

How Your Excruciating Labor Pains Are Bearing Incredible Spiritual Fruit

My husband and I were walking by a large pond in our neighborhood. We live in the low country of South Carolina, and our ponds are full of alligators as well as other reptiles and amphibians. We also have blue herons, snowy egrets, cormorants, ospreys, red-tailed hawks, ibis and wood storks, all of which make our walks so incredibly delightful. That day, the gators were out in full force. We must have seen five or six on our short walk. For the first time ever, we heard an alligator growl. Our neighbors, who were walking several steps ahead, stopped and shouted back, "Hey, did you hear that?"

"Yes," I said, "but what is it?" Our neighbor replied that it was the sound of an alligator in mating season.

It reminded me of a time when I was a young woman, and I growled at my husband in that same way. It was in the labor room as I was getting ready to give birth to my son. I had been in hard Pitocin-induced labor, with its characteristic intense and abrupt contractions of the uterus, for 18 hours. I cannot remember ever being in such pain. It seemed as though it would go on forever. However, when my sweet baby son was placed in my arms, all the pain I experienced seem to fade from my memory. As I peered into his beautiful blue eyes, I saw in him the reflection of my husband and me looking down at him. Joy. What joy. He was perfect.

When a baby is being born, it has to be pushed through the birth canal. He has to leave his place of security and comfort and go to a new place of the unknown. It cannot be a pain-free process for either the mother or the child, but when complete, the baby feels safe in his parents' arms. The child quickly

identifies with the mother who carried him for nine months, and then recognizes the father as he quickly connects with him also. The pain is soon forgotten, and the joy of new life takes its place.

If you have ever had children, you might remember that precious look in your babies' eyes when they first looked up and recognized their father. The newborn knows almost nothing, yet he knows to whom he belongs. Think back to the time when you saw the father gazing into the eyes of his newborn. Dad was beaming with joy at every sound and every little movement.

Now take this picture of a father and a newborn and apply that to how God feels when we have come through a difficult period of refinement. He smiles down at His child. He is so pleased. He sees more of His own perfect reflection as He gazes into the soul that has been refined. Was all the pain worth it? Yes. Yes. Yes. Pain is here for a time, but joy comes in the morning after the darkness of the night. Joy bubbles up inside you when you come through the fires of refinement. It is a joy that cannot compare with mere happiness. It's deeper. It's richer. It's more intense.

Trials come. Tribulation comes. However, as believers, we are to count it all joy when we have to face various trials and temptations (James 1:2). How can we do that? Are we supposed to fake our way through it? Are we to put on a happy face when everything in us is hurting? I think our real test is to not become a victim of our own circumstances but instead to be victorious, knowing that through the trial we are being refined. In the process, we are being purged of all that is not like God.

And this is an important process. After all, as Charles Spurgeon once said, "No faith is so precious as that which lives and triumphs in adversity. Tried faith brings experience. You could not have believed your own weakness had you not been compelled to pass through the rivers; and you

would never have known God's strength had you not been supported amid the water-floods."

✖ *Adapted from No Regrets by Robin M. Bertram, copyright 2017, published by Charisma House. This book is a manual for living your life to the fullest, without regrets and embracing what lies ahead to make your life more meaningful and rewarding. To order your copy click on this link.*

Prayer Power for the Week of Sept. 17, 2017

This week, in the aftermath of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma as well as remembering the impact of the terrorist attacks on 9/11/2001, continue to pray and ask the Lord to guide your steps to make you a blessing to those who desperately need it. Pray for unity among believers and across the nation as we combine efforts to help those victimized by both natural and terrorist disasters. Continue to pray for the president and those working with him to do what's best for the country. Remember our allies as well. Read James 1:2; 1 Peter 1:6-7; 2 Corinthians 8:7.