

ix years ago, my husband and I decided to have a second child. Our first son, Champ, was almost 4. We had completed seminary and would soon be back in our hometown to start a church. We knew the time was right.

It seemed so simple, so completely normal, that for the next three years, I trusted nature to take its course. But the course nature took didn't seem to include pregnancy.

A friend gently prodded me one day, "Don't you think it would be good to see a doctor? It could be just a minor problem — it's gotta be worth a try."

At first I balked at the idea, believing it would demonstrate a lack of faith. After all, I had prayed for a child, we'd had no trouble conceiving our first son, and I was sure God was going to answer, probably that month.

But a few months passed, and I still wasn't pregnant. Feeling discouraged and put-off at my unanswered prayers, I approached my husband, Joe. "How would you feel if I went to an infertility specialist?"

"Is that what you want to do?"

When His Love Is SILENT

BY TRICIA MCGARY RHODES

"I don't know. Each month I get more and more discouraged. I never thought this would happen to me."

Joe reached out and hugged me. "Listen, we both want another child, and we've prayed about it. But God uses doctors, too. It can't hurt."

So I made an appointment with the best infertility specialist in San Diego. Perhaps God was waiting for me to take some action, to prove I really wanted another baby.

Our first visit was both encouraging and scary. The doctor told us that most of the time a failure to conceive was a minor problem, one that could be treated quite easily. But he went on to note our age and years of infertility, recommending we take a very aggressive course of action.

The many tests revealed only one problem — I suffered from a mild case of endometriosis. We quickly scheduled the procedure to treat it, knowing my greatest chance of getting pregnant would be the following two months, before it could recur. Four months went by, and nothing happened.

The doctor called us in one day, "I think it would be best if we used a procedure called artificial insemination. This will eliminate any problems we can't see and give you the strongest possibility of conception."

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I looked over at Joe, wondering how he felt about such an arrangement. But he was nodding confidently. "OK, when should we start?"

For the next three years I rode a spiritual roller coaster, vacillating between self-blame and frustration with God. I labored to perfect my spirituality, feeling confident that He would respond in turn. Month after month, when He didn't, I pictured Him with arms folded, looking down on me in condescension.

Early in my treatment I was admitted for outpatient surgery in the local women's center. After the anesthesiologist explained everything to me, he spoke to a young woman across the room.

I overheard their conversation with horror. "So you are here to have a septic abortion, is that right?"

I wanted to run from the room, screaming at the blatant unfairness. In recovery, this same woman lay next to me, separated only by a drab curtain.

"I'm so scared," she cried. "Why did I do this?" Her moans became sobs. A nurse tried to comfort her. "Listen, it's going to be OK. Everyone feels this way

at first. You'll feel better in a little bit."

Through the cloud of anesthesia, I felt ripped in shreds by this cruel joke. *How could God do this to me?* I went to bed that night unsure whether I could continue with the treatment. Joe held me close, not knowing what to say.

The next morning I asked, "Do you think we should keep doing all this? Maybe God just doesn't want us to have another child." His answer both reassured and angered me.

"God hasn't told us that yet. Until He does, I think we should do whatever we can to have a baby."

"How can you say He hasn't told us?" I argued. "Nothing we've done so far has worked. Maybe that's His way of telling us to give up!"

"I just think we'll know for sure. Until then I can't give up . . . hey, are you OK? What's wrong?"

My familiar tears poured out, but I couldn't explain why. I was beginning to feel as if no one understood what I was going through. I knew Joe wanted a baby, but he just didn't seem to get so emotionally involved. Why couldn't I let it go as he did?

A few days later, a friend gave me a

devotional entitled *Why God Is Silent*. It told how God often did not answer prayer because He wanted to draw us closer to Him. He used these times of silence to bring us to a point of desire for His presence. This provided me with a plan, and I was comforted.

Getting to know God better became my intense goal. Each day I read His Word, spent time in prayer, and confessed my lack of trust as my inner confidence built up. Although I could not see it at the time, I was taking the blame once again, setting myself up for a greater fall.

A few weeks later, I went in for a sonogram to determine any problems. The doctor came into the room with excitement. "Where's your husband? You are in the best condition we've seen for successful insemination!"

