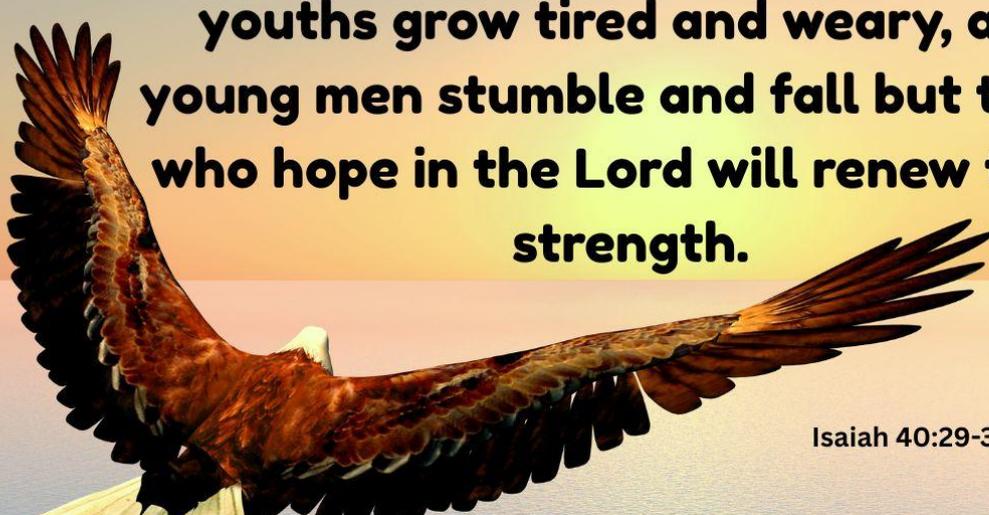


Mum guilt and perinatal depression struggles



He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

Isaiah 40:29-31 (NIV)

Motherhood is often described as one of life's greatest blessings. Yet for many women, the days and months after childbirth bring challenges that are rarely spoken about. Perinatal depression and the weight of mum guilt are often kept behind closed doors. Because of stigma, shame, or misunderstanding, mothers may feel they must appear strong, or that they must always "enjoy every moment."

The saying goes - it takes a village to raise a child, meaning raising a child is a complex, demanding job, and is not easily accomplished by just one or two people. Having a new baby can be stressful on new mothers and can result in the mother having mum guilt, baby blues or perinatal depression

Mum guilt and baby blues

Motherhood can be hard and very overwhelming, after giving birth, a mother's body goes through not only the healing process after giving birth, but also changes in her hormones that affect her physical and mental wellbeing, which can make her feel very overwhelmed, and can cause mood swings and anxiety, many new mothers will experience the "baby blues," where they feel teary, overwhelmed, or uncertain in the first few weeks. Sleep deprivation and the enormous responsibility of caring for a newborn can amplify these hormonal effects.

A lot of mothers put extreme pressure on themselves due to "wanting to do it right" or comparing themselves to others, which plays a role in fuelling mum guilt. Putting high standards on yourself as a new mum and when these expectations are not met, guilt floods in and then you may have feelings of self-doubt or inadequacy. Mum guilt can also be the nagging voice that whispers, "You are not doing enough, or you are failing in your role as a mum." These thoughts often arise from internal and external pressures. This can be things like high expectations, from yourself, from

family members and peers with babies, health providers, nurses, and society. Often, you can become stressed when you are asked questions from others about your care or progress of your baby. This can be nerve racking with a feeling of judgement from others if you feel you and your baby have not lived up to the expectations of what they expect, e.g., your baby not putting on weight, or the mother is struggling with breastfeeding, or even unable to breastfeed and need to bottle feed. This experience can be emotionally exhausting and, if left unchecked, can contribute to the development of perinatal depression. But you need to remember that every child is different, every experience is unique, and every milestone unfolds in its own time.

Perinatal depression: more than baby blues

Perinatal depression is a recognised clinical condition that goes beyond the common “baby blues.” Baby blues typically last a week or two but if the mothers mood swings, tearfulness, and depression last longer than two weeks it could be that they are suffering from perinatal depression which is more severe. It can develop through pregnancy and any time in the first year after birth and can affect not only mothers but fathers as well. Research suggests that approximately one in five mothers and one in ten fathers experience some form of perinatal mental health conditions.

