

Preparing for PMS

PMS Prep

by Carolyn Mahaney

We know they're coming (most of the time, anyway): PMS, morning sickness, postpartum depression, menopause. Yet these predictable, physical trials of a woman's life still tend to catch us off guard. When they show up, we feel like we've been hit from behind and struggle to keep steady amidst physical and emotional challenges.

Last week, my girls and I spent an evening answering questions from the wives of the men in the Sovereign Grace Pastors College. We had a blast with these sweet ladies. The final question was from a woman who was pregnant again and dreading the inevitable postpartum feelings of sadness she knew would follow the birth of her baby. She humbly asked for counsel. *How could she glorify God and serve her family in this difficult season?*

This wise woman understood the truth of Proverbs 22:3: *"The prudent [woman] sees danger and hides [herself], but the simple [women] go on and suffer for it."* She saw danger ahead and by seeking counsel, she was running to hide herself from it.

For the next few days we're going to talk about some of the ways we can all prepare for the "dangers" of postpartum depression, PMS, or other physical difficulties. So no matter what time of the month it is for you, we hope you'll join us for a little "PMS Prep." You know it's coming. But take heart: God's grace is already here to help us prepare to glorify Him and serve others. Let's consider how.

Postpartum Depression

by Janelle Bradshaw

Caly turns two next week. As all mommies say, "It feels like yesterday" that I brought my sweet girl home from the hospital. And, well, to be quite honest, it feels like yesterday that my friend "postpartum depression" also followed me home from the hospital. (Maybe I should deliver somewhere else with my next one!)

Having watched my mom and sisters all have babies and not experience postpartum depression, I was completely unprepared for the three months following Caly's birth. My c-section did slow down recovery a bit, but even after most of the physical pain was gone, I was still feeling tired and rundown. I would wake up each morning thinking that I was feeling better only to find myself exhausted and overwhelmed a few hours into my day. Tears were my constant companion. This continued for about three months and then, as quickly as it came, it left.

In the same way, the first trimester of my current pregnancy has brought similar challenges. Along with the vomiting and exhaustion, I have experienced that familiar "down" feeling, just like with my friend postpartum depression. All someone has to do is look my way and I start to cry. Boy, I don't sound like someone that you want to hang out with right now. (Hee-hee!)

So what's a girl to do? You may not be experiencing postpartum depression or pregnancy blues, but perhaps PMS or menopause is where your struggle is. For me, one of the most encouraging things that my mom told me after Caly was born was... "THIS IS NORMAL." Yes, it's common. As it says in 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man." These hormonal challenges are a temptation—not an excuse to sin, mind you—but a significant temptation to be sure.

And we are not alone in this struggle. Women all over the world experience the same things. We aren't the first and we certainly won't be the last. I don't know about you, but this truth brings comfort to my heart. I'm not some strange person experiencing a unique trial with no known cause. The Lord allows this and He will grant all of the grace needed to endure. In fact, that's exactly what 1 Corinthians 10:13 goes on to promise: "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

Our Lord does not stick us in the middle of hormonal craziness and leave us alone to find our way out of the maze. No, He graciously provides a way of escape so we can endure it. He provides a way of escape so we can rejoice in Him (even when it's the last thing we feel like doing). He also provides a way of escape so we can serve others (even when it's the last thing we feel like doing!).

We'll spend the next few days considering some of the "ways of escape" God has so graciously provided. For me, God was faithful to help me

endure in the months following Caly's birth. That same help is here in the midst of morning sickness and pregnancy hormones. And I know He will be faithful once again in the months following the appearance of this next little one. I won't be surprised this time. No, I'm planning on welcoming "postpartum depression" home right along with Baby #2 because I know that the Lord will grant me the strength to endure. That knowledge will dry up a few of those tears!

Handling our Feelings

by Nicole Whitacre

"Oh the havoc that is wrought and the tragedy, the misery and the wretchedness that are to be found in the world simply because people do not know how to handle their own feelings!" D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

My in-laws have a dog named Bailey that my four-year-old son Jack loves to put on a leash and drag around the yard. Poor patient Bailey! You can tell he'd rather be snoozing on the rug, but what choice does he have? He's on the leash and Jack is running around in circles. So Bailey runs around in circles.

