

Newborn Promise Podcast

Episode #11- for Postpartum Depression

Audra Haney: Thanks for tuning into the Newborn Promise podcast, a production of Graham Blanchard, Inc. You are listening to an interview with Rebecca McCutchan called Preparing for Postpartum Depression. For today's show notes, transcript, and more information about your newborn promise project, please visit grahamblanchard.com.

Well, welcome to the Newborn Promise podcast, I'm Audra Haney, and today we are tackling postpartum depression. Motherhood no doubt can bring on a tsunami of change, and with it, wave after wave of emotions, excitement, anticipation, contemplation, weariness, and many others, but most expecting moms don't think about the possibility of depression. However, the reality is that according to the CDC, one in nine moms will experience postpartum depression. Former social worker and mental health counselor now turned full time mom, Rebecca McCutcheon joins us today, to share her personal experience with postpartum depression. We think you'll appreciate how she dealt with it head-on, and some of these incredibly practical tips she has for expecting moms to tuck away, in case postpartum hits your family after baby. Rebecca, thank you so much for being with us today.

Rebecca McCutchan: Yes, thank you for having me.

Audra Haney: Let's start by having you share about your first pregnancy. Give us a quick testimony of what that experience was like for you.

Rebecca McCutchan: Sure. With my first pregnancy, it came as a total surprise. We were originally told by doctors that it would kind of be impossible to get pregnant, because I had cysts on my ovaries and was dealing with some medical things at the time, so we were just totally caught off guard with that pregnancy and just overjoyed, and just really in total awe of God and his ability to open my womb in that way in that time.

Audra Haney: Your son's name is Isaac, tell us a bit about that decision.

Rebecca McCutchan: Yeah, so his name is Isaac, and it means laughter, and we got it from the Bible, and it was when I found out I was pregnant with him. That was my response, is I just started laughing, and I hadn't even had a menstrual cycle for two years before we conceived him, so it was just totally kind of out of nowhere, and I did laugh because I was just in shock and in awe of God and his goodness.

Audra Haney: What were some of your ideas or expectations when it came to adding a baby to the family at that time?

Rebecca McCutchan: I think I was just sort of in a place where I think most new parents are, of just total naivety, and not really knowing what to expect. I definitely, because my personality is more of a perfectionist and a student by nature, I went and read a lot of books, and kind of thought that that would be enough to prepare me for motherhood. I think I also naively thought that my baby wouldn't be the baby who's crying and losing control in a grocery store, and my baby would essentially be a product of how much I prepare.

Audra Haney: Yes, I'm laughing over here because I'm remembering all of my highlighted baby books on sleep, and it definitely didn't work out the way that I planned. For you, as you were planning and dreaming, was postpartum depression something that was on your radar before Isaac?

Rebecca McCutchan: It wasn't, it really wasn't. I had struggled with depression and anxiety kind of on and off throughout my adult life, especially in college, but at the time of being pregnant with Isaac, I was just so overjoyed with that experience that it really wasn't on my radar, and I kind of wrongfully associated it with a mom wanting to hurt her baby. I kind of put that out of my head, that's what I thought it was, and then I just sort of moved on, and did not think that it would apply to me, or when I was experiencing symptoms, I didn't connect it with that.

Audra Haney: Tell me about meeting Isaac and those first few moments of being a mom, was it everything you imagined?

Rebecca McCutchan: Yeah, it really was, it was everything that I hoped it would have been, and it was just so much more. I was really, I went into the labor and delivery experience just totally open, and I was at a really neat place with God, I feel like, during that experience. It's supposed to be like a storybook version of labor and delivery, that's what it was, so it was just a really emotional high for me. I think it just, that emotional high was just such a stark contrast to the months that were to follow.

Audra Haney: Yeah, and tell me about the transition into motherhood, as you got into those first few days and months, what was that like for you?

Rebecca McCutchan: For the first two weeks, I think I was still kind of riding off of that emotional high of, "Oh my goodness, God met me in this really wonderful place, and the baby's here and he's perfect," and he was really sleepy and quiet. My mom lived with us for two weeks, and she's such a huge support to me, so I felt really surrounded by love, my husband was off work for awhile. Those first two weeks were like, just an emotional high is really the only way I can describe it of, just

everything felt right. I had the support and love I needed, I had my sweet little sleepy baby, and then after two weeks, it just seems like that all kind of all crumbled away.

