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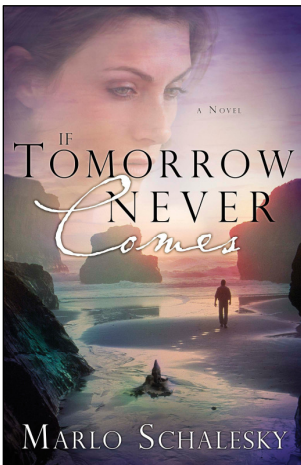
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Learning to Love in the Face of Infertility

Marlo Schalesky comforts struggling families and their loved ones.



Salinas, CA—Marlo Schalesky understands infertility. She’s lived with it for twenty years. Difficult? Definitely. Still, she points out, “It seems that just about every deep and meaningful thing I’ve learned about God, I can point to my journey through infertility and say, ‘Yeah, infertility taught me that.’” Now Marlo passes these lessons along, offering two titles that speak to the issues of infertility: *If Tomorrow Never Comes* (Multnomah Books, March 2009) and *Empty Womb, Aching Heart* (Tyndale, 2000)

One in six couples struggle with infertility, yet it remains one of the least understood and most painful issues haunting families today. The unfulfilled longing for a child threatens marriages, self-esteem, and relationships with others. Proverbs 13:12 tells us, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.” Marlo has ridden the monthly emotional roller-coaster, wondering if this time her prayers will be answered. Crushed expectations lead to railing against God for the injustice of the situation

Surrendering her battle with infertility to the Lord and praying to become more like Jesus, Marlo has learned eternal lessons along the journey. She says, “Infertility taught me that I’m not the god of my life. God is. It taught me there are things I cannot control, cannot achieve, no matter how hard I try. And sometimes we must choose to live the life God has given us, with love and hope, even when it’s not the life we dreamed.”

Marlo latest novel *If Tomorrow Never Comes* relates the story of Kinna and Jimmy Henley, childhood sweethearts on the brink of divorce. They never planned for infertility to steal their dreams, to crush their love. But it did. Now, their last hope lies in a silver locket, held by a mysterious woman Kinna rescued from the sea.

About the Author

Marlo Schalesky is the author of several books, including *Beyond the Night* and *Empty Womb, Aching Heart*. A graduate of Stanford University, Marlo also has a masters of theology with an emphasis in biblical studies from Fuller Theological Seminary. Married over twenty years, she lives with her husband, Bryan, and their five children in California.



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Interview Questions for Marlo Schalesky

1. Why do you write about infertility?
2. What has been the hardest part of the journey for you?
3. What's your best piece of advice for those struggling with infertility, physically, emotionally, and spiritually?
4. Can couples have a fulfilling life without children?
5. How do you answer the question, "When are you going to start a family?"
6. How can friends or family support someone who's dealing with infertility?
7. With the number of abortions, teen pregnancies, and unwanted pregnancies, how do you deal with the issue of God's justice?
8. Is infertility a punishment from God?
9. Mother's Day is said to be the hardest day of the year for women dealing with infertility. How do you face Mother's Day?
10. Lots of women had trouble conceiving in the Bible – Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, Elizabeth. God gave all of them children. So isn't having a child just a matter of having enough faith?
11. How much is *If Tomorrow Never Comes* based on your own experience?
12. Any new projects on the horizon?

An Interview with Marlo Schalesky

1) **Why do you write about infertility?**

When my husband Bryan and I first started down the road of infertility and infertility treatments, we found a lot of information on the more intellectual side of the journey – on medical interventions, ethical issues, possible causes and tests. But those weren't the issues I was dealing with every day. There were no pamphlets or books telling me how to cope with the monthly cycle of hope and disappointment that was tearing me apart, or what to do when I walked down the toilet paper aisle at the grocery store and cried when I saw the diapers, or when I opened the paper and saw an increase in teen pregnancies and abortions and cried out "It's not fair!"

It was only when I met others struggling through infertility that I found they dealt with the same issues I was struggling with, and some even invaluable insights that helped me so much in my own journey.

And that's why I wrote this book – to share the stories, wisdom, and insight of Christian men and women who have traveled the road of infertility and found hope and deeper relationship with God in the midst of it. I wanted to share the stories that have helped me.

