

OPTIONS FOR LABOR

CHOOSING WITH LOVE

HOW DO YOU KNOW?

The options you have for labor will sometimes present themselves with a definite “answer.” Just as frequently there will be no obvious right or wrong choice. It is the right and responsibility of the parents to make decisions affecting the health of their child. You should never feel forced, coerced or manipulated into any decision.

When choosing how to handle labor, or when making any decision affecting your child, a key point of stewardship will be loving your child with the love Jesus modeled for us. Your decisions should be

made always being focused on meeting the needs of and protecting your baby. This means your baby’s health should be a higher priority for you than your desires for pregnancy or labor.

There is no cookie cutter answer for what a labor should look like when the health of the baby is the highest priority. You will simply make the best decision you can with the information you have at the time. It may mean you have exactly the birth you planned, or you may not want the choices you know are right for labor.

In fact, the attitude in which you make a decision may be

more important eternally than the decision you make. God does not look at the externals, he sees the heart. He isn’t interested in you “looking” like you are the perfect Christian in labor. He wants your loving devotion. Two labors can look completely different, and still have honored God.

Before you can build your birth plan, you will need to do some searching about the options available to you and searching of your heart. Explore your fears, concerns and other strong emotions about options to learn the deeper needs and desires that drive those feelings.

MAKING GOOD USE OF YOUR TOOLS

Medicines and other health technology are tools. They are neither good nor evil. Depending on how labor is progressing, they can either help or hinder the process. Use them wisely.

The key to making a good use of your tools is to be aware of the risks and benefits. Using a tool that adds minimal benefit while increasing risk to you or

your baby is unwise. At best tools should be used to decrease the risk, at minimum they should not add risk.

In general, there is more than one way to handle any labor challenge. A tired mother may benefit from a narcotic, but she may also benefit from a massage, a warm bath, changing positions or deep relaxation

between contractions. Once you know what tools may be beneficial you can look at the associated risks. Give yourself adequate time to try low-risk tools before moving on to higher risk tools.

Your goal should always be to keep the risk as low as possible for both you and your baby.

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

- *Proverbs 2:6*
For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.
- *Proverbs 14:8*
The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception.
- *John 15:12*
My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.
- *Philippians 2:3-4*
Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.
- *1 John 3:16*
This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.
- *Psalms 20:4*
May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed.
- *Proverbs 16:3*
Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.

LABOR CHALLENGES

MAKING WISE DECISIONS

KNOWING THE TRUTH

How can you be sure what you are deciding is the best option unless you understand the truth about what is happening? There are many variations of normal when it comes to labor. You may be experiencing something that is not average, and still be completely healthy. Knowing what signals a problem and being able to adjust for that problem is a key component to the stewardship of pregnancy.

There are several ways in which you may be challenged during labor. Your goal should be first to learn the difference between a birth emergency

and a normal variation of labor. Then you must understand how to handle the situation so you can respond appropriately.

It is important to remember that making changes in response to a labor challenge may not always give you the desired result. Although certain techniques can be effective, it does not mean they always are. It can take two or three tries before you find what works best.

The process of labor is beautifully simple, yet relies on a complex balance of hormones, movements, contractions and time.

Sometimes adding a new component to the mix can throw off a system that is otherwise working well. You will find it helpful to understand the benefits and risks of any tool available to you in labor so you can prepare for the changes it may bring.

Even if you make appropriate changes, you may not be able to overcome a labor challenge. You can only respond to what is happening, you cannot control your labor. God has a purpose for your labor, even if you do not discover what it is until months later.

HAVING PEACE

In the midst of uncertainty, you can have peace. The environment does not determine the spirit, the Spirit controls the environment.

Don't confuse safety with peace. Peace is not having everything perfect. Peace is not an uneventful labor. Peace is not the absence of fear or concern. Peace is

trusting in God in the midst of a storm, in the middle of uncertainty, while you are afraid.

