your word intake. Why? Because you've got Promise in your spirit, and now you need to grow that baby.

When some people get a Promise from God, they neglect and starve it out. When we don't feed Promise, instead of birthing God's purpose we just break wind. Isaiah wrote about this:

We have been with child, we have been in pain; we have, as it were, brought forth wind; we have not accomplished any deliverance in the earth, nor have the inhabitants of the world fallen (Isa 26:18).

Isaiah was writing about people who get pregnant with purpose but end up just passing gas because they didn't grow their Promise in their spirit. Let's heed his caution. What a tragedy it would be to walk for months and years toward God's purpose, but then instead of birthing His purpose through our devotion to Him, we just pass gas.

When we get a Promise from God, therefore, we're not going to kick back and chill; we're going to step up and run the

race set before us, looking to Jesus' example, until we see the fulfillment of His purpose in our lives.

According to Isaiah 26:18, God intends that we carry something real in our spirits, grow it, bring it to full term, push, and birth something substantial in the earth. If we do, we can accomplish *deliverance in the earth*—that is, others will be delivered from bondage through the authority of our message and faith. And with the phrase, *the inhabitants of the world fallen*, we're meant to understand that unbelievers will fall before the Lord in repentance and faith because of the race we've run.

Let's birth this thing! So much is at stake! Feed your Promise, grow it, bring it to full term, push, and birth God's purpose for your family.

Promise requires a high-calorie intake in the word of God in order to develop and grow. It needs lots of faith food. When you abide in the words of Christ, you're growing that baby!

When you have a Promise from God, you don't *relax* your prayer life, you *ramp up* your prayer life. You're like, "Lord, now that You've given me this wonderful Promise, You're never going to hear the end of it! I'm going to badger heaven nonstop, day and night, until You fulfill this Promise in my life" (see Luke 18:7).

It's time to intensify your prayer life. Turn the fire up seven times hotter, partner with the Holy Spirit's groaning, and birth the thing.

Somebody might say, "This fiery trial is *killing* me!" But God says, "I don't see a tomb. I see a womb."



## IT'S NOT A TOMB . . .

**JESUS SHOWED US**, through His example on the cross, that what we view as a tomb in our lives is often intended by God to be a womb that births eternal life. Once you awaken to the womb principle of John 16:21, you start to see it all over the Bible.

In the pages that follow, we're going to explore the womb metaphor as seen in several Bible stories, and then draw personal encouragement for our own lives. You'll relate personally to some of these heroes if you've ever been enslaved (Jacob), banished (John), widowed (Anna), silenced (Zacharias), imprisoned (Joseph), bereaved (Naomi), targeted (Mordecai), detoured (Caleb), or crushed (Job).

Let's start with Jacob and the Egyptian slavery. Your faith will grow, while reading the next chapter, when you realize that Israel's slavery was a womb. And then stay engaged for all eleven chapters. With each chapter, you'll get to know a Bible hero better and your heart will soar with growing confidence that Christ is redeeming your circumstances as a womb to birth kingdom purpose.

## . . . IT'S A WOMB

## FOR SMALL GROUPS

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1. Talk about the John 16:21 metaphor of the cross as childbirth. How does that metaphor speak to you personally?
2. "Every advance in the kingdom is preceded by a setback." In what ways have you experienced that?
3. "The nails were His friends." What does that statement mean to you? If there are any mothers in the group, did you experience your contractions as friends to help you push?
4. Have you had an experience in which pain became your friend? Share your story.
5. Do you agree with the author, that the seat of the human spirit is in the upper belly area? Is it helpful for you to connect there with the Holy Spirit?
6. Do you have a promise from God that you're growing in your spirit right now?

## PRAY TOGETHER

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*Is there something painful in your life that you're harnessing like birth pangs, so that something redemptive can be birthed from it? Allow the group to pray with you.*

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