When it comes to my fluctuating feelings (which spike at a certain time every month) I sometimes feel like Bailey on a leash. I often follow my feelings around in circles, forgetting that I am the owner and the leash should be on my feelings instead.

If I feel irritable, I might make an unkind remark. If I feel depressed, I may cry. If I feel fearful, I might become withdrawn. If I feel despair, I want to curl up and go back to sleep. Obviously I don't need to attend obedience school! No, I need to handle my feelings instead of letting my feelings handle me. It's "Way of Escape #1" from the hormonal maze.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones elaborates in his book (which we highly recommend) *Spiritual Depression*:

"Avoid the mistake of concentrating overmuch on your feelings...Above all, avoid the terrible error of making them central. If you put them there you are of necessity doomed to be unhappy because you are not following the order that God himself has ordained...After all, what we have in the Bible is Truth; it is not an emotional stimulus, it is not something primarily concerned to give us a joyful experience. It is primarily Truth, and Truth is addressed

to the mind, God's supreme gift to man; and it is as we apprehend and submit ourselves to truth that the feelings follow."

By apprehending and submitting ourselves to Truth, we put a leash on our feelings and they must follow. Granted, they may follow slowly at first, but eventually, as we put Truth at the center of our lives, our feelings will fall into line. What is this Truth? Dr. Lloyd-Jones again:

"Put at the centre the only One who has a right to be there, the Lord of Glory, Who so loved you that He went to the Cross and bore the punishment and the shame of your sins and died for you. Seek Him, seek His face, and all other things that be added unto you."

Only the Truth of the Gospel is more powerful than our fluctuating emotions.

So no matter how your hormones are raging today, put at the center the only One who has the right to be there: Our Savior! And tell your feelings to heel.

The Cloud of Witnesses

by Nicole Whitacre

Easier said than done, this telling our feelings to submit to Truth. It's not a one-time thing, like learning our ABC's in the first grade. It is a battle, an intense battle, a lifelong battle where victories are often outnumbered by defeats and progress is sometimes hard to measure.

But we're not the first to fight. Stretching back to the beginning of time is an unbroken line of saints who struggled against the onslaught of their emotions.

The Prophet Micah knew what it was like to "sit in darkness" (Micah 7:8-9)

Job, in the midst of his suffering lamented his very being: "Let the day perish on which I was born, and the night that said, 'A man is conceived.' Let that day be darkness!" Job 3:3-4

The Psalmist berated his despairing soul: "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Psalm 42:5-6

The Apostle Paul pleaded with the Lord to take away his thorn his "messenger of Satan to harass me."

David Brainerd “suffered from the blackest dejection, off and on, throughout his short life.”

The missionary Henry Martyn “suffered from an obvious tendency to morbidity and introspection.”

Charles Spurgeon lamented: “My spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for.” (We all know what that is like!)

Martyn Lloyd Jones writes of being “overworked and badly overtired, and therefore subject in an unusual manner to the onslaughts of the devil.”

Need I go on? Because I could! And these were all men who didn’t have to deal with PMS or menopause!

The battle isn’t the only thing these men have in common, though. Even more encouraging, they all received grace from our Heavenly Father to endure and eventually to triumph! They all were led to discover the “way of escape.”

As John Piper writes, “God has woven his Word with strands of truth directly opposed to [our despondency]. The law of God does revive (Psalm 19:7). God does lead to springs of water (Psalm 23:3). God does show us the path of life (Psalm 16:11). Joy does come with the morning (Psalm 30:5).”

May this “great cloud of witnesses” spur us on to “lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Hebrews 12:1

Just to Clarify

by Carolyn Mahaney

As we’ve told you before, we’re not medical experts here at girltalk. Today, we have a case in point (although I doubt you needed further evidence to convince you!). One of our readers, Christina, who happens to be a Family Nurse Practitioner emailed us and graciously explained that we got our terms wrong. What we have been referring to as “postpartum” (which is simply the recovery period following the birth of a child) is actually called “postpartum *depression*” or “baby blues.”

