

A Simple Prayer for Mothers and Children Worldwide

C.S. Lewis once penned, “Prayer. It doesn’t change God’s mind. It changes me.” At Hope Through Healing Hands, we provide clinical care for vulnerable populations worldwide through medical missions. We also promote awareness and advocacy for maternal, newborn and child health in developing nations. We pray for mothers and children around the world, not because it changes God’s mind, but because it changes our own.

We know that 1 in 39 women are at risk to die in childbirth in sub-Saharan Africa this year. Moreover, pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death for girls age 15-19 worldwide. We know this is a preventable tragedy. This is why we have launched the Faith-based Coalition for Healthy Mothers and Children Worldwide. We are galvanizing leaders in the evangelical community across the nation who are athletes, actors, artists, authors, pastors, academic and nonprofit leaders to rethink and reconsider the critical importance of maternal and child health in developing nations with a special emphasis on healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies as a part of that continuum of care.

What do we mean by healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies? Becoming pregnant at age 15-19 creates *twice* the risk of death to a mother as becoming pregnant at age 20-24. In Ethiopia, the average age of marriage is 16. This means so many young girls are at risk of severe complications and death if their pregnancy debut is before 20. Even if they survive, they face a high risk of fistula or other disability. If these young married women can simply “time” their first pregnancy in their early 20s, they have a substantially better chance at having a safe pregnancy, delivery and healthy baby.

And if the young woman can have the opportunity to “space” her

children, just three years apart, the child is twice as likely to survive the newborn stage.

The Mother & Child Project: Raising Our Voices for Health and Hope (Zondervan, 2015) chronicles the stories of women in Ethiopia, Burundi, Kenya, India and Uganda. They share their stories about how healthy timing and spacing of families has saved their own lives, the lives of their children, or the stability of their families. Authors like Christine Caine, Natalie Grant, Mary Beth Chapman, and Michael Gerson talk about their experiences in developing nations with stories and anecdotes to demonstrate why this issue is so critical to combatting modern day slavery, sex trafficking, the orphan crisis and mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS.

Healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies means combating both maternal and infant mortality worldwide. It is a critical tool to save lives, empower women and promote sustainability for families, communities and even nations.

What can you do as a believer for these women and children? How can you be a part of saving lives and creating sustainable, lasting change for millions worldwide?

First, pray. And, when you pray, consider Amy Grant's simple prayer in "Greet the Day" on her album *How Mercy Looks from Here*:

"Lord, lead me to the ones I need.

And, to the ones who need me."

This is a simple prayer that may change the way you encounter your own daily experiences. This prayer opens your eyes to those who cross your path that you may need in your life, and opens your heart to those who may very much need you and your voice.

Secondly, promote awareness. Talk with family and friends

about these issues. Tweet this article; ask friends on Facebook to join you in prayer for these women and children. Lead a Bible Study or book club with *The Mother & Child Project: Raising Our Voices for Health and Hope* and its companion 4-week discussion guide.

And finally, join the chorus of voices. Advocate. King Lemuel's mother in Proverbs 31 advises him to "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; speak up for the poor and the destitute." She knew the wisdom and the righteousness of uplifting those on the margins. We are called as believers to raise our voice for the voiceless, and to let our elected leaders, such as our president, senators and congressional representatives, know that we want them to support foreign assistance, less than 1 percent of the U.S. Budget, on behalf of vulnerable populations around the world.

Let's lift our voices together to protect and increase funding for maternal, newborn, and child health worldwide to save lives as we strive to care for the "least of these," as commanded in Scripture.

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