

# *You* GOT THIS, *Dad*

AARON E. SHARP



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## WE'RE HAVING A BABY!

If you're reading this book, you, someone you love, or possibly someone you are related to by marriage needs it. This is a book about a dad's perspective on the miracle of pregnancy and childbirth. This is not a how-to book. The list of things I could write a how-to book about is short, and God surely knows that parenting does not make that list.

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### PREGNANCY EXPERTISE

You may be reading this book hoping to find the wisdom of an expert. In my opinion, there are two kinds of experts in life.

The first kind of expert is a person like Bill Gates. Gates is currently one of the richest and most well-known people in the world. He started programming computers at the age of 13. He attended Harvard University only to drop out to cofound a software company we know today as Microsoft. If you use a computer, a smartphone, or really any piece of technology, there's a good chance it was influenced by him. He is an icon in the computing world. Bill Gates is a genuine expert in technology.

An example of the second kind of expert is Roy Sullivan. You probably haven't heard of him. He was a park ranger in Virginia's Shenandoah National Park. He was neither rich nor famous, though he did gain some notoriety when he made the *Guinness Book of World Records* in 1977. Sullivan's claim to fame? He was the only living man to be struck by lightning four times. But the lightning wasn't finished with Roy Sullivan. He was reportedly struck three more times in his life. Sullivan was not a meteorologist. He didn't create lightning, and he didn't know why it struck him so many times. Yet I would suggest that he was a lightning expert. Think about it. Who knows more about what it feels like to be struck by lightning than Roy Sullivan?

When it comes to a dad's perspective on pregnancy and infants, I'm the second kind of expert. It's not unusual for my prayers to start with "God, I'm not sure *how* this happened, but..." More often than I'd like to admit, I don't even know *what* happened. But I've survived four pregnancies, even if my hair is a little singed, I'm twitching, and my short-term memory is shot.

**Finding out your wife is pregnant is one of the most amazing, wonderful, and surreal moments of your life. It can also be terrifying.**

## **PREGNANCY EMOTIONS**

Finding out your wife is pregnant is one of the most amazing, wonderful, and surreal moments of your life. It can also be terrifying. If you aren't quaking in your boots, Nikes, Skechers, or whatever, that's probably because you don't know enough yet to fully appreciate what news like that means.

If you are a man who just discovered that your wife is pregnant and you are unsure how you should feel, here is a simple test:

Do you feel like you are at the top of a massive roller coaster that does loops, breaks the sound barrier, and is typically described as death-defying?

Are you also unsure if you are properly latched into your seat or if this ride somehow skirted past government regulations about safety harnesses?

If you answered yes to those questions, then your emotions are tracking well with dad-to-be syndrome.

If you feel supremely confident, well rested, and calm, then you are either naive or foolish, or maybe this is your first child. Or all of the above. Thank God for naivete. Right now, you are like Spider-Man just after he was bitten by a radioactive spider. You feel a little funny and think everything is okay, but you have no idea what's coming. You are about to be responsible for the life of another human being!

For some reason, an all-knowing, all-powerful God has sovereignly chosen you to be a parent, the most important job in the world.

If that doesn't make you nervous, then I don't think you understand the gravity of the situation. It can be tempting to think, "Well, I already take care of my wife," and maybe you do. Maybe you pay all the bills, clean the house, do all the laundry, and wash all the dishes. If that is your situation, then good for your wife. She is an incredibly blessed woman. (More likely, your wife does a great job taking care of you, but let's not get off topic.)

Your wife may depend on you for certain things,<sup>1</sup> but odds are if she had to, she could take care of herself. More than likely, she can take care of herself much better than you can. A baby will not be like that.

The baby is going to be completely, totally, 100 percent dependent on you. Yes, you—the guy who forgot to pay the cable bill last month, the guy who lost the grocery list and just bought a bunch of frozen pizzas, the guy who can't do a load of laundry without shrinking his wife's shirts.<sup>2</sup>

A small, helpless bundle of joy will soon look at you, expecting you to already possess the knowledge needed to take care of him or her. If you turn out to be completely inept, this poor kid doesn't have a chance. If your wife discovered that for your entire dating life, you managed to hide the fact that you are a pathetic loser, that is unfortunate for her, but she bears *some* responsibility for not having a better process for screening the candidates for her future husband.

