

Contents

Acknowledgements	17
1. A Healthy Heart	19
2. The Antenatal Class Above All Others	25
3. A Heart of Awe	33
4. Threats to Your Heart	45
5. Gospel Relief for Your Heart	57
6. A Cross-shaped Heart	69
7. A Word-fuelled Heart	81
8. A Community-focused Heart	91
9. A Prayerful Heart	103
10. When to Seek Help for Your Heart	113
Notes	119

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BUMPS, BABIES AND THE GOSPEL

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To Christ be the glory.

1

A Healthy Heart

It's a tension like no other, the weighty anticipation making you sick to the stomach. Fears, hopes and desires wrapped up in the moment before you. It's felt like years since peeing on that stick. Has it all been a dream, something we've just cooked up in our minds and persuaded ourselves is true? The sickness and exhaustion would beg to differ but who are we to tell? Our name is called. We walk into the dimly lit room, sweaty palms clasping one another tightly. Feet up, belly exposed, gel squirted, eyes closed. This is it. The wait is over.

You watch the sonographer, one hand on the probe, the other hand typing and adjusting the screen, her lips are moving, her eyes focusing. It's all a blur to you. And then, you hear it. Loud

as thunder. And you dare to look up and see it. Clear as the sun. The most extraordinary sight. A living heartbeat. Small, fast, beating. New life dawning, growing, becoming. The most incredible miracle happening inside the human body. A wave of relief like no other passes over you both, as you grasp what you're seeing.

A healthy heart. Pregnancy marks the beginning of an extraordinary journey concerned for someone else's heart. The longing is there from day one, and the preoccupation continues long after your child is born. It's the concern above all concerns. Is their heart beating?

How extraordinary then, that our concern for another's heart is but a beautiful echo of God's own concern for our heart. From the first pages of Scripture, the big picture painted in the Bible is one of intense preoccupation, as the King of the universe is concerned at every turn for man's heart to be spiritually healthy, in right relationship with him. And what an extraordinary journey God ultimately undertakes to win back our wandering, fallen heart. One that sees his own Son no less, being

A Healthy Heart

born into the world he created, to restore our relationship with him for all eternity.

So my question for you as you enter this new season, preparing for parenthood, is: how is your heart? As you look to, and are preoccupied by another's heart, the temptation is to forgo the encouragement throughout Scripture. The apostle Paul certainly knew that the battle was on for our heart, when he wrote to his Christian brothers and sisters in Colossae:

I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart (Col. 2:1–2).

This is a book addressing your heart – the ‘steering wheel’ that controls and shapes all your thoughts, words and deeds.¹ In the midst of all the noise that accompanies bumps and babies, we’re going to walk through the book of Colossians together, establishing some core principles that will prepare your own heart for parenting.

BUMPS, BABIES AND THE GOSPEL

Before we dig in, let me lay out some caveats. This book is unashamedly geared towards the season of pregnancy and the months that follow the birth of a baby or babies. Because of its nature, it'll therefore undoubtedly be harder to read for some than others. Whether you're thinking about starting a family, are expecting at the moment, are struggling to conceive, or are in the adoption process, my prayer is that there is ample encouragement for your heart as we delve into the book of Colossians, even if how you apply the truths might differ. Likewise, I'm fully aware that while it's a gift to have a believing spouse, it's not always the reality. Again my prayer is that this book will still be a helpful prompt for discussion, even though it'll inevitably take a different shape to what's presented in the following pages. Let's acknowledge together, as we begin this journey, that the sensitivities surrounding this season of life are real, painful and at times hard to bear – with grief and sorrow often accompanying joy and hope, as we remember hurts and losses for ourselves and others.

A Healthy Heart

Last but not least, let me be clear from the outset that I'm no expert on pregnancy, birth or parenting. The Lord has been full of grace towards my husband and me as we navigate our way through the early years. Much of what's written here is what I would've loved to have read when we were pregnant with our first child. So above all, my prayer is that it would bless you and encourage your heart as you walk into this exciting new season together.

To enjoy the most nourishment from this little book, I suggest the following:

1. Grab yourselves a cup of tea and a bar of chocolate, put your feet up and read through the book of Colossians aloud together, before reading the rest of this book.
2. Whatever pace you choose to read this book, and whether together or individually, make sure you plan in time to discuss it together (preferably before the arrival of your baby!). The discussion questions at the end of each chapter are designed with this in mind.

BUMPS, BABIES AND THE GOSPEL

3. Take good time to pray together: for each other, for your baby or babies and for your future, when you are least likely to fall asleep!