Joe was an hour away at a conference. But I couldn't let this stop me. I made some phone calls, tracking him down. "Joe, you have to come! The doctor says this is it; he wants to do an insemination this morning!" Canceling appointments and breaking speed laws, Joe arrived as quickly as possible. This time we were both confident. I remember the laughing, hopeful atmosphere as we left the doctor's office.

Two weeks later, I was back at the bottom of the roller coaster ride. I had not conceived and was sure I never would. Joe and I talked at length and decided not to go on with any more treatments. The expense was hitting our budget hard, and I didn't feel I could handle any more ups and downs.

Joe tried to reassure me. "Listen, God isn't limited to medical procedures. He can give us a baby if He wants to. This is not the end." I heard his words, but they didn't make any sense. My mind was in a cloud of anguish. I could not see any hope, and I felt God had let us all down.

Champ, who was now 8, prayed each night for a brother. What was he going to think about a God who wouldn't answer such a simple prayer? And I knew Joe was hurting. He was one of those rare, devoted fathers, continually giving of himself to Champ. He rarely said much, but I watched him hold other infants with such tenderness, I knew he grieved, too.

My deepest pain was yet to come.



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We received news that Joe's sister, a single mother of two, was expecting another baby. Her pregnancy produced in me a continual battle against bitterness. I knew resentment would not help my situation, but resisting it was tough.

She gave birth on a sunny Southern California day, and we visited her in the hospital. "Here, you hold him; you've always been so good with babies," she said, placing him in my arms.

It was more than I could handle. Finding an excuse to leave, I ran to the car, sobbing. I cried for three days. Overcome with depression, I could not look up to see or hear God. This time it was clear: He had abandoned me.

One day, Joe asked for my help with a sermon he was preparing on prayer. At first I tried to go along. We talked about the meaning of prayer, how to see results, and what faith was. Then he asked, "What would be some hindrances to seeing God answer our prayers?"

It was all I could take. "Look, I can't answer that, I've spent six years trying to figure it out. I'm not even sure He does answer prayer."

Joe looked at me with confusion. I could tell he wanted to be sensitive, but just couldn't relate to what I was saying. I went on, "Don't you ever wonder why I haven't gotten pregnant? Doesn't it bother you? How can you preach on prayer with what we've been through?"

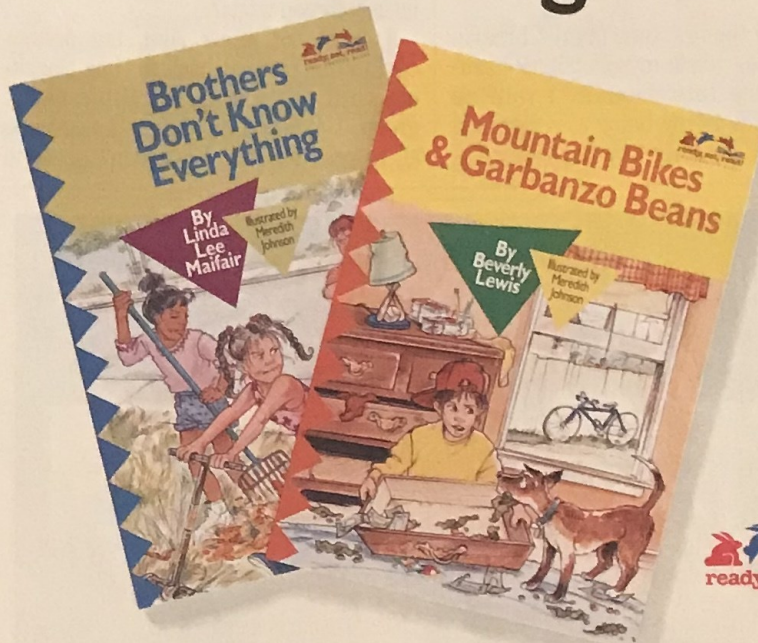
"Well, I guess this just affects me differently," he said. "I mean, the thought of having no more children crosses my mind occasionally and I feel real sadness, but I guess I still think there's hope. I don't know what God is doing, but I know He is faithful and knows what is best."