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#### ELAINA SHARP CHIMES IN

<sup>1</sup> Like holding my hair back when I'm tossing my cookies for the umpteenth time with morning sickness.

<sup>2</sup> All. The. Time. But can I really complain if he's helping with the laundry?

**This kid is stuck with you for better or worse...and didn't get a say in the matter.**

But this child who will soon call you Dad didn't have the luxury of choice. This kid is stuck with you for better or worse...and didn't get a say in the matter.

So yeah, this is the part where you should be somewhere on the scale between anxious and falling to your knees crying, "Good Lord (and I mean that with all reverence), what have we done?"

The realization hits dads at different times. Some dads-to-be are fine until they're on the way to the hospital. Some are fine until they see their child for the first time. And some dads begin to lose their marbles the moment their wife says, "Honey, we're pregnant."

I'm going to be completely honest with you. I'm a veteran of four pregnancies, but I have no recollection when it first hit me that another human being was now reliant on me for everything. (Remember, the loss of short-term memory is a common casualty of parenting.) I only remember one of the four times Wonder Woman told me we were pregnant. I remember lots of pregnancy tests, which are among the strangest parts of this whole operation.

## **PREGNANCY TESTS**

**In this age of technology, the best method we have for detecting a new life growing in a woman is by her urinating on a stick.**

In this age of technology, the best method we have for detecting a new life growing in a woman is by her urinating on a stick. I'm sure there is some fancy science involved in all of this, but it does feel a little like hocus-pocus.

At some point, the test comes back with two lines instead of one. Well, even this isn't as clear-cut as it may seem. Medical science has made great improvements in pregnancy tests in recent years, but with our first pregnancy, there was a lot of staring at the stick trying to decipher if there were two lines or not. If this is your

first pregnancy, your wife probably spent hours peering at her freshly contaminated stick, trying to decipher if there was a second line or not. So if her depth perception seems off when she tells you that you are going to be a father, don't panic. It should clear up soon.

There is a good chance this whole bringing-a-new-life-into-the-world thing has hit your wife a lot faster and harder than it will hit you. In a very scientific poll, 100 percent of the men I interviewed in the mirror confirmed this is the case.

A woman's pregnancy is initially very conceptual to her husband. One minute you are lying in bed as a dude who is a husband. The next moment your wife is jumping up and down on the bed telling you that you are now a husband *and* a father. Nothing in your everyday life has changed—yet. For your wife, everything has already changed. Things are happening inside of her, so she feels pregnant. You just feel tired and a little disoriented because she woke you out of a deep sleep to share the news.

Then again, you may find out that you are going to be a father (or a father again) in a Chick-fil-A.

Wonder Woman tells me this is how things went down with baby number three.<sup>3</sup> It's important to note that baby number three didn't sleep for the first eight months of her life, so there's a good chunk of this period of time I don't recall. It's like I got the mother of all concussions and part of my memory is just a blank recording. Dead air.

**The human body's inability to remember if it is sleep deprived is a gift from God. Without that gift, no one would have more than one child, and the human species would slowly die out.**

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#### ELAINA SHARP CHIMES IN

<sup>3</sup> I told him about baby number four in Chick-fil-A. I can't believe he can't keep them all straight.



species would slowly die out. There are aspects of pregnancy I intend to ask God about one day. Sleep deprivation is high on the list.

It is important to note you can respond in various ways when you learn your wife is pregnant. It often depends on what number child this is. If this is your first go-round at being a father, you are a blank slate. The wonder of the moment numbs you to the shock of what's going on. If this isn't your first child, your mind probably fast-forwards to concepts like deductibles and available vacation time. If this is your wife's fourth (or more!) baby on the way, what loops through your mind is the scene from the Lord of the Rings movie *The Two Towers* right before the major battle at Helm's Deep when King Théoden, King of Rohan, surveys the massive attacking army and says, "So it begins."<sup>4</sup>

Which brings us to our next topic: pregnancy, hormones, and fastballs.

## HOW HORMONES ARE LIKE FASTBALLS...AND OTHER NECESSARY PIECES OF ADVICE

A few months into Wonder Woman's fourth pregnancy, I watched a fascinating baseball documentary named *Fastball*. These two events may seem completely unrelated. At first, I didn't see the connection either, but a clear parallel exists between the two.