2) **What has been the hardest part of the infertility journey for you?**

For me, the monthly roller coaster of hope and disappointment has been by far the hardest. It always starts the same, with me telling myself not to get my hopes up. But still, I can't help wondering if this could be the month, especially if I've undergone some form of treatment. Every twinge analyzed, I feel a little sick to my stomach and I wonder if it might be morning sickness. I try not to count the days, but I do anyway. 29, 30, 31... and then it starts, and I know I'm not pregnant, again, still. I can't help crying. And this happens month after month, until I'm so emotionally exhausted that I just don't think I can stand one more cycle of it.

The best help I've found for this is to try to look beyond today's storm to the rainbow – God's promise that it won't rain forever. Someday, the infertility journey will end, and whether that's with children or without I want to have walked with God through it and come out more like Jesus on the other side.

3) **What's your best piece of advice for those struggling with infertility, physically, emotionally, and spiritually?**

Physically, I would say to not waste time being treated by your local OB/GYN. Once you've tried to get pregnant for a year and not been able to, go straight to a specialist – a reproductive endocrinologist. They're up on the latest technology, are specially trained, and deal with infertility all day, every day.

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Emotionally, I'd say live your life to the fullest now. Do the things you enjoy. Don't put things off "just in case" you might get pregnant. Infertility can consume you. And it's going to be emotionally taxing, so try to make time to do things that you find refreshing.

Spiritually, don't be afraid to go to God with your doubts, fears, and even your angry accusations. Yell, scream, pound on his chest if you have to. Just go to him. He can handle your frustration. What he can't do much with, however, is your silence.

4) **Can couples have a fulfilling life without children?**

Oh, absolutely. One of the very neatest couples I know – Rich and Cathy Bisson – are childless. They wanted to have children, and tried, but were never able to. Yet God has used their lives in such powerful ways to minister to others. Rich is a pastor and Cathy is a Christian counselor. Through their ministries and through the very faithfulness of their lives, God has allowed them to be spiritual parents to so many hurting people. Cathy talks about how she often has to "re-mother" adult children who come to her for counseling. And Rich is a father figure to fatherless children in his congregation, as well as others whose fathers aren't all they need to be.

So, what I say to childless people is to seek out God's path for their lives. Follow him. Trust him. He won't let your life go to waste.

5) **How do you answer the question, "When are you going to start a family?"**

I always say the same thing: "We already have. We just don't know if God is going to add to it with children or not." It's a huge misconception in our society that children make a family. When God created Adam and Eve, he pronounced his creation "very good." It was complete. A husband and wife *are* a complete family. Children only expand that family. I like to encourage childless couples to think of themselves as a family of two and do family things together – bake cookies and decorate the tree together at Christmas time, hide Easter baskets for each other – whatever their family traditions were as a kid, continue them as a family of two.

6) **How can friends or family support someone who's dealing with infertility?**

Great question! So often family and friends don't know what to do and end up saying just the wrong things. I have four basic rules for that:

ONE: Don't start any sentence with "at least." There is nothing you say after "at least" that's going to be helpful. All that does is trivialize the other person's pain. What I like to remember here is that you can't lessen someone's pain by talking it away, you can only lessen it by sharing it.

TWO: Don't be like Job's friends and offer all kinds of excuses for God not giving someone a child. One of my friends was actually told by someone in her church "Maybe God knows you'll be a bad mother and that's why he hasn't given you any children." We have this desire to get God off the hook, but he can stand up for himself. Our job is just to be there for hurting people – pray for them, remember them with notes or little cards on difficult days like

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Mother's Day, understand that it hurts to long for a child and not have one. Be someone they can come to to vent frustrations and hurt.

THREE: No advice unless you're asked for it. I tell you, I got to a point where I thought if I heard "just relax" or "you should adopt and then you'll get pregnant" one more time I might just punch the person in the nose. After a while that stuff just makes you crazy. For one, relaxing just isn't going to cure ovarian cysts, open blocked fallopian tubes, and get rid of endometriosis. Stress may affect consistent ovulation, but there are a whole host of other medical problems that could be causing someone's infertility. As for adoption, adopted children are a beautiful and special gift all on their own. They aren't a means to getting a biological child. Instead, ask how they're holding up, say things like this must be really hard for you, how can I be praying for you.