When Jonathan approached the Philistines, he understood he could be walking to his death, but he had peace in his decision because he knew whether he lived or died in battle was up to God.

The disciples in the boat with Jesus were frightened as the storm raged, but felt peace when Jesus calmed the storm. It was not their safety that changed, only the part they could see. They were safe in the midst of the storm even if they didn't understand. The ultimate authority of God can bring peace in the midst of your labor challenges.

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

- *Deuteronomy 31:6*
Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."
- *1 Chronicles 16:11*
Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.
- *Psalms 4:8*
I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.
- *Psalms 18:32*
It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.
- *Psalms 29:11*
The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.
- *Proverbs 18:13*
He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame.
- *Philippians 4:6-7*
Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

FEAR OF LABOR

UNDERSTANDING AND OVERCOMING

PRODUCTIVE OR UNPRODUCTIVE

Learning how to handle the challenges of labor is what drives most women to childbirth classes. Labor and birth have become so separate from our lives, very few women have actually seen a birth before their first child is trying to be born. Because of this, a normal healthy concern to be as prepared as possible is helpful in our modern times.

A healthy concern can be productive, encouraging you to make the healthiest decisions for yourself and your baby. Such concern is a motivator, moving us to do the things God desires for us to do.

Yet for some women, concern becomes an unproductive fear, paralyzing them from making decisions or enjoying the blessings of a pregnancy. In addition to preventing proper preparation, such fears can cause problems during a labor. The female body is designed to stop labor in unsafe situations, and the mother being in a heightened state of fear is a trigger for stopping labor.

There are a lot of unknowns in labor because you are not in control. Yet you can take comfort in knowing God is in control. Even if the task set before you is

difficult, God will give you the strength to come through it.

Don't confuse a lack of concern with trusting God. Judge how much you are trusting God by looking at every area of your life, not just pregnancy. It is possible to feel a lack of concern because you are choosing to avoid the reality of the situation. Avoidance is another form of fear.

In short, your faith in God is not exhibited by the lack of concern for labor, but in your continuing to act according to the will of God regardless of what is going on around you.

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

You are more than just a bag of flesh. You are a body and spirit, and both parts of you will be challenged during labor. You will learn to master physical comfort techniques with a little practice. It will take much more than practice to master spiritual comfort.

Spiritual comfort comes from peace and trust, perseverance and resting in

the lord. These are more than simple attitudes to adopt during labor; they are the evidence of a heart that loves and serves God alone.

Your spiritual comfort must be built before labor begins. It comes from spending time with God through Bible reading and prayer. It comes from confessing any sins you may have hidden in your heart, being honest

about fears and thanking God for who he is and what he has done. Spiritual comfort comes from recognizing the true power and nature of God, and finding rest in him alone.

Spiritual comfort will not come from doing the "right things" in labor, it only exists where the heart is truly serving God.

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

- *Psalm 119:165*
Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.
- *Isaiah 30:15*
This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it."
- *John 14:27*
Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.
- *Philippians 4:6-7*
Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
- *Philippians 4:13*
I can do everything through him who gives me strength.
- *2 Timothy 1:7*
For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

COMFORT MEASURES

LEARNING TO BE EFFECTIVE

A DEEPER KNOWING

Understanding the normal process of labor can help you determine what types of comfort measures are effective at different times during labor. There are some techniques useful for speeding labor, others useful for a backache in labor and still others that can be helpful when you feel tense.

Knowing the variety of comfort measures is only the first step. Taking the time to uncover the uniqueness of your body can help you understand what comfort measures are most useful for you.

Both showers and baths can

have beneficial effects in labor. They can both help ease a sore back, encourage relaxation and make you more comfortable. Chances are, you enjoy one better than the other—and knowing which you prefer is part of the key to a deeper understanding of comfort measures.

