



CONVERSATION: MARLO SCHALESKY

Yearning to be Mom

For nearly two decades Marlo and Bryan Schalesky dealt with the disappointments and frustrations of infertility. Her nonfiction book *Empty Womb, Aching Heart* explores four specific areas of struggle and offers words of hope. Her latest release, *If Tomorrow Never Comes*, tells the story of the effects of infertility on a marriage. Now a mother, Schalesky recently spoke with Assistant Editor Jennifer McClure about the parallels between motherhood and spiritual motherhood, as well as the pain of infertility and what friends and family should and shouldn't do.

tpe: What does spiritual motherhood look like to you?

SCHALESKY: I've seen God bring people whose relationships with their own mothers are broken into the lives of those who have a mothering heart but are unable to have children. It's a beautiful thing.

tpe: What are the responsibilities of a spiritual mom?

SCHALESKY: Just like a mother helps a small child learn to read and write, a spiritual mother helps others understand Scripture and grow in their trust and relationship with God. Part of that is to offer them the wisdom and advice that come from Scripture and help them make wise decisions. Just like mothers model behavior for little children, when you're a spiritual mother, you model how to trust God and how to live in Christ instead of

living by the world's values.

It also includes nurturing in a way that people see God more clearly in the hard times of life. When my little children get hurt, it's my job as a mother to comfort them and to help them heal. When people get hurt, it's the job of a spiritual mom to help them heal in a way that helps them see God in new ways — not blame Him or become bitter, but to help

those times when it was a hard, hard day. I would have to go to church because my husband was the worship leader. I sat in the very back. They always brought the mothers up front and gave them carnations, and I was stuck in the pews with the kids and the fathers.

But one Mother's Day changed me forever. They played the song, "My Jesus I Love Thee," and



Bryan and Marlo Schalesky with their children (from left) Joelle, 5, Bethany, 9, Bria, 3, Jayna, 3, and Jayden, 5 months

them understand that God can use even the hurt in our lives to grow us.

tpe: Today is the day you used to dread — Mother's Day.

SCHALESKY: Even now I'm not super fond of Mother's Day because I'm reminded of all

when they sang the line, "If ever I love thee, my Jesus 'tis now," God spoke to me through that. He said, *Can you still love Me on this day even though you have no children after trying for years? Can you say that you love Me in these circumstances?*

And it broke my heart. I just cried and said, *Yes, Lord, even*

today, even now. After that, Mother's Day became something different for me. It became a day to proclaim my love for God even in the midst of my pain.

tpe: What would you say to readers for whom this day is not a happy one due to infertility?

SCHALESKY: Make it about something else. Make it about the day that you tell God you still love Him. I found telling God that I loved Him even then and spending the day doing some reading, singing praise songs — that helped me the most.

tpe: What about the people who know someone who hasn't been able to have a child — what should they do or say?

SCHALESKY: The best thing to do is simply say, "I know it's hard. I'm praying for you. I'm here for you." If they're going through treatments, it's best to ask them how they're doing — "How are you holding up through all of that?" — not "How are the treatments going? Is it working?"

Also, be very sensitive when inviting people to events like baby showers or dedications or to help in the nursery. Invite the person, but don't push them.

Don't ever say anything that starts with "at least," such as, "At least there's still time left." "At least you have a good marriage." Anything that starts with "at least" essentially tells the person that they shouldn't feel bad. Infertility is a hard thing. It's OK

for a person to hurt through it. God can work through that pain. So don't lessen it by saying "at least."

And don't give advice unless it's asked for.

Here I am with all the "don'ts"! But I give these warnings because in my experience people say the most awful things.

tpe: What advice do you give married couples who are experiencing infertility?

SCHALESKY: A marriage can really take a hit when you go through infertility. It's easy to become so focused on the child you don't have that you don't focus on the spouse you do have. You've got to protect the marriage by focusing on your spouse and on loving him or her in all the ups and downs of the journey.

tpe: In your book *Empty Womb, Aching Heart* you address the struggles of the heart, mind, body and spirit. Was one area of struggle harder for you to overcome than the others?

SCHALESKY: For me the spiritual struggle was the most difficult because I know who the Author of life is and who can give children. Several times it hurt so much it seemed like God was cruel and couldn't possibly love me. Yet it was through those dark

times when He was still with me — even when I was mad at Him and asking hard questions and accusing Him of being unloving — that I was able to see He still loved me, He died for me, and He sticks with me through my pain.

I found it's OK when we bring all of our doubts, frustrations and even accusations to God. As long as we turn toward Him, that's all good. God can take that. He has big shoulders. It's when we turn away and don't ask the hard questions that the bitterness can settle in our souls and become like a poison.

So, even though I found the spiritual struggle the most difficult, I found the most riches there, too.