My mom had to go back home, and my husband had to go back to work, and then all of the sudden, my sweet calm baby started losing his mind. He was later diagnosed with colic and acid reflux, but he was just totally inconsolable. He didn't sleep, and he just, I mean he was a really really hard baby. We couldn't leave the house, because the car seat caused too much pressure on his little organs and made everything worse, so we were really confined to the house during that time. I felt like motherhood was really just crashing down on me all at once.

Audra Haney: Rebecca, what kind of thoughts were running through your mind as you tried to process some of these hard aspects of motherhood?

Rebecca McCutchan: I felt totally responsible for what was happening, I felt like his, what appeared to be life dissatisfaction I felt like was totally connected to my ability to mother him. I felt like such a huge failure, like you know, "I thought I had prepared for this, I read all the books, I have all the best stuff for you, and nothing is working." To have your baby not respond to you in those moments, like I couldn't even comprehend, and it was heartbreaking, and it also to me confirmed I think this deep belief that I was feeling at the most important job I ever had. I put so much into this, this was it, this was the culmination of who I'm supposed to be, the mother of this child, and he was confirming for me this just really negative belief system that I had.

Audra Haney: How did that spill over into marriage? That's a lot to carry around, so how did that play out in your relationship with Matt?

Rebecca McCutchan: Yeah, I think unfortunately I kept a lot of it in, and I really wanted, I still wanted to show him that I was doing a good job and trying. I didn't really let on to what was going on, I feel like, internally. I took a lot of the brunt with the nighttime screaming, and I would stay awake with Isaac and that sort of thing, and really tried to shelter Matt from that. Yeah, I think I really just wasn't totally honest with what I was feeling in my heart, and then I wasn't totally honest with him, although the whole time he was very affirming and just a huge support, always has been, but I don't even know if I could have vocalized it at the time, what I was feeling.

Audra Haney: Did you have any idea that this might be postpartum depression? You know, it can be a big, scary word to wrap our minds around if we haven't been through it, so did it ever occur to you that this was what you were experiencing?

Rebecca McCutchan: Not at the time, so I was really still caught up in the fact that Isaac, with the colic and the reflux, that kind of consumed me, like just trying to help him, trying to fix it, trying to make it better. I really didn't realize something was not right with me until about five months postpartum, and that's when Isaac, that's kind of when the colic was sort of lifted off of him. He was eating better, sleeping better, he was starting to smile for the first time. Things were getting better with him, and I think that's when I realized, "Oh, something's not right with me." I stopped sleeping, that was the first indication that something wasn't right.

Audra Haney: Were there any other red flags or symptoms on top of those things that you've already mentioned?

Rebecca McCutchan: Yeah, I think like the mind racing, I felt a lot of anxiety throughout the day, just a lot of, I was kind of trapped in just this negative thought loop, but yet I still tried to push through that and appear to have it together and appear to have the perfect situation going on. My house was always kept really clean, and I was even hosting a Bible study in my house during that time, and really wanted to have it together, but inside I was just crumbling. The ability to do simple tasks became really hard. A big part of it was due to the fact that I truly was not sleeping at night, I averaged like two to four hours most nights, and then other nights I just wouldn't sleep at all, and I would just stay awake watching the clock and just feeling afraid, worrying for my baby, just worrying that I wasn't sleeping.

I really attributed it to, "Oh, well my baby didn't sleep for five months, my body must just be off. My body's not responding now." My body got used to not sleeping, and I focused all my attention on that symptom of not sleeping and, "How can I solve this now?", rather than going big picture, and maybe more looking at my heart and really being honest with how I was feeling and doing in motherhood.

Audra Haney: I'm sure that felt so heavy. Rebecca, do you feel like you carried around a lot of false spiritual shame because of that?

Rebecca McCutchan: I wrongfully attribute it to, "God is punishing me, there's some area in my life spiritually speaking that I'm not doing or performing well enough in, or there's some deep sin in my heart, and this is why this is happening." I think I kind of got, I think I over-spiritualized what was going on and sort of muddled it with the torture I was feeling in my brain. I don't know if that makes sense, but I think I kind of turned it into something it wasn't in that area.

