

When There's No Logical Reason for a Teeny, Tiny Baby to Survive

According to the World Health Organization, approximately 15 million babies are born prematurely each year. Among those that survive, many suffer from lifelong health problems like cerebral palsy, developmental delay or sensory loss. March of Dimes estimates that nearly 1 in 10 children in the United States is born prematurely. Thankfully, the creation and use of neonatal medical technology has significantly increased the potential for American babies to have a fighting chance. But what happens to babies in the developing world, who don't have access to such life-saving technology?

"Currently, prematurity is the leading cause of death among children under 5 around the world, and a leading cause of disability and ill health later in life." And according to Every Preemie – SCALE, only 37 percent of Haitian births are attended by a skilled attendant. (In LiveBeyond's research, we've found that 98 percent of the women in our area deliver at home alone.) According to their research on Haiti, "In 2012, prematurity was a cause in 17 percent of childhood deaths under 5 years old and in approximately 35 percent of all neonatal deaths. Haiti's preterm birth rate in 2010 was 14.1 percent, ranking it 19th among countries with the highest preterm birth rates, similar to Bangladesh and Liberia."

As a Christian, these are hard statistics to face. Why is God letting this happen? But more importantly, why are we as Christians not doing more about it in the name of God? After all, "For the eyes of the Lord move about on all the earth to strengthen the heart that is completely toward Him" (2 Chron. 16:9).

Now, I'm a writer. So, I can advocate all day long about how this is an issue, but I can only do so much to help. It's people like my friend Tayler Johnston, a women's health nurse practitioner and certified midwife who can make a real difference. She moved to Haiti earlier this year to run the Maternal Health program at LiveBeyond. She saw what was happening and knew that she could use her knowledge and skills to make an impact.

The program has been going strong since 2012. In its first year, it reduced the perinatal mortality rate among the women in the program by 66 percent, and it has not stopped there. They provide women in the program with initial screenings and weekly pregnancy monitoring, weekly provisions of prenatal vitamins, nutritional support, maternal health education, a sterile obstetrical delivery kit, in-home check-ups after delivery and newborn medical care for one year. They even provide a 24-hour hotline for the mothers and obstetric services to women wanting to give birth in the LiveBeyond clinic.

And we aren't alone. Heartline Ministries in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, has used its Maternal Health program as a tool for orphan prevention because if mothers feel capable of delivering healthy babies, they will be less likely to abandon them. And that builds healthy families.

"I see these tiny, tiny babies in Haiti," Tayler says, "and all I can do is pray for a miracle because there is no logical reason that they should survive. Once they grow strong and healthy, I try to give all the glory to God for coming through and miraculously keeping these babies alive." This year we've been able to help close to 350 mothers through our program. But we know there are thousands more still needing help in Haiti alone, and millions more around the world. It's just a matter of people becoming more informed about these issues, advocating on behalf of those less fortunate and donating and volunteering if they have the funds and the skills to do so.

We have plans to build an obstetric ward in our hospital complex to offer services to women and babies who have previously had access to almost no medical care. While prematurity is not an issue that's going away any time soon, we can help provide the technology and expertise needed to get these babies on a path to success. Will you join us and others around the world in helping to end deaths due to prematurity?

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Devin Vanderpool is the director of communications for LiveBeyond. To find out how you can partner with LiveBeyond or donate to their relief efforts visit