My stomach churned as he went on. "For you, every month is a painful reminder of loss, and it's hard to get past that. But God has answered a lot of prayer in our lives. Don't you think He will answer this one in His way?"

"I just don't believe all that any more," I fired back at him. "Nothing I've ever believed makes sense right now."

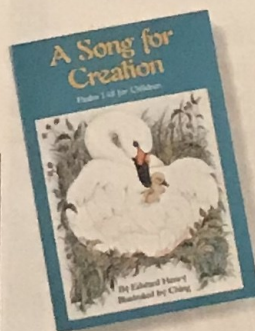
Though he tried to be compassionate, I could not accept his comfort. My fight with God had raged for years. Over and over I had come to Him, anxiously asking, seeking, and knocking. It seemed as if He capriciously refused to answer my pleas. I responded by doing

How good reading habits begin.



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whatever I thought might move Him to act on my behalf. The vicious cycle seemed to perpetuate itself, while I moved closer and closer to the edge of a frightening precipice.

I felt drained, discouraged, and weary of the battle.

For the first time in my Christian life, I felt myself falling headlong into despair. I wanted with all my being to reject God completely, to deny any faith or rela-

tionship that I had with Him.

For several mornings, I sat in my room, Bible open, unable to think of anything to say. My spiritual condition frightened me. What would life be like without the God who drew me to Him in love, sustaining me through years of life's common trials?

I could not reject Him, but neither could I find my way back to Him. Speaking cautiously with my Bible study group, I exposed my fears. "I need you all to pray for me; I just can't seem to

pray any more. I know you've prayed with me for a child, but this time I need you to pray that my relationship with God will be restored."

Several mornings later, as I sat before God trying to read His Word, I sensed Him speaking to me. The message, though not audible, was clear. "Tricia, your inability to have another child is not causing this depth of suffering. It is caused by the lies you have accepted about Me; that I don't love you, that I am not just and fair, that I am not all-powerful, and that I don't really care what you want."

In my journal I began to write how I felt about God on one side, and what I knew to be true from His Word on the other. I pleaded with God to help me choose to believe what was true. Slowly, faith began to form within me.

Through many tears, I felt a release from the weight I had carried for so long. I was so relieved, I called a friend who had been praying for me. "Barb, God has finally set me free from the burden of unanswered prayers. I don't know why He hasn't answered, but I know He loves me and wants the best for me."

I didn't know then that a miracle was on its way.

That afternoon, I received a phone call about a pregnant woman planning to give her baby up for adoption. I called Joe at work, unsure of what his response would be. We had never really discussed adoption. I sensed the rightness of this situation, but I knew Joe needed to feel the same way. "So, what do you think?" I asked nervously.

"It sounds good; it might be God's answer. I think we should pursue it, don't you?" I could hear the guarded excitement in his voice.

Within a week, we sat in a lawyer's office across a desk from the woman who would soon give birth. She examined us carefully. "Are you sure you want another child? A baby, when your other son is already 9?"

We spoke of some of our life with her, answering her concerns as best we could. I looked at her with compassion for the decision she was making. "I can promise you this," I said. "If you choose us to parent your child, it will be cherished, loved, adored, and never for one minute be taken for granted."

Did God Have Answers to Depression Before Sigmund Freud?

After listening to many "Christian Counselors," one would almost conclude that God had no answers for Depression before the advent of modern psychological techniques. This thought leads to several questions...

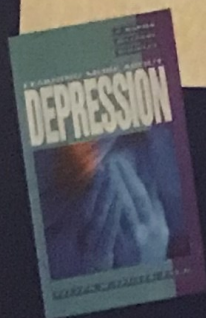
- ◆ Is Depression a recent phenomenon for Man?
- ◆ When God spoke of His provision to His children of the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience,...) in Galatians 5:22-23, was He able to provide that fruit because Depression did not exist?
- ◆ Or is our lack of godly understanding the reason we struggle in dealing effectively with Depression?

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She nodded tearfully and said the words I will never forget, "I would like to give you my baby. Will you take it?"