Audra Haney: That's so hard, and when did you realize, "I need to get some help," and how did you begin to take steps to get that support?

Rebecca McCutchan: At this point, between like five and nine months postpartum, I still didn't think postpartum depression, and that still wasn't even on my mind, because I thought, "Oh, I'm not thinking about hurting my baby, so that's not it." I really became obsessed with this idea of I'm not sleeping, and that's what needs to be fixed. I did go get help, I went to a counselor actually, and I saw her for maybe a month or more, and sadly, she never picked up on the postpartum depression, postpartum anxiety thing. She didn't see any of that, and I now know it's because she just wasn't trained in that area. She kind of dove into areas of my past, and kind of brought up things from childhood where she thought she was doing good, but now looking back in hindsight, I know that that was actually not what should have been happening at that time.

Yeah, I was trying in my own way and my own knowledge to reach out to people, and I did say, "I'm not sleeping, I need help with this." I got counseling, took the counseling, it wasn't helping, it was actually making it much worse, because now I would lay awake at night thinking about things from my childhood that I had already forgiven my mom for or something, but that was coming back to the surface again. I went to a midwife actually, and I went to my primary care physician, I also went to a natural doctor during this time period, and all with the same complaint, "I'm not sleeping at night," and so they all focused on that, of how to treat that, and it still wasn't helping. I finally was prescribed a really heavy dose of sleeping pills, and this was around nine months postpartum.

Again, that's maybe the only symptom I really could recognize or something, but that's what I would lead with, and so then that's what they would try to assist me with. When I was given the sleeping pills, I had to make the decision to stop breastfeeding my son, and that was traumatic all over again, because that was one of the only areas that I felt confident in with him, and it was one of the only areas that brought peace, something I felt like I was good at. To have that be taken away from me, it just felt like another confirmation that I was failing at this. I was failing him, I was failing myself, and I mean, none of that's true, but those were the lies that I was believing at that time.

Audra Haney: You're listening to the Newborn Promise podcast, I'm Audra Haney, and we're talking with Rebecca McCutcheon about her experience with postpartum depression. We asked Rebecca how she finally got help, and how she faced her depression head-on.

Rebecca McCutchan: After I weaned my son and just kind of went through that physical and emotional torture, I think I fell into an even deeper depression, and I think that's kind of when the anxiety sort of turned into this ugly monster of depression, and I began having thoughts of self harm, and just was in a very deep, dark place. It was one time in the middle of the night, I think this was around 11 months postpartum by this point, and

so middle of the night, just really crying out to the lord, and I often did at night, just crying. Usually it was, "Lord, help me sleep. Why is my body broken, why can't I sleep?", like just focusing, obsessing over this one area, where this time, my prayer was a little different. It was just, "Lord, just help me, I can't do this anymore."

I just felt really broken in a different way, and I just started Googling, as I did a lot too, for answers. I think I maybe changed some of the search terms I was using, and it just came up with a checklist for postpartum depression, and I thought, "Okay, I'll give this a look." By that point, at 11 months postpartum, I could pretty much check off everything on the list, and it was just kind of this, like the [scale 00:18:00] fell off my eyes and I could see finally like, "Oh my goodness, this is what I've been dealing with this whole time." I felt a lot of freedom in that, a lot of anger toward all the professionals that I had seen previously that had not picked up on it. Then thankfully at the bottom of the checklist, it was produced by the Hope Clinic here in Nashville, which is a women's wellness crisis pregnancy center.

At the bottom of the checklist, there was a phone number I could call, so the next day I did call, and I made an appointment and was seen immediately. Within two weeks of getting the right treatment, I began healing, it was really quite incredible how quickly my mind and my body and my spirit responded to the appropriate treatment for what I was dealing with.

Audra Haney:

I think your story is so eye-opening because many think of the stereotypical postpartum depression as just one of those first few weeks or months right after baby, and I think it's really interesting that it can be longer, and perhaps something that builds upon itself. Tell me some ways that postpartum may not fit the typical picture that many have in their minds.