Now that we have learned the correct terminology, we're going to fix our previous posts. (So for all of you with RSS feeds, we apologize in advance! I don't have an RSS feed, but I assume it's annoying to have people like us edit their previous posts, which we do on occasion!)

But this little clarification provides us with an opportunity to pass on some additional, useful information about what women may experience following the birth of their baby. Preparation is half the battle and that's the point of this "PMS Prep" series. In his book, *Blame It on the Brain*, Edward T. Welch (not only uses the correct terminology, but) provides us with a concise and helpful description of "baby blues" and "postpartum depression":

"Baby blues. The baby blues is a poorly defined condition that is experienced by 50 to 70 percent of women in the first week to ten days postpartum. Rarely severe, it begins within the first three days and might be experienced as sadness, depression, feelings of wanting to cry, or rapid and unpredictable emotional fluctuations. To those who experience these emotions, the triggers are often felt to be insignificant. In fact, many women will not actually feel sad when they cry!"

"Postpartum depression. More severe and of longer duration than the blues, postpartum depression (PPD) occurs in about 10 to 15 percent of all mothers (Pitt, 1968; Watson, Elliot, Rugg & Brough, 1984). Indistinguishable from other forms of depression, it can last anywhere from two weeks to a year."

Being equipped with this knowledge removes the element of surprise. In other words, if we feel sad for the first week to ten days after our baby is born, or even if the sadness persists, we shouldn't be shocked. We can simply realize—"Ah, I know what's going on here, but I also know that God has provided 'ways of escape' to endure this trial."

Getting Ready for Trouble

by Carolyn Mahaney

More tomorrow on "handling our feelings as a way of escape" from postpartum depression, baby blues, or any other hormonal trials!

When it comes to handling our feelings, we must first recognize that physical symptoms (whether hormonal or otherwise) can result in greater

temptation to sin. That's why it is so important, as we've been saying over and over again, to prepare for these seasons of our lives

"Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak," instructed Jesus in Mark 14:38. And Matthew Henry commiserates: "What heavy clogs these bodies of ours are to our souls! But when we see trouble at the door, we should get ready for it."

Although temptation is greater, it doesn't mean we have to sin! By faith, we have the power to resist temptation. There is a way of escape, *"For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace"* (Romans 6:14).

Elisabeth Elliot elaborates on this truth: "Choices will continually be necessary and—let us not forget—*possible*. Obedience to God is always possible. It is a deadly error to fall into the notion that when feelings are extremely strong we can do nothing but act on them."

We must not fall into the trap of believing that we are helpless to confront our feelings. Instead, we must choose to obey God.

"Try it," challenges Elisabeth Elliot. "When, in the face of powerful temptation to do wrong, there is the swift, hard renunciation—*I will not*—it will be followed by the sudden loosing of the bonds of self, the yes to God that lets in sunlight, sets us singing and all freedom's bells clanging for joy."

What glorious words for women who *feel* (and not "are") trapped by depression, anxiety and despair! When we choose to say "I will not" to sin, we will experience (maybe not right away, but eventually!) freedom, joy, and the sunlight of God's face.

So when that hormonal trouble comes knocking, we need to prepare to renounce our feelings and choose to obey. We'll continue to discuss how in the days to come.

A Time to Grow

by Carolyn Mahaney

There are few times I feel less spiritual than when I face physical and hormonal challenges such as PMS and (now) menopause. I feel tired and irritable, my sin sometimes spilling over onto those around me.

My strategy has often been to try and wait it out. *Once this is over, I tell myself, then I'll get back to making progress in the Christian life.* I forget that I am smack in the middle of God's plan for my life! God has ordained these hormonal days along with all the others! Menopause isn't simply a trial to get through. It's an opportunity for testing faith and spiritual growth.

Elizabeth Prentiss beautifully expresses this point:

“God never place us in any position in which we can not grow. We may fancy that He does. We may fear we are so impeded by fretting, petty cares that we are gaining nothing; but when we are not sending any branches upward, we may be sending roots downward. Perhaps in the time of our humiliation, when everything seems a failure, we are making the best kind of progress.”

The best kind of progress. Far from precipitating a spiritual decline, we often grow more in these difficult seasons than when life is easy, and we feel like we're flourishing (remember, those feelings can't be trusted!)