We ran to our car, bought our favorite ice cream, and raced home to Champ. We had not wanted to get his hopes up, but we couldn't wait any longer. "Champ, come here; we're having a celebration. You're finally going to get that baby brother or sister you've been asking for!"

He jumped up with a "high-five" for each of us and then stated in childlike faith, "It's gonna be a boy, you know; that's what I asked God for."

One month later, we held our newborn son in our arms, still in wonder at the events that led up to this. We named him Jonathan (sent by God) Samuel (asked of God). In those four weeks leading up to his birth, every one of our prayers had been answered — from the birth parents choosing us, to finding a doctor in the community where the mother lived, to the finances we needed to pay the lawyer.

Unanswered prayer, God's fault or mine? Much can be said about our part in prayer and God's sovereignty in response. Shelves in Christian bookstores overflow with books on the subject.

But I also know there came a time when those answers did not help me. I read in Scripture of Job who "was blameless in all his ways" and yet his prayers went unanswered. Whose fault was that?

We could not have known, but I believe God answered my prayer years before I prayed it. The first time I looked into the deep brown eyes of my tiny new son, I knew he had been chosen for us long ago.

While the process of praying for a child was one of growth in the midst of pain, I don't believe my efforts to find favor in God's eyes caused Him to grant my desire.

God's ways are higher than mine (Isa. 55:8,9). There are many things I do not understand. Jonathan had been in his mother's womb eight months when we met her. She had searched for adoptive parents she could believe in. Why didn't God bring her to us sooner, saving me the agony of those final weeks?

I learned a lot. But does God condition His answers on how much we learn, or how well we meet some stan-

dard of perfection? If the Cross teaches us anything, it is the unconditional nature of His grace.

God desires intimacy with me. And to that end, He will use all of life's events to draw me closer to Him. He allows our lives to take turns we can never hope to understand fully, given the finite nature of our human perspective. But God is, above all, a loving Father, seeking to impart good and perfect gifts to His children.

My second son is now 6. In these

years, God has granted some of my prayers; others remain unanswered. Affixing blame is no longer my response. I don't try to second-guess God's motives or dwell on my unworthiness.

But when I look into the light of life in my son's eyes, I see the heart of God — loving, caring, giving me the best. ■

Tricia McCary Rhodes is a church worship coordinator and free-lance writer from San Diego. Her article, "A Cup of Water in Jesus' Name," appeared in the September issue of MOODY.

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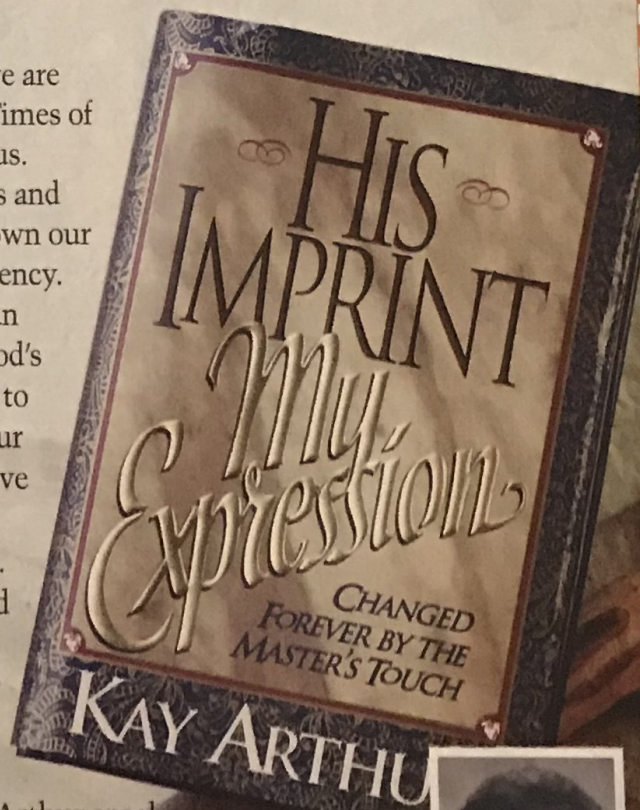
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