Rebecca McCutchan:

I think it wasn't the stereotype because I had had a really good ... Well, I had thought I was kind of immune to it because I had a really good birth experience, and I know a lot of times postpartum depression can arise out of a negative birth experience. I also had a really good first two weeks, and a lot of times it's an initial feeling of anxiety and depression, and I felt like mine just kind of built upon itself, and it got worse and worse and worse. In that sense, it didn't seem typical, but now as I've learned more about it, it can even happen a year or two after you've had your baby. It has no time limit, and it can affect anyone too, you know that was the biggest thing I could take away from this. It can be anyone, and it doesn't look the same for everyone. If you've given birth, you're at risk for it.

Audra Haney:

That's such great information to know, and you've mentioned some of the counseling approaches that were not as helpful. Tell me, what were

some of the approaches or practices at Hope Clinic that really helped make a difference?

Rebecca McCutchan: Well, they had this specific training in postpartum depression and postpartum anxiety which I soon realized was really important for healing. It really focused just more on the immediate situation, and kind of like, "How can we get you back up on your feet as quickly as we can?" It wasn't necessary to dive into hurt from my childhood or other things, it was just really important to get me back on my feet, and help me to enjoy caring for my baby again. One of the things they did, they helped me get off the sleeping pills that I was on, because that was just kind of a temporary Band-Aid. By this point, I had become pretty addicted to them, and they were causing other symptoms, just really other negative symptoms.

I worked with a nurse practitioner there who helped me wean off of those, and then she also prescribed a low dose antidepressant. I feel like that helped kind of lift that initial fog, and just allowed me to be more receptive to the counseling that was being done. A lot of it was just, and the counselor was a mother, so I really appreciated her approach and sensitivity to what I was going through. It was about just setting my expectations appropriately. At least for me, that was a big area I was struggling in, just having appropriate expectations for myself, for my baby, for my husband, just for motherhood in general, and really just being honest with how I was feeling in the moment, and being okay with things not being perfect. That was a really big part of it as well.

Audra Haney: Let's go back to that negative self talk you mentioned earlier, the script in your mind that said you were failing or you weren't a good mom. How did you begin to rewrite that script, and what did that sound like?

Rebecca McCutchan: A lot of it really was centered around expectations, and just really the allowance for failure, and just to be okay with that, and to learn to be honest with myself, with God, and then be honest with other people. I had really kind of set up this wall around me during that time, so a big part of it was just being honest with my friends who were mothers as well, and then meeting in a place of honesty, "Oh wow, you feel that way too?" This isn't fun every day, and it's okay to say that. Yeah, just really breaking those walls down to a place of authenticity.

Audra Haney: After Isaac, you had two beautiful twin boys, and that was an amazing faith journey again, they really have a unique story. Tell us briefly about that.

Rebecca McCutchan: Yeah, so between Isaac and the twins, we actually had a miscarriage, and we were well into our second trimester, so we were really surprised by that. We found out we were pregnant with the twins, just totally to God's glory, the same week we would have been due with the baby that

we had lost, so it was really kind of, "Wow, had we had that baby, we wouldn't have been pregnant with these twins." It was a really interesting way to see how God orchestrated that, and really made beauty out of a painful situation. Yeah, we found out we were pregnant with the twins, and then very soon after that, we found out, "Oh wow, this is a really rare type of twin pregnancy, and there's only a 50% survival rate," because they shared the same sac and shared the placenta, and their cords were just in there tangling up the whole time.

It was a really high risk pregnancy, it required two to three ultrasounds a week, and then I had to go inpatient, I went in around 26 weeks, so yeah.

Audra Haney: You have two beautiful baby boys now, which is just incredible, and I think one of the things that is so interesting about your story is that you struggled with postpartum depression with Isaac, but not the twins. Talk to me about the noticeable differences, now that you've had the two different experiences.

Rebecca McCutchan: I think the main difference is, so normal is, I mean there is a period of baby blues typically after a woman gives birth, and I think that's just where the hormones are kind of re-settling where they need to be, so that's totally normal to be a little extra weepy, and maybe feel some anxiety the first couple weeks, but then it lifts, it goes away. The difference for me is that it never went away. Yeah, I mean there's such an adjustment into motherhood, so I think that the main difference is just this either looming darkness of depression, the looming anxiety, irritability that just never leaves. You wake up with it and it's there, you go to bed and it's still there, and I think that's the main difference that I can see between the two pregnancies.