That's why the apostle Paul sees weakness as an opportunity for boasting in the Lord:

“But [God] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

For the sake of Christ, we are to boast in our weaknesses, we are to be content in menopause or PMS or postpartum depression. For when we are weak, it is then that His power rests on us. What an opportunity!

Not a Time to Analyze

by Nicole Whitacre

PMS can be a time of spiritual growth. It is not a time to assess your spiritual growth. It is not a time to measure your maturity, or take stock of your sanctification.

Martyn Lloyd Jones' advice is sound: "Do not spend too much time feeling your own pulse taking your own spiritual temperature, do not spend too much time analyzing your feelings. That is the high road to morbidity."

On a normal day we should be careful not to spend excessive time analyzing our feelings. But on a PMS day, such self-examination is most unhelpful. If we try to "take our spiritual temperature" when our hormones are raging, the reading will most certainly be inaccurate. And we run the risk of compounding our discouragement and despair.

Today, if it's a PMS day, is a chance to grow. Tomorrow we can evaluate that growth.

Unhappy, Yet...

by Nicole Whitacre

I used to think that if I didn't feel happy, I must be sinning. So during PMS, all my unhappy feelings were compounded by the guilt and condemnation I felt over my unhappy feelings which only generated more unhappy feelings!

This bit of advice from D. Martyn Lloyd Jones has helped to break that unhappy cycle:

"There is all the difference in the world between rejoicing and feeling happy. The Scripture tells us that we should always rejoice [Phil. 4:4]...To rejoice is a command, yes, but there is all the difference in the world between rejoicing and being happy. You cannot make yourself happy, but you can make yourself rejoice, in the sense that you will always rejoice in the Lord. Happiness is something within ourselves, rejoicing is 'in the Lord.' Take the fourth chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. There you will find that the great Apostle puts it all very plainly and clearly in that series of extraordinary contrasts which he makes: 'We are troubled on every side (I don't think he felt very happy at the moment) yet not distressed', 'we are perplexed (he wasn't feeling happy at all at that point) but not in despair', 'persecuted but not forsaken', 'cast down, but not destroyed'--and so on. In other words the Apostle does not suggest a kind of happy person in a carnal sense, but he was still rejoicing."

Happiness is something within ourselves, rejoicing is 'in the Lord.' What liberating truth. Our feelings and emotions may fluctuate, but the eternal

God never changes, and we can rejoice in Him, no matter what time of the month it is!

Never So Bad

by Nicole Whitacre

To learn how to handle our feelings—rejoice even when we don't feel happy, resolve to obey even when we don't want to—this is Way of Escape #1 from the hormonal maze.

Way of Escape #2 (and #1 in order of importance) is to remember the gospel. More specifically, remember that we are justified—declared righteous—before God on the basis of what Christ has done for us on the cross and not our performance during PMS.

When hormones are raging, we're often prone to focus on our (lack of) obedience and become discouraged when we fail. We sometimes (wrongly) feel we can't "get right" with God until our postpartum depression goes away. We tend to walk around in a cloud of condemnation instead of coming to God, repenting, and receiving forgiveness for our sins, and strength to endure.

That's why we must remind ourselves more vigorously than ever that we are justified **ONLY** by what Christ has accomplished for us on the cross. We are not less able to come to God on days when we feel discouraged, depressed, or have been irritable than on the days when we are rejoicing and victorious. That's because we are only ever acceptable to God because of Christ and what He has done for us on the cross.

Or to paraphrase Jerry Bridges (in a way I'm not sure he intended, but hopefully one he would approve of): Our PMS days are never so bad that we are beyond the reach of God's grace, and our best postpartum depression days are never so good that we are beyond the need of God's grace.

Tomorrow: we'll continue with more practical "ways of escape."

Get Ready

by Nicole Whitacre

As promised, we're going to spend the rest of the week considering some practical ways "ways of escape" in the midst of hormonal seasons such as PMS or menopause or postpartum depression. The first is, "Get Ready."

Now, of course, we can't always plan ahead. Maybe we are caught totally unawares by postpartum depression or perhaps menopause comes early or our monthly cycles are irregular. This will be true for many of us, and God's grace is available to help us through.