FOUR: Be sensitive that things like baby showers, dedications, baby baptisms, and mother's day or father's day, are tough for people going through infertility. Sometimes, I just can't endure going to a baby shower. It's too painful. And don't push someone struggling with infertility to work in the church nursery. Sometimes women will be okay with working in the nursery, but a lot of times it's just too hard emotionally.

7) With the number of abortions, teen pregnancies, and unwanted pregnancies, how do you deal with the issue of God's justice?

That's a hard question. I think that just about everyone who goes through infertility at some point wants to turn to God and say, "What are you, nuts?" And when you look at things on a grand scale – people who don't want children get pregnant while wonderful Christian couples can't – it doesn't make a lot of sense. So, for me, it helps to look at the smaller picture – my life and what God wants for me. The blessings he chooses for me shouldn't be compared with those he gives to others, and vice versa. So, I try to focus on what He's doing in me, in my life.

Also, I believe that every child is a precious and undeserved gift from God. So, if he chooses to give that gift to others, even those who don't appreciate it, and not to me, that's his prerogative. God doesn't owe me a child. I hope he'll give me one, but it's his choice.

8) Is infertility a punishment from God?

Let me answer that with a resounding NO. For some reason as human beings we have the need to answer this question of WHY. Why is this happening to me? And punishment often becomes a simple answer to that question. A good friend of mine really struggled through this issue. She asked, am I being punished because I was sexually active before marriage, because we didn't try to have children right away after we were married, because I'm not a good enough wife, or did this, or didn't do that? But plenty of people are sexually active before marriage, or use birth control, or whatever, and they have not problem conceiving.

So, the real question is not so much "is this a punishment," but rather, "why do I feel so badly about myself that I have to believe that I somehow deserve this?" My friend finally realized that maybe God had just chosen this path for her for reasons she couldn't fathom.

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Maybe there wasn't a "why" that she could know. And if that was the case, could she trust God, and His love for her, enough to not make up a bunch of "why's" to get him off the hook.

9) **Mother's Day is said to be the hardest day of the year for women dealing with infertility. How do you face Mother's Day?**

Mother's Day was the worst day of the year for me for years until three years ago. Sometimes I'd stay home from church on that day, but that year I had to go to help with the sound system. It's amazing how many years I was conveniently ill on Mother's Day. But anyway, that Mother's Day I went to church and it was the same rigmarole as always – roses for the mothers, signs everywhere, happy mother's day all over the bulletin and all that. And of course, I was miserable, as always. But that year, something different happened. In the middle of the worship, they began to sing, "My Jesus I Love Thee, I know thou art mine." The last line of each verse of that song says, "If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now." And that line so struck me. That now, on the one day that is most painful, that most represents all that God has not given me, if I could declare my love for God in the face of that pain and loss, then it would really mean something special. So I sang that song, sang it with all my heart. And ever since that day, Mother's Day has meant something special to me. It's become a day for me to declare my love for God irrespective of what He's given me. To proclaim a love that's not based on gifts but on who he is. And to tell Him that no matter what, I want to follow Him.

10) **Lots of women had trouble conceiving in the Bible – Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, Elizabeth. God gave all of them children. So isn't having a child just a matter of having enough faith?**

Sometimes we like to think that because it kind of gets God off the hook. It's not his fault we're not having children, it's ours. Then we don't have to deal with all those tough questions of faith like "if God really loved me, then why doesn't he give me a baby?"

But when we take a closer look at these Biblical women, we find that God didn't give them children because of their super faith. Sarah even laughed at the prospect of God giving her a child so late in life – that doesn't sound like miracle-making faith to me. Rather, what's interesting about these women is that each of them had their own unique place in God's plan.

That's what I think we need to focus on when we look at these women. I've found that faith isn't working up enough "belief power" to get God to do what you want him to do. Faith is trusting God enough to follow him down the path he chooses for your life even when that path isn't what you want. It's trusting his love, believing in his goodness, even in the darkest times. Faith doesn't get you a child, it makes you a child of God. And that's what matters most.