Audra Haney: Rebecca, how would you encourage expecting moms? What practical tips would you give them before they enter into this new season of motherhood?

Rebecca McCutchan: I think, I mean unfortunately it's not something that gets talked about enough, the postpartum depression or anxiety, so I would say just be aware of it, really consider it, consider your mental health and just the importance of your mental health and how that affects your whole family. Really, if you're not in the right place mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally, it's going to have a rippling effect. With the twin pregnancy, I was all over the mental health area, I mean that was a big focus of mine in that pregnancy and then right after I had the babies, of just kind of ready for it. Like I felt armed, and just ready to take it down. If I saw any signs, I was going to jump on it.

I had made an appointment with a psychiatrist when I was pregnant, and met and talked with him, made a game plan for if I see symptoms,

what am I going to do, because I wanted so desperately for that experience to be different. I knew I had a lot at stake, I had a two year old, and I was bringing home premature twins. I thought, "This ship can't sink this time," so I did not leave the hospital after I had the baby, I did not leave the hospital without a prescription in my hand for an antidepressant medication that I knew, if I started seeing symptoms, I was going to go fill that prescription, kind of thing. I just had no pride in that at all, it was just very, "This is what it is, this is about the survival of myself, my family, like I need to take care of this. This is okay, and it is not my fault if symptoms start arising again."

Yeah, I would say to expectant moms just to be really diligent, and just give that some focus. When you're planning for your new baby and reading books about sleep training and buying the best equipment, really sit with yourself for a little bit, and just kind of make a plan and maybe review things that typically set you off. You know, we all have them, things that might send us kind of into a not-good head space, and just kind of spend some time in that. If you need to, talk with your provider, and just kind of let them know that that's an area that you're wanting to focus on a little bit more.

Audra Haney: In addition to that, what would you say to husbands, family, or friends, who may eventually need to support someone experiencing postpartum, what advice do you have for them?

Rebecca McCutchan: I would just encourage them to just become aware of the signs and symptoms of it, and really be honest. I don't think I had anyone during that time period, and it's not any fault of their own, they didn't know that that's what I was experiencing, but I definitely didn't have anyone mention that to me, you know even the providers that I saw during that period. Nobody said, "I think this is postpartum depression," but I think if you're concerned that someone you know is experiencing that, I would say just say those words, just say that out loud. Putting a name to it kind of releases the grip that it can have around someone, just sharing the list of symptoms and just being honest with it, just suggesting, "This may be what you're experiencing right now."

I mean, that in itself could be the turning point, I mean that's what it was for me, is really just reading it, hearing it and, "Oh wow, this is me," could really bring a lot of freedom to them. Granted, that is a tender topic, especially to a new mom, but yeah, I would say just be open with that, and then walk with them helping them out of it, getting the help that they need. I really, really recommend it needs to be treated by a professional ultimately, so helping them locate someone that can effectively treat it, someone that has had training in postpartum depression and anxiety, I believe that's key to healing.

Audra Haney: Thank you so much, Rebecca. You have shared so many valuable things today. Would you mind praying for expecting or new moms who may be experiencing postpartum depression, or may face it in the future? Please just close out our time blessing them and lifting them up.

Rebecca McCutchan: Sure. Dear heavenly father, lord, we just thank you, God, that you are in control, that you are above all of this, that you are in all of this, that you will see all of us through all of this, lord. Motherhood can be such a lonely, scary time for so many of us, God, and I just thank you that you are ever-present, lord, and that you have our best interests in mind, that you have the best interests of our children in mind, lord, and that ultimately you want more out of this experience for us, God, and we thank you for that. Lord, I pray for the woman right now who is listening and maybe identifying with some of these areas, God. I just pray, God, that you will hold her tight, lord, and that you will bring healing into her life, lord. I just pray for a sense of hope, God, that she will feel hope that there can be newness of life on the other side of this, lord, and that there's a greater purpose for all of this, lord.

Audra Haney: Thank you so much for joining us. Please join us next week as Charissa Kolar shares about her journey with infertility. Remember you can get today's show notes, transcript, and more information at grahamblanchard.com.