If you are a woman who finds comfort in talking about what is happening, you may find yourself choosing to talk longer into your labor than most other women. If you are a woman who responds to touch by tensing, you may want to identify places of your body that may be the

most comfortable with massage and touch in labor, or use other comfort measures such as changing position or rocking on a birth ball.

It all comes down to knowing who you are. Don't expect something to work for you because it worked for someone else. God created you uniquely, and it is only you who knows what really works to help you feel comfortable.

Once you have explored the different comfort measures, you will be able to share with your labor partners what are the most effective techniques for you.

GOD AS A COMFORTER

We have a wonderful model of a comforter in God. As early as the story of Adam we see a God who is concerned about meeting the needs of his people. God responds to Adam's lack of a companion by making Eve.

Further into the Bible, we see God comforting a forlorn Hagar by meeting

both her physical needs and her emotional needs. He provides water for her to drink and reassures her Ishmael will become a strong nation.

God sends comfort to Elijah by providing food and rest first. After Elijah's physical needs have been met, God meets his emotional needs by reassuring him he is not

alone. God tells of 1000 prophets he saved.

As you practice comfort measures, be sure to learn techniques to bring physical and emotional comfort. Do not underestimate the importance of the emotional comfort you feel knowing God is your strength even during labor.

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

- *Psalm 51:10-12*
Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
- *Psalm 73:26*
My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
- *Psalm 119:50*
My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.
- *Isaiah 26:3*
You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.
- *Isaiah 30:15*
This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.
- *2 Corinthians 3:4*
Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

BIRTHING NATURALLY TOPICS IN BIRTHING

BIRTH PLANNING

LEADING AND FOLLOWING

SETTING YOUR GOALS

Think for a few minutes about what your perfect labor experience might be. Consider who is with you, where you are and what things are available to you. Imagine how you might handle both the expected and unexpected situations that may arise. Reflect on which of these is the most important to you.

Keeping these things in mind, write out your plans. This will not be a script to be followed exactly, but a sort of calling card to help those with you understand what help you would like during labor.

Your Birth Plan is just as

important before labor begins as it is during labor. You should be using it to talk with your midwife about questions you have and options available to you. In this way, you can be sure you will work together to achieve the best labor experience possible.

Understand you may not be able to do anything on your birth plan. Your labor may move too fast for you to try some comfort measures or give birth where you had hoped. Or, you may be able to do everything on your birth plan with a labor that gives you plenty of time to try every comfort technique and ends with a

surgical birth they way you had planed for such an outcome.

Your success in labor is not determined by how strictly you follow your birth plan, but in how effectively your plan is able to meet your needs. For this reason you must know who you are and what you will need when you write your plan.

A plan that lists everything other people felt was important has little chance of expressing what you will need in labor. A well written plan helps those attending you know who you are and how they can be the most help to you.

GOD REMAINS IN CONTROL

The book of Judges shows an interesting way in which God works in our plans. Gideon was told to fight, but before God sent him into battle He weaned the army down to about 400 men.

This idea of decreasing the army size goes against our worldly wisdom of the way to achieve victory. In our minds we think, "Give me

more God, prove everything will turn out OK and then I'll trust you." Gideon had to trust God's seemingly backwards plan would work.

Yet this having less was exactly what God needed to show Gideon it was not the strength of his army that would win, but the strength of God.

Which leads us to an interesting question. What can God wean from your birth plan? Where might you be relying on your power or strength instead of God's?

More importantly, does your plan really express what you feel is important, or does it express what is socially acceptable? Was it written with God, or alone?

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

- *Psalm 20:4*
May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed.
- *Proverbs 15:22*
Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.
- *Proverbs 16:9*
In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.
- *Proverbs 20:18*
Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance.
- *Isaiah 55:8*
"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord.
- *Zechariah 10:1*
Ask the LORD for rain in the springtime; it is the LORD who makes the storm clouds. He gives showers of rain to men, and plants of the field to everyone.
- *Haggai 1:5-6*
Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."