If these seasons do come unexpectedly, though, we can still stop and pray and plan for the duration. Maybe we pull away for a few minutes when we realize it's a PMS day. Or, we take an afternoon to pray and read if we find ourselves floundering in the midst of menopause or postpartum depression.

Here are three simple suggestions to get ready:

1. *Check the calendar:* If you know you struggle with PMS every month, then figure out when that might be. Tell your husband or roommates as well. If you experienced postpartum depression with your first child, be aware (not afraid) that you might experience it again. And while we can't predict when menopause will come exactly, we do know it will probably be in the middle to later years of our life.

2. *Read up:* Soaking ourselves in gospel-centered materials will help strengthen us for the fight ahead. Consider reading books such as *Spiritual Depression* by D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *When the Darkness Will Not Lift* by John Piper (you can read online) or Chapter 13 in *Seeing With New Eyes* by David Powlison, entitled "What Do You Feel?" Also, getting a medical education (from a biblical perspective) can be of great benefit. We suggest you begin with *Blame it on the Brain* by Ed Welch. Or, if it is something as predictable as PMS, simply having a verse at the ready can be invaluable.

3. *Get Help:* If you think menopause might be around the corner, pursue godly women for practical and spiritual advice. If you believe you might experience postpartum depression again, ask for help from your husband and a godly woman to prepare. Or simply ask someone to speak truth to you in the middle of PMS. Obviously, help from your doctor may be in order as well. We'll touch on that later in the week.

Some practical "in the middle of it" thoughts tomorrow...

A Simple Season

by Janelle Bradshaw

My life is pretty simple these days. I've cut way back on activities and responsibilities. As I wrote in a previous post, I have been more sick (and emotional) this pregnancy than with Caly. When sickness first set in, I tried hard to keep my normal schedule: still waking up early and tackling my to-do list. But I was failing royally. I was exhausted and couldn't keep up. Change was needed. I knew I needed to simplify.

I had to acknowledge that the Lord had placed limitations in this season of my life. It was humbling, but these limitations were God-given and for my good. So, I pared down my life to the two most important things: tending to my soul and caring for my family (to the best of my ability).

Making these two areas a priority meant cutting out other projects and pursuits and even disappointing people at times. I have said "no" to certain social events and photography jobs. I have barely picked up my camera in over two months. (And for someone who used to take pictures every day, that is pretty drastic!) I purposefully take one to two naps every day. All this so I can conserve my energy and spend it on a quiet time and caring for my family's basic needs.

How can you simplify in hormonal seasons so that your family and your spiritual life are the main priorities? What do you need to cut out of your life temporarily so that these two most important things don't get crowded out by less significant activities and events? If we don't purpose to pare down in these difficult seasons (or days of the month), then we'll most likely end up overwhelmed and exhausted, neglecting what is most important.

This week I have begun to feel the sickness lifting. Slowly but surely my energy is returning. And soon I will begin adding things back in to my schedule. But in six short months, when baby number 2 arrives, it's gonna be a "simplify" season once again.

Check back tomorrow for "strategies to simplify."

A New Normal

by Carolyn Mahaney

"I have been unexpectedly catapulted into menopause because of the chemo I was on last year" wrote a friend who is recovering from cancer. "This is a fairly common side affect for women my age. In my effort to 'get

back to normal' I have been trying to go full throttle with everything. Wondering why I keep crying. Anyway, I think the hormonal changes have a lot to do with it. I am making an effort to simplify and look for a 'new normal' in this season. Thank you all so much. You have really encouraged me."

My friend is right. We often need to find a "new normal" in these seasons of our lives. We need to adjust our lifestyle to keep the most important things most important. We brainstormed and came up with just a few "strategies to simplify." These can all be useful for the week of PMS, the months of postpartum depression, the years of menopause, or any other unusually busy or difficult season.