Early in pregnancy number four, my wife and I had what was easily the worst argument of our marriage.<sup>1</sup> We'd been married almost a dozen years, and big arguments were pretty rare. The argument was tear-producing. It was actually the reason we told the other three kiddos Mommy was pregnant. I had to either say, "Listen, kids, Dad really blew it and was a jerk to your mom," or I had to say, "Hey, kids, Mommy is crying because she has a baby in her tummy." I chose the latter. Don't judge.

I had to either say, "Listen, kids, Dad really blew it and was a jerk to your mom," or I had to say, "Hey, kids, Mommy is crying because she has a baby in her tummy." I chose the latter. Don't judge.

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### ELAINA SHARP CHIMES IN

<sup>1</sup>I don't even remember what this massive argument was about. Five dollars says neither does Aaron.

Shortly after this argument, I had an epiphany about the relationship between the 100-mph fastball and pregnancy hormones. I'm not going to claim this idea is divinely inspired, but you might conclude that there is some providence at work.

## **BASEBALLS HIGH AND TIGHT**

The documentary was fascinating for many reasons. Among the many players interviewed were a handful of high-caliber hitters, several of whom were in baseball's hall of fame. Almost to a man, they emphatically claimed that a 100-mph fastball is often rising as it crosses the plate.

That didn't seem totally crazy until they interviewed physicists who explained that it is physically impossible. A baseball is pitched at a downward angle, and no matter how hard you throw it as it approaches the plate, it is losing speed and its height is dropping. Without some outside force acting on it, baseballs flying through the air don't suddenly start rising when they were headed downward.

So either God is working a miracle outside of the laws of physics on every baseball thrown that fast or baseballs headed down don't suddenly go up. I'll not say dogmatically that the Almighty isn't doing this, because He hasn't specifically mentioned it in the Bible, but I think we should probably look for another explanation.

Here is where brain science gets fascinating. No denying, 108 mph is fast. That's as fast as Baptists leave a room when there is dancing involved.<sup>2</sup> A fastball traveling at that speed reaches home plate in 396 milliseconds. Incidentally, this is also roughly the same amount of time it takes our four kids to transform a room from clean to chaos.<sup>3</sup> What 396 milliseconds means is that a batter can't watch the ball from the time it leaves the pitcher's hand until it crosses the plate. Essentially, a batter sees the ball in the pitcher's hand, and then he looks at the plate. Because they can't watch the trajectory of the ball the whole way, the batter's brain fills in the gap with what you might think of as a flight plan. The ball's path between the pitcher's mound and home plate is a result of the batter's brain making calculations and assumptions based on available information.

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## **ELAINA SHARP CHIMES IN**

<sup>2</sup> Hey, I grew up Baptist, and we enjoyed plenty of great "foot functions."

<sup>3</sup> It's cute when he underestimates our kids. I've seen them tear the place apart in half that time.

The problem facing a batter is that a fastball traveling at more than 100 mph has such speed and backspin that it doesn't drop at the rate of a slower fastball of, say, 92 mph. As a result, the ball is dropping at a different rate and angle than the brain anticipated. This means that the flight plan the brain filed for the path of the baseball located it lower than it was in reality. When the ball comes in higher than the brain said it would, the batter "sees" it as if it is rising. A ball thrown that fast can function as an optical illusion to a batter.

You might be wondering how this relates to pregnancy hormones, and I'm getting to that. Living through four pregnancies makes me a wily veteran of husbanding while pregnant, at least in this century. Susanna Wesley, who was the youngest of 25 children and gave birth to 19 children herself, would view me as a rank amateur. In the twenty-first century, however, having four children is often viewed as strange, self-destructive behavior. The two biggest reactions I get are "On purpose?" and "Do you know why that keeps happening?"

So as husbands go, I am the equivalent of an elder statesman.

## HORMONE CHIN MUSIC

The whole process of what happens to a woman's body during pregnancy is amazing. God absolutely knew what He was doing when He decided women would bear children rather than men. I'm a dreadful person to be around when I have a headache. Yet somehow my lovely wife manages to operate at a high level while all of this is going on in her body. I know that Genesis tells us Eve was formed from Adam's rib. But I have to think God also included some other divine substance, because pregnancy makes it clear that men and women are made of different materials.

