Beyond the Church Meal Train: Caring for Women in Postpartum Distress

by **CARLY ROBINSON**

My friend Mary texted me late one night.[1]

> Can we talk soon? I'm having a hard time with Joanna [her newborn daughter]. I'm not sleeping and feel so overwhelmed. I don't know what to do. I don't know what's wrong with me. I'm exhausted. I'm lashing out over every little thing. It's like I'm trapped. Every day is the same, the demands don't end, and there are times I just don't want to do it anymore. And then I feel so guilty for having thoughts like this.

By the time Mary reached out that night, she had been struggling for weeks. Her husband, who worked long hours, felt helpless in supporting her. When I called the next day, he joined us and sounded equally discouraged. Sleep deprivation, constant irritability, and waves of uncontrollable sobbing had become Mary's new normal. I knew Mary well. She was a mature believer and had prayed earnestly to become a mother.

1. "Mary" is a composite of multiple friends and counselees I've walked with through postpartum difficulties.

Carly Robinson (MA) serves as a counselor at CCEF.

Yet most nights she fell to pieces while the fruit of those prayers snuggled on her chest. I was just hours away but eager to broaden Mary's in-person support. I asked her if she had contacted one of her pastors or trusted friends at church and was met with an awkward silence. She paused before saying,

> I haven't. My mom was coming over to help, but a few weeks ago, I tried to tell her I thought something was off hormonally and had considered seeing my doctor. She just didn't understand how I could feel so upset because Joanna is an easy baby. She said that being tired and hormonal is normal and shouldn't keep me from being joyful because "motherhood is such a gift" and I can "never get these days back."

Shame swallowed Mary. Haunted by guilt over how her struggles impacted Joanna, she pleaded with the Lord for joy. She stopped asking for her mother's help and feared the same reactions from the women she was getting to know at her new church.

Although I was saddened by Mary's mother's comments, such reactions are common. Even other women can struggle to grasp how a time of great blessing can be overshadowed by profound sorrow. While all new moms face many changes and adjustments after childbirth, the tougher challenges may be more common than you expect. Statistically, 1 in 5 mothers experience severe postpartum issues.[2] They are women like my friend Mary and other faithful believers, such as:

- Katherine, who shared, "Once my husband walks out the door for work, I start crying. There's so much to do between my two-year-old and the baby, and once I'm all alone, the weight of it hits me. I feel paralyzed. I don't want to hold them or play. I just want to lie down on the couch and do nothing."
- Melody, who said, "When the baby won't sleep, my anxiety shoots through the roof, and I don't know why. I feel angry and even enraged sometimes if she's crying or screaming. I was never like this before."

---

2. "Perinatal Mental Health: Signs, Symptoms, and Treatment," Postpartum Support International, accessed October 24, 2025, https://postpartum.net/perinatal-mental-health/.

- Michelle, who confessed, "I'm still having flashbacks. I keep replaying the birth in my mind. I was pretty sure I was dying, and felt like no one in the hospital noticed or cared."

How can God's people help women like these? While I hope to see future biblical counseling resources dedicated to formal counseling relationships with postpartum women, this article is a call to action for local churches. Why the local church? Because God, in his wisdom, has uniquely positioned the local church to provide a rich diversity of compassionate support for women in postpartum. It offers a community not just for the woman but for her entire family, and not just for a short season but for pregnancy, postpartum, and the long haul. This means that the church is often on the front lines of caring for mothers before formal counseling is ever considered, and it will be there long after counseling ends.

God has uniquely positioned the local church to provide a rich diversity of compassionate support for women in postpartum.

I've written this article for leaders of local churches, such as pastors, elders, deacons, and staff.[3] My aim is to create awareness and to help educate and equip churches with compassionate and practical steps to support mothers during this vulnerable season. To do this, I will address four matters:

1. The types of postpartum struggles mothers face
2. How to understand these struggles biblically
3. How churches can prepare to serve these moms
4. Ways to care for a mother's soul in her postpartum troubles

Many churches begin a meal train for a woman after childbirth. This is a positive step, but it may fall short for some women who need additional help. Let's look beyond the meal train to more substantive ways the church can minister to women who are suffering after childbirth.

3. For a broader vision regarding the work of counseling within pastoral ministry, see David Powlison, "The Pastor as Counselor," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 26:1 (2012): 23–39.

The Journal of Biblical Counseling

(ISSN: 1063-2166) is published by:

Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

1803 East Willow Grove Avenue

Glenside, PA 19038

www.ccef.org