To feed your soul:

- ✦ Do whatever is necessary to spend time in God's Word each day. If you are unable to do so in the morning (the ideal time), carve out space in the afternoon or evening. And if you don't already, make sure to have a good Bible-reading plan to feed your soul. We highly recommend DA Carson's *For the Love of God, Morning and Evening* by Charles Spurgeon, and Spurgeon's commentaries on the Psalms.
- ✦ Create a list of verses and gospel-focused quotes that can feed your soul. You could write them on index cards or even make a little booklet. Often, in these difficult seasons, we need simple, bite-sized truths from God's Word to sustain us.
- ✦ Have worship music or hymns, Bible reading or *The Valley of Vision* audio, or even good sermons around the house and in the car. Turn on a soundtrack of truth to replace the lies of your conscience and the enemy.

To serve your family/roommates:

- ✦ Focus on food and laundry (and not much else!). And keep it basic. No gourmet meals or new recipes! Go paper plates. Freeze meals ahead of time. Buy already prepared food. Do cereal if you have to! And simplify laundry by sending dress shirts to the dry cleaners or getting the kids to help sort.
- ✦ My mom always said: "If you make your bed and do the dishes in the sink the house will feel a whole lot cleaner!" Don't worry about the toys on the floor or the baseboards that need scrubbing.

Just set simple, achievable goals like getting the bed made every day.

✦ Get a shower. You'll feel a whole lot better.

✦ Take naps and go to bed early.

We told you these were simple ideas. Although they may seem elementary, we often ignore them in favor of more complicated strategies designed to stuff our lives as full as possible. Instead, during these seasons, we should look to make extra space to meet with God and serve our families. And if we're more peaceful in the process, then we'll be a blessing to all around us.

What's Next?

by Nicole Whitacre

We've readied ourselves for hormonal seasons, cut out unnecessary activities and devised simple strategies. All that is left is to do our duty; to get off the couch, to change the diaper; to go to work, to make the bed--whatever task is right in front of us.

It might be the last thing in the world we feel like doing, but God will provide the strength; and grace to endure will come as we obey. It's a simple "way of escape" that this poem describes:

"Many a questioning, many a fear,
Many a doubt, hath its quieting here.
Moment by moment, let down from Heaven,
Time, opportunity, guidance, are given.
Fear not tomorrows, Child of the King,
Trust them with Jesus, DO THE NEXT THING.

Do it immediately; do it with prayer;
Do it reliantly, casting all care;
Do it with reverence, tracing His Hand
Who placed it before thee with earnest command.
Stayed on Omnipotence, safe 'neath His wing,
Leave all resultings, DO THE NEXT THING.

Step by step, next thing by next thing, God will be faithful to help us to glorify Him in these challenging seasons.

The conclusion of our PMS Prep series next week, and Friday Funnies before the day is through...

“Talking to Your Tears”

by Carolyn Mahaney

After reading Friday’s post, girltalk reader Andrea encouraged us to check out an essay from John Piper’s *A Godward Life* entitled “Talking to Your Tears.” We’re quoting a small excerpt here, but you’re really going to want to read the rest; so go ahead and buy the book!

“Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.” Psalm 126:5-6

“This psalm teaches the tough truth that there is work to be done whether I am emotionally up for it or not, and it is good for me to do it. Suppose you are in a season of heartache and discouragement, and it is time to sow seed. Do you say, ‘I can’t sow the field this spring, because I am brokenhearted and discouraged’? If you do that, you will not eat in the winter. Suppose you say instead, ‘I am heartsick and discouraged. I cry if the milk spills at breakfast. I cry if the phone and doorbell ring at the same time. I cry for no reason at all, but the field needs to be sowed. That is the way life is. I do not feel like it, but I will take my bag of seeds and go out in the fields and do my crying while I do my duty. I will sow in tears.’

If you do that, the promise of this psalm is that you will ‘reap with shouts of joy.’ You will ‘come home with shouts of joy, bringing your sheaves with you,’ not because the tears of sowing produce the joy of reaping, but because the sheer sowing produces the reaping. We need to remember this even when our tears tempt us to give up sowing.” *A Godward Life*, pp. 89-90

So what fields in your life need to be sowed today? Even if you cry while you do your duty, you will, one day reap with joy.

Wise Medical Counsel

by Carolyn Mahaney

Along with other practical ways of escape, taking care of our bodies in the midst of PMS, menopause, postpartum depression etc. is wise and helpful.

Because we girtalkers have no medical expertise whatsoever, we consulted two Christian doctors, Dr. Jeffrey Trimark and Dr. Christopher Mays and asked for their advice.