**I know that Genesis tells us Eve was formed from Adam's rib. But I have to think God also included some other divine substance, because pregnancy makes it clear that men and women are made of different materials.**

What sadly took me four pregnancies to realize is that pregnancy hormones are to a marital relationship what a 100-mph fastball is to a baseball player's batting

average. When Wonder Woman and I had a lengthy and animated discussion at the beginning of our most recent pregnancy, I was woefully unprepared for the change pregnancy hormones were making in how we interacted. You might be thinking, “Hadh’t he figured some of this out already?” No, no, I had not. Which isn’t that astounding since one of the challenges of pregnancy is that hormones often take the women experiencing them by surprise too.<sup>4</sup>

First Peter 3:7 (ESV) instructs husbands to “live with your wives in an understanding way,” which is a challenge under normal circumstances. When a woman is pregnant, you are trying to live with “understanding” with someone who doesn’t even understand herself. Husbands can be forgiven for feeling like Peter should have included a pregnancy exemption.

What happens to couples who have been married for any length of time is that the brain files a flight plan for how any argument is going to go. You know what you tend to do, you know what your spouse tends to do, and so you navigate the issue, work things through, and come out the other side because of the predictability of understanding one another. Each of you knows the other person. If you are committed to working your problems out, you can usually tackle most issues. Ideally, the longer you’re married, the better you are at honoring God and each other, even when you would like to rip out the other person’s eyeballs.

This is how things work under normal circumstances. But pregnancy hormones create anything but normal circumstances.

Instead of reacting in a manner that is typical for her (think of it as a 92-mph fastball), a pregnant woman reacts by bringing the heat. You settle into the batter’s box thinking you are prepared for what is about to happen, and the next thing you know, the ball is humming toward you at 103 mph, and you are pretty sure she is aiming for your head.<sup>5</sup>

This leads a man into uncharted territory. His brain says the pitch is going to be low and away, and instead it comes in high and tight. Suddenly a rather minor

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#### **ELAINA SHARP CHIMES IN**

<sup>4</sup> Let the Pregnancy Brain Games begin!

<sup>5</sup> I would never! (Said with a completely innocent, wide-eyed expression.)

issue can leave a husband swinging and missing while wondering what has happened to his wife.

For us, a minor issue was that my pregnant better half started asking me questions while I was brushing my teeth.<sup>6</sup> Few things in life annoy me more than someone expecting me to talk while I have a mouthful of toothpaste. If I try to answer, I end up making a colossal mess, so I generally mumble “In a mimit” or just give a dirty look.

Usually Mrs. Sharp takes this quirk of mine in stride, but not when she is pregnant. When pregnant, she doesn’t find my surliness funny or cute. She considers it infuriating. When she got irritated at my refusing to answer a question while I brushed my teeth, my brain filed a flight plan for how the next few minutes were going to go. My brain was wrong. I didn’t realize it, but I was in the position Goliath was in just as David was releasing the stone.

The best-case scenario for any husband in this situation is to live to bat another day. Your wife is throwing a blazing fastball, and your goal isn’t to get a base hit. It is to make it through the at-bat without taking one on the chin. Don’t try to be a hero.

**Your wife is throwing a blazing fastball, and your goal isn’t to get a base hit. It is to make it through the at-bat without taking one on the chin. Don’t try to be a hero.**

I’ve shared this analogy with a few guys, and generally everyone agrees that it makes sense. So at some point during pregnancy number four, I shared it with Wonder Woman’s OB/GYN. She listened intently as I explained my theory as to how 100-mph fastballs and pregnancy hormones are alike. When I was finished theorizing, she proclaimed that not only was I onto something, but my theory applied to other times in a woman’s life, such as menopause. She then proceeded to

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#### ELAINA SHARP CHIMES IN

<sup>6</sup>Well look at that, he did remember. IOU \$5, babe.

pull out her cell phone and call her husband so I could explain my now-expanded theory of fastballs and hormones to him.

He listened intently before assuring me he wasn't sure why his wife thought he needed to hear this. Their marriage was a perfect one, he said, but he felt he might be able to use this analogy when mentoring younger men, so he was glad I told him.

I guess swinging and missing isn't exclusive to dealing with pregnancies.

This brings us to morning sickness, which contrary to the name, isn't exclusive to mornings.