Treatment for perinatal depression depends on its severity. Mild to moderate cases often respond well with therapy. Support groups can also reduce isolation and provide encouragement. In more severe cases medication may be prescribed. Alongside this support, our faith and trust in God is comforting and essential, which can involve prayer, reading scripture, worship, and fellowship can provide comfort and strength for us.

Struggles and symptoms of new mothers

Struggles and Social factors

- Complete responsibility for the baby 24/7, which can feel overwhelming and exhausting.
- Constant pressure to “do it right”, with worry about meeting every one of the baby’s needs.
- Emotional load of caring, planning, and thinking for another life around the clock.
- Feelings of isolation as days can become repetitive with little adult conversation and interaction.
- A sense of losing part of one’s identity, with limited time for simple self-care like showering, preparing food, or doing something for yourself.
- Difficulty balancing other roles, as a wife, daughter, sister, and friend.
- Lack of emotional or practical support.
- Isolation or loneliness, especially with the lack of sleep.
- Financial pressures or other family stress.

Relationship Strain on Husband and Wife

- Adjusting to life with a newborn can put strain on your relationship with your husband due to routine changes and intimacy may take time to return.
 - Both may feel sleep deprived and emotionally stretched, leading to short tempers or misunderstandings.
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- One parent may feel the other isn't helping enough or doesn't understand their stress, these mismatched expectations can lead to frustration or resentment, affecting closeness.
 - The baby's needs often come first, and conversations can revolve solely around feeding, sleep, and schedules, resulting in less time together
 - Some fathers may feel jealous or left out, unsure how to fit into the new family dynamic.

While this strain is common, it doesn't mean the relationship is broken, it can be an opportunity to grow stronger together, learning to share responsibilities, communicate openly, and lean on each other for support as you adjust to this new season of life

Symptoms of Perinatal Depression may include

- Prolonged sadness, tearfulness, irritability, anger, or feelings of anxiety, hopelessness, worthlessness, and shame.
- Difficulty bonding with the baby, feeling emotionally distant, overwhelming guilt or a sense of failure.
- Difficulty concentrating, making decisions, changes in sleep patterns and appetite, persistent fatigue or low energy, loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed.
- Thoughts of self-harm or harming the baby (This symptom requires immediate medical attention).

Perinatal depression is more than sadness or tiredness, it is important to realise that these feelings are not the mother's fault, they are part of a health condition, just like high blood pressure or diabetes, so with the right support and treatment, mothers can improve and recover. Every mother deserves understanding, care, and hope. Healing begins with compassion and support, not shame and judgement.

Compassion for mothers

Perinatal depression struggles are often kept in secrecy which feeds the mother's guilt and shame. Mothers should be made to feel that they can speak their pain without fear, knowing they will be met with love and support rather than condemnation.

Perinatal depression is not only emotional, but it can also be physical and spiritual as well. God cares about the whole person—body, mind, and soul. In Matthew 11:28, reassures us as it says, come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. He invites us to come in our weariness, in our heaviness, and in our weakness. We long for the heaviness to lift quickly, and we want the clouds of despair to part immediately. But often God's timing is slower than our preference, and we are told to trust His timing.

If we feel that people around us do not understand, be assured that God still does. He sees the battle that others may overlook. Isaiah 42:16 records a powerful picture of His care, I will lead the blind by a way they do not know, in paths they have not known I will guide them", and in Psalm 139:10 reminds us, "even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast". When we feel like we cannot stand on our own, His hand is there to hold us fast. The moments that feel overwhelming, He promises to transform into manageable steps. If you are walking through mother issues God sees what others cannot, and He knows the way forward even when the path feels impossible.

Reminders of comfort for mothers

- God blessed YOU with your baby. God gives you challenges, but He always provides you with the love, strength and grace to raise them.
- You may feel weary, but your Heavenly Father sees you and is working through you in every small act of love.
- You don't have to have all the answers, just trust your journey and trust God's plan for you.
- You don't have to be a perfect mother, just a present one, and trust God will fill the gaps in with His grace.
- When you have days that the dishes never end, the noise never stops, and the to-do list only grows, and you wonder if what you do even matters, it does, you matter. The love you pour out, even in exhaustion, is seen by God.
- When your hands are busy, but your heart feels empty and you find you are saddened, you are not invisible, God sees you. Our Heavenly Father always sees us, Genesis 16:13 (NIV).
- You are not alone, millions of mothers have stood right where you are and made it through, and you have God in your corner. Psalm 34:18 says, "The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit".