First, Dr. Trimark explains that:

"Treatment for either PMS or PMDD (premenstrual dysphoric disorder, a severe form of PMS) begins with non-prescription interventions. I recommend women take Vitamin D 1000IU daily, Calcium 1000mg daily and Vitamin B6 100mg daily. In addition, I recommend avoiding caffeine and alcohol and participating in regular aerobic exercise (150 minutes weekly). As always, a balanced diet is recommended, but there is no evidence to suggest certain foods will improve or worsen symptoms. Because the symptoms of PMDD and PMS are cyclical, I also encourage women to be intentional to spend some additional time in prayer and meditation during these challenging times."

Dr. Mays adds for those experiencing menopause:

"Although PMS and menopause are conditions that are primarily hormonal, they are obviously not the same and the treatment for the most part is not the same. The non-prescription interventions for PMS (Vitamin D, Calcium and Vitamin B) are important in menopause, but they will not treat the symptoms of menopause. Non-prescription treatments include Vitamin E, black cohosh, and naturally occurring estrogens called phytoestrogens. There are several other prescription options as well."

Both doctors concur, in Dr. May's words, that: "The main message when it comes to treating PMS or menopause is that each patient responds differently and often a physician will need to try several treatment options before a successful combination is reached."

As Christian physicians they do, as Dr. Trimarks says, "believe there is a God-honoring role for prescription therapy" and so, if your symptoms are severe, you should consult your physician.

However, both doctors caution their patients "to not excuse the sinful behaviors that occur during these times of increased temptations by thinking of them as simply a result of a disease." That is why we've spent the majority of this series examining ways of escape, so we can stand up

under the increased temptation during PMS, postpartum depression or menopause.

Wise doctors are a gift from God. We are so grateful for the common grace of medical wisdom, and to Dr. Trimark and Dr. Mays for their willingness to serve the *girltalk* audience. Tomorrow we'll look beyond the helpful advice contained here to the promises of God's Word, which is sufficient to sustain us, regardless of the severity of our trial.

Real Trial, Real Grace

by Nicole Whitacre

A grandmother once told me about how she suffered from postpartum depression after the birth of her first baby. She didn't know what was happening to her. No one had told her to expect this. No one assured her it was normal. No one offered comfort or counsel. They just didn't talk about things like that back then.

But hormonal challenges are real. PMS, menopause, postpartum depression—whether mild or severe—are honest to goodness trials. It is no use being pseudo-spiritual, thinking we as Christians are immune to such temptations. Better to humbly acknowledge the frailty of our human condition. Better to remember, as God does, that “we are dust” (Ps. 103:14).

But God “knows our frame.” He's counted every hair on our head and knows the exact level of every hormone in our body. He made us this way. And not as some kind of cruel joke; but rather, so that through our weakness, His power may be “made perfect.”

Yes, the hormones may be raging, our feelings may fluctuate and our body may have worn out. But God's grace—that comes to us because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross—is real. It is not a myth or a placebo. His grace is real. And it is more powerful than any out-of-whack hormones in our body. It is, as God told Paul in 2 Corinthians 12, “sufficient for you.”

Unpredictable hormones may be the proverbial thorn in our side. We may plead, as Paul did with his ailment, that God would take away this trial. (I admire Paul's self-control in only pleading three times!) But often, God has other plans. He wants to position us so that the power of Christ may rest on us.

Therefore, let us be content in weakness. Not that we don't do what we can to alleviate the symptoms. We should avail ourselves of the common grace of naps and vitamins and paper plates and a shoulder to cry on and even a doctor's visit, if necessary. But our hope is not ultimately in these things. Our salvation is from God. Our hope is in His power that is sufficient to see us through.

So let us boast.

Let us tell other women of the grace of God that is sufficient. Sufficient to enable us to get a handle on our feelings. Sufficient to help us rejoice. Sufficient to cause us to grow. Sufficient to empower us to do the next thing, to sow in tears and reap in joy.

Today, women are much more educated than that grandmother about the reality of hormonal challenges. But we, as Christian women, should testify even more loudly of the grace of God that is real, the power of Christ that is sufficient.*

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