

## A Birth Plan

Expectant parents like to plan. When I was expecting my first child, I dreamed of the beautiful day and started jotting down ideas for a birth plan. I selected a doctor at the small hospital near where we lived in New Ulm, Minnesota. My husband would drive me the short distance when the time came. Natural birth seemed a healthy choice. The bag of comforts and baby gear would be meticulously packed. The car seat would be correctly installed. April was the expected birth month. We would bond as a family during the first hours.

The day I actually became a mother was a cold day in February. I drove myself thirty miles from work to the hospital, not realizing my discomfort was life threatening pre-term labor. I had not packed a bag. I did not have a car seat or a crib prepared. Of course, I never dreamed the placenta would abrupt eight weeks before my baby was due. Nothing was natural about the birth experience. It involved many machines, anesthesia, steroids, medications, and a major surgery to save our lives. My doctor warned my husband and me that our baby might be too early to cry when delivered. A helicopter was already on its way from Minneapolis to whisk our little guy off to a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

I did not hold my baby that day. I did not feed him, and we did not have intimate bonding time as a new family. My first night as a mother, my husband and son were miles away. When the nurses came into my room, I didn't hold a baby out for them to admire. I held a Polaroid picture. Smart phones, online video hangouts, and Wi-Fi weren't readily available for instant connections. Even if that technology could have connected us, my doctors were concerned about the risk of eclampsia and had me in a dark, quiet room. I was heartbroken.

I was expecting to experience physical pain in labor, but I hardly remember the physical pain because my heartache was so great. I was so hurt that death had come so close to this new life. It felt as if the ideal family start I was expecting between my husband, myself, and our son was taken from us. I understood that, in time, our family would grow stronger from the experience, but in the moment, I just felt sad.

I am reminded of another mother. She was incredibly blessed, but she also became a mother in an unexpected way. I assume she never would have dreamed she'd be pregnant before marriage. She gave birth far from home, and then went into exile in Egypt. That was not her plan. When her child grew older, he left the safety of her home for a ministry filled with opposition.

How did Mary feel? Did she feel the need to keep her son and Savior safely home? She must have felt heartbreak like none other as she saw Jesus' suffering on the cross. She saw him die by one of the worst types of execution in history. That was her little boy.

That was God's Son, too. He loved his Son even *more* than Mary loved Jesus. Yet, this was God's birth plan for his Son, a plan he promised and prophesied in his Word. What love he has for *us*!

God the Father loved his Son, Jesus, as any parent does. Yet, he made this plan for his Son because of his love for us. For me. For my son. For you. Jesus lived that plan willingly. He was born in a humble stable and lived in a humble home. He lived a perfect life, amid all the struggles and temptations of our world. He also suffered, felt pain, and died. Because of that, I live, and my son lives. Although I did not plan such a traumatic birth for my son, God graciously gave my son life here on earth. He gives us both life forever in heaven as his children.

To be honest, it took a few years to sort through the mess of details in that birth day and start to pull out the beautiful pieces. God drew us close to him that day. He comforted us with blessings. In time, my heartache eased up and I could see more clearly those gifts God had provided in the middle of it all. I did make it safely to the hospital, and my husband was by my side. Our baby *did* cry when he was born. While I did not hold him, he opened his eyes wide and looked at mine before he was taken out of the operating room for intubation and incubation. That quick look started the bond that helped me through until he was in my arms. Our tiny boy became a child of God before his helicopter ride, baptized by his earthly father, welcomed into the family of believers. Our heavenly Father surrounded us with family and friends for support. The skilled neonatologists on the other end of that helicopter ride helped our son grow strong and healthy until we could take him home six weeks later. Now, I have a tall energetic boy who loves to tell his birth story. "Raise your hand if you've been in a helicopter!" he says. In the midst of heartbreak and pain, God made that day about life. Beyond these earthly blessings, he planned eternal life for us, his dear children.

**"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir."**

**Galatians 4:4-7**

**Prayer Suggestions:**

- Pray using Jeremiah 29:11-13, remembering that Jesus is your hope as you move through uncertain times into the future. You can call on God, and pray to him. He promises to listen. This scripture says he has a plan for your life.
- Pray for Jesus' strength and comfort as you accept the loss of the forty week healthy pregnancy you had hoped for. Thank your heavenly Father for sending his only Son, to make you and your new tiny baby his dearly loved children, through faith given by the Holy Spirit.

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