How to support mothers

Paul reminds us in Galatians 6:2, Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ. Family, and brethren and sisters support is critical for new mothers, supporting or carrying mothers' burdens may be doing a list of helpful duties for the mother. It may consist of listening without judgment, offering prayer, and reminding one another of God's promises. We need to provide a safe space where mothers can be honest about their struggles without fear of shame, but offer encouragement, guidance and assure them that they are doing a good job of mothering. We also must encourage new mothers to take care of themselves, as part of taking care of their babies, involves taking care of themselves.

We find a beautiful illustration of this in Exodus 17:12. During Israel's battle, Moses stood with his staff raised, but as his arms grew tired, Aaron and Hur stood beside him, holding up his arms until the battle was won. In the same way, mothers in the depths of their struggles need "arm-holders", people who will lift them up when they feel too weak to carry on.

[Ways to help a new mother](#) (Remember nobody hides pain better than a mother that is not coping).

- We can ask a simple question, what do you need me to do right now? Or see a task that needs to be done and do it. This could be as simple as providing a break for the mother by holding the baby, having a sleep, getting some fresh air, time to complete a household chore, you could run an errand for them, put on a load of washing, do dishes, tidy up, or take care of the baby whilst the mother has a shower etc. Even doing the smallest job can help her feel less stressed.
- We can organise for meals to be dropped off to them or deliver some food and baby items.
- We need to be good listeners. When mum becomes overwhelmed or is upset, we need to normalise mum's feelings and emotions, while offering support and reassurance to her.

- We need to make sure that we keep checking in and offering support even after the initial few days of motherhood, it's important for the mother to know she has supports and is not alone.
- Support for a new mother can also be phone calls, texts, or small gifts to brighten up her day. If the mother doesn't respond to the text don't be upset as she has a lot going on.
- You could remind them of scripture encouragement of God being with them, always working, and guiding them.
- Encourage mothers to seek professional help if there are signs of perinatal depression, as this is critical for the health of the mother and her baby.

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Hope for weary mothers

To the mothers who are silently struggling, to the one who doesn't feel the joy she thought would come naturally, to the one who cries when no one's looking and wonders if she'll ever feel like herself again, you may feel tired, or weighed down, but remember you are not alone, and you are not broken. Many mothers suffer these feelings, and God is there with you. Perinatal depression is not your fault; it's not a sign of weakness. And in the eyes of God, you are still deeply loved, still held, and never for one moment unseen.

Perinatal depression may feel like an endless and lonely struggle. God's promises remain unshaken. He promises to hold us fast, as Psalm 139:10 declares. He promises to turn darkness into light, as Isaiah 42:16 assures us. He promises to strengthen us in the waiting, as Proverbs 3:5–6 reminds us. And He promises to give rest to the weary, as Jesus Himself invites us in Matthew 11:28.

Becoming a mother brings many challenges, but it also reveals a strength you may not have realised you carried, the strength to face the hard times for the sake of this new life you treasure so deeply. And while motherhood may change some of your old friendships, it also opens the door to new connections with other mums and families, giving you people to share your experiences and journey with.

Our Heavenly Father sees our hearts and how hard our struggles are, we need to ask Him for help to overcome our guilt that we carry, restore our peace of mind, heal our broken hearts, and remember God's grace and forgiveness.

When I am sad at heart, when earthly joys depart, in hours of loneliness, in times of dire distress, In failure or success, teach me Thy Way. When doubts and fears arise, when storms o'erspread the skies, shine through the cloud and rain, through sorrow, toil and pain, make Thou my pathway plain; teach me Thy Way. Hymn 165 verses 2 & 3

Kylee Mingham

I share my own personal journey and experience as a new mother with perinatal depression on the Adelphicare website - <https://www.adelphicare.org/documents/075-perinatal.pdf>

Click [here](#) to view a recording of hymn 165 by the Adelpian Singers, or [here](#) to download it.
