

book review: Bringing Forth Life

God's Purposes in Pregnancy & Birth

By Jodie McIver

Pregnancy, birth, and the avalanche of change that marks entry into motherhood brings with it many questions. From the simple and practical, to the physiological and existential, "Bringing forth life" engages with the multi-faceted nature of this transition. It is a great resource for pregnant women, new mums and those walking the journey with them – a much needed invitation to step back and take in the awe-inspiring process you become part of in bringing forth life.

As the subtitle suggests, 'Bringing Forth Life', is an exploration of the wonder and intricacy of pregnancy and birth, not only as a physiological phenomenon, but also as a transformative physical and emotional season with spiritual intent. Author Jodie McIver shares her knowledge and insight as midwife and mother, as well as drawing on the experience of other women, to take the reader on a tour through pregnancy, antenatal care, labour, and birth in its many variations.

McIver also invites us to see the beauty and struggle of this momentous life stage through the broader framework of birth in the biblical narrative, and the spiritual re-birth of the Christian. Walking the reader through creation, fall, redemption, and the painful cost of the new life we enjoy in Christ, our eyes are lifted to see the hand of a loving God intimately involved in this unique stage of life. I found this a refreshing reflection on the sacrifice and pain involved in childbearing and motherhood, bringing meaning and significance to what can be a vulnerable or sidelined season for women.

Whilst opening with this theological backdrop, 'Bringing forth Life' is also a very practical book with much information about the experience of being pregnant and giving birth – complete with anatomical diagrams and relevant physiological information. The Christian worldview is woven into the text and expounded on at various points, providing a holistic approach to understanding the many questions, anxieties and changes women may face during pregnancy and into motherhood. Each chapter is book-ended with questions for discussion or

reflection, and a prayer which grounds the ideas raised and encourages genuine engagement.

This is a well-researched and referenced book with a list of practical go-to resources at the end of each chapter, many of which I routinely recommend to patients throughout pregnancy. Christian resources are helpfully distinguished under their own heading.

As a GP involved in shared antenatal care, I frequently discuss options for pregnancy care and antenatal screening with patients, and the challenge of doing this well in the time available is not lost on me. Aptly titled 'Controlling Risk or Risking Control' the chapter on prenatal screening and testing is a very helpful resource for both women and those involved in their pregnancy care alike. With the increasing availability of genetic screening and indications for clinicians to recommend these, this chapter helps women consider their own expectations, the limitations of the tests available, and how they might respond to the results. This is an important process that better facilitates an informed discussion with healthcare providers. This topic leads Mclver to touch on the issue of termination in pregnancy, and she has done so with great sensitivity and care. In a healthcare system where termination is routinely offered in the context of uncertainty or abnormality, this chapter provides a refreshing perspective on choice in pregnancy care.

Navigating the healthcare system can be an overwhelming experience, and Mclver goes on to lay out the different options for antenatal care and place of birth in Australia. This includes details of potential medical interventions or lack thereof that may be available in each. A helpful resource for those making choices regarding pregnancy care or engaging with the services available to them.

From the experience of meeting your baby, to breastfeeding, finding a 'village', and the hormonal and emotional rollercoaster that can characterise the early days, weeks, or months of life with a newborn, Mclver's section on the newborn mother covers much. Yet, as it encourages women to lean into God and their community, it has a calming effect and offers the reassurance that all new mothers need.

Motherhood changes us. And in 'Bringing Forth Life' Mclver gently encourages us to confront and embrace the reality of change that comes about through pregnancy, birth, and the transition into motherhood, and see God's good purpose in it. It's a book that helps us to look beyond the anxieties and fears that can cripple us on this journey and experience God's goodness.

This was a valuable and encouraging read, and I would readily recommend it to Christian women and couples in pregnancy, whether that be a first or subsequent pregnancy, and to new mums.

It is a great resource for Christians involved in antenatal and postnatal care to read and be aware of, as well as those involved in the spiritual care of women entering motherhood. Non-Christians open to exploring deeper meaning in this stage of life, or simply after practical information, would also greatly benefit from reading this book.

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