

New Mercies in Maternity & Postpartum

Throughout pregnancy Yoga is a beneficial activity for holistic health. The process of being pregnant, having a baby and recovering from birth requires different things at different times. The purpose of this workshop is to educate you on how your body was created, how you can optimize your health, and encourage you to see this phase of life from a holistic point of view. Pregnancy, labor and postpartum are not just physical events - they are indeed, mind, body, and spirit events. We need to be aware of balance in all of these different areas for optimal health.

If you have never practiced yoga before, you should begin very gently and slowly as your body acclimates to the stretches and poses.

Today's theme is about choosing JOY - and choosing it over and over and over again no matter the circumstances we face. We want to practice this act of choosing joy, so that we become more proficient at it. What would your definition of JOY be? John Piper states, "The Spirit gives us eyes to see the beauties of Jesus that call joy up out of our hearts."

christianity.com states, "Biblical joy is choosing to respond to external circumstances with inner contentment and satisfaction because we know that God will use these experiences to accomplish His work in and through our lives." Again, what would your definition of joy be?

Anatomy & Physiology of Our Bodies

Your body was created for pregnancy, birth and postpartum healing. He has certainly fearfully and wonderfully made every inch of you and the baby inside you. All of your systems change during pregnancy.

Let's take a look:

- Digestive (gut/intestines/stomach)
 - Slower, work harder, extra fluid
- Cardiovascular/Circulatory (heart/veins/arteries)
 - Higher blood volume
- Respiratory (lungs/breath/oxygen)
 - Less space in your rib area, breathless, tired
- Muscular (movement of the body)
 - Leg cramps, spreading, hip flexors
- Lymphatic (immunity)
 - Body is working on baby growth
- Endocrine/Exocrine (thyroid/adrenals/ovaries/glands/hormones)
 - Sweat, moods, depression
- Nervous (brain/spinal/sensory)
 - Pinched nerves, sciatica, carpal tunnel
- Renal (urinary/kidney)
 - Extra water weight
- Integumentary (skin)
 - Drying, more oily

Alignment matters

Benefits of Yoga for Pelvic Alignment

Reference: [ISSA Online](#)

- **Build Awareness**
 - Yoga can help individuals become aware of their thoughts, emotions, breathing, and body. The presence, stillness, and focus required for many yoga postures can help clients tune in to how they move, where they hold tension, and where they have pain. Seeing and feeling the imbalances in posture and movement can initiate correction much like passing a mirror and noticing hunched shoulders can help trigger a conscious posture correction. The body is great at telling us what it needs, we just need to do a better job of listening.
- **Increase Strength and Flexibility**
 - Many times, imbalances in the body are caused by imbalances in opposing muscles. One muscle is typically tight (shorter in length), and the opposing muscle is stretched (longer in length). To help combat this, the lengthened muscle needs to be strengthened, and the tighter muscles need to be stretched.
 - Many people think yoga practice is just stretching and flexibility. However, yoga is an incredible way to increase flexibility and strength. As a fitness professional, helping clients with the appropriate postures to stretch tight muscles and strengthen weaker muscles can help their bodies shift back into alignment.
- **Reduce Pain**
 - When the position of the pelvis is altered, it can cause pain in a variety of different areas of the body. Because so many muscles are connected to the pelvis and spine, any imbalance in that region has a domino effect on the rest of the body. The body adapts to repetitive movements and postures. For example, the more an individual sits the more likely it is for them to have tight hip flexors. If the individual sits for long periods of time, the hip flexors are in a shortened position for most of the day.

- Sometimes the slightest postural deviations can cause pain in other areas of the body which can make it difficult for someone to associate it with the root cause. This means that the pain an individual feels is not always where the actual problem lies. For example, if one hip is higher than the other, this could cause uneven shoulders. Over time, this compensation can cause pain in the neck and shoulders.
- Injury Prevention
 - Imbalances in the body are often a precursor to injury. A compressed spine is many times a concern with pelvic tilt. The spine helps absorb shock and when the spine is compressed, it reduces the range of motion and can put increased stress on the vertebrae and surrounding tissue. If the body is in an altered position and weight is added, speed is increased, or additional stressors are added even the smallest imbalance can turn into a significant issue.

Spiritual Significance

- Scriptures about choosing joy:
 - Romans 15:13 — May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.
 - Romans 12:12 — Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.
 - Philippians 4:4 — Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.
 - James 1:2 — Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds
 - Galatians 5:22 — But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness
 - Psalm 16:11 — You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.
 - John 16:24 — Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

There are many more verses on the subject of joy. You have a handout with many verses written out for you to meditate on, make affirmation cards, or study.

Whole-body health is important. Spiritual balance is an important part of pregnancy, birthing, and healing. Two of my favorite authors should be mentioned here because their work can benefit you in this season.

Henri Nouwen has written many books, but one of his devotionals is about choosing joy. I like to share that with my mommas so they can meditate and reflect on what it means to choose joy.

Joy is essential to the spiritual life. Whatever we may think of or say about God, when we are not joyful, our thoughts and words cannot bear fruit. Jesus reveals to us God's love so that his joy may become ours and that our joy may become complete. Joy is the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing—sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war, or even death—can take that love away.

Joy is not the same as happiness. We can be unhappy about many things, but joy can still be there because it comes from the knowledge of God's love for us. . . . Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day. It is a choice based on the knowledge that we belong to God and have found in God our refuge and our safety and that nothing, not even death, can take God away from us.

God describes these as the testing of our hearts and minds, but in the end, the “promised land” is oh, so sweet to behold, making it all worthwhile!

Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to your fathers. And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not... For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of the valleys and hills:... then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. — Deuteronomy 8:1-10

*Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!
— Psalm 27:14 (ESV)*

Patience requires much of us. Waiting, being in liminal space - in a threshold, unsure of what is ahead, but trusting we are being obedient to what God has called us to. We have to ask for patience. The Holy Spirit is our helper. Patience brings rewards and blessings.

The number three is also significant such as in the triad of mom, dad, and baby. Babies come from the inside, dark womb, to the outside where there is light. Blood is used in the birthing process, as a cleansing agent to the womb, blood is always referred to in the Bible as a cleansing agent to wash away sins and to cleanse the people. There are two arteries and one vein in the cord (strand of three is not easily broken). When a baby passes through to earth- side, there is a passing through the waters. When a baby is born they inhale and exhale into new life. Gone is the old life of breathing fluid. There are so many lovely images for us to meditate on regarding the spiritual significance of the whole design of pregnancy and birth.

John O'Donohue has written about this liminal space or threshold that we experience in life in general. Pregnancy, birth and postpartum can be a "place" of the "not before but not yet".

Within the grip of winter, it is almost impossible to imagine the spring. The gray perished landscape is shorn of color. Only bleakness meets the eye; everything seems severe and edged. Winter is the oldest season; it has some quality of the absolute. Yet beneath the surface of winter, the miracle of spring is already in preparation; the cold is relenting; seeds are waking up. Colors are beginning to imagine how they will return. Then, imperceptibly, somewhere one bud opens and the symphony of renewal is no longer reversible. From the black heart of winter a miraculous, breathing plenitude of color emerges.

The beauty of nature insists on taking its time. Everything is prepared. Nothing is rushed. The rhythm of emergence is a gradual slow beat always inching its way forward; change remains faithful to itself until the new unfolds in the full confidence of true arrival. Because nothing is abrupt, the beginning of spring nearly always catches us unawares. It is there before we see it; and then we can look nowhere without seeing it.

Change arrives in nature when time has ripened. There are not jagged transitions or crude discontinuations. This accounts for the sureness with which one season succeeds another. It is as though they were moving forward in a rhythm set from within a continuum.

Liminal Space

Reference: <https://www.verywellmind.com>

The word "liminal" comes from the Latin word "limen," which means threshold. To be in a liminal space means to be on the precipice of something new but not quite there yet. You can be in a liminal space physically, emotionally, or metaphorically.

- When was the last time you found yourself in liminal space?
- How did your mind, body, and spirit respond to that space?
- What is your strength or weakness surrounding choosing joy in that time?
- What are the benefits of liminal space for your situation?

Author and Franciscan friar Richard Rohr describes this space as:

When we are betwixt and between the familiar and the completely unknown. There alone is our old world left behind, while we are not yet sure of the new existence. That's a good space where genuine newness can begin. Get there often and stay as long as you can by whatever means possible... This is the sacred space where the old world is able to fall apart, and a bigger world is revealed. If we don't encounter liminal space in our lives, we start idealizing normalcy.

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Postures & poses

- Twisted pose
 - Your spine, legs, hands, and neck are exercised along with gentle massage to abdominal organs.
- Chair pose
 - Strengthens thigh and pelvic muscles.
 - Allows for a lifting and rootedness at same time, full body engagement.
- Angle Pose
 - Opens hips, strengthens the pelvic floor, stretches legs.
 - Lifting arms creates space and stretch into side body, rib space.
- Mountain Pose
 - Strengthens knees, and ankles, distributes the weight of body over heels, alignment.
 - Gives focus, can be used as rest pose.
 - Lots of variations.
- Crescent Lunge
 - Hip flexors, opens up the psoas on each side, lengthening it.
 - Helps release tension in your hips.
 - Lizard Pose as variation.
- Side Angle Pose
 - Releases stiffness in shoulders and back.
 - Stretches the side body, opens rib space for growing baby.
 - Strengthens knees, ankles and thighs.
- Horse Pose
 - Strengthens the groin area, core, thighs, arms, shoulders, upper back.
 - Many variations: lifting heels, one arm stretch above and over, prayer hands, cactus arms, eagle arms.
- Additional postures you can practice at home:
 - Fish Pose
 - Downward Dog
 - Pigeon
 - Modified Side Plank Table Top

- Cat/Cow
- Warrior I
- Warrior II
- Reverse Warrior Warrior III
- Dancer Pose
- Camel
- Butterfly
- Seated Straddle
- Happy Baby
- Bridge
- Wide Leg Forward Fold Squat
- Monkey Pose
- One Arm/Leg Balance

Breath & Breath prayer

- **Abdominal Breathing**

- This is also called diaphragmatic breathing.
- Here are more benefits this type of breathing can have
(<https://www.healthline.com/health/diaphragmatic-breathing#benefits>):
 - It helps you relax, lowering the harmful effects of the stress hormone cortisol on your body.
 - It lowers your heart rate.
 - It helps lower your blood pressure.
 - It helps you cope with the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
 - It improves your core muscle stability.
 - It improves your body's ability to tolerate intense exercise.
 - It lowers your chances of injuring or wearing out your muscles.
 - It slows your rate of breathing so that it expends less energy.
 - One of the biggest benefits of diaphragmatic breathing is reducing stress.

- **Deep Breathing**

- Place one hand on your chest, and one hand on your abdomen, expanding your abdomen, rib cage and lungs as you inhale for 5-7 seconds, pause, then exhale for the same duration.
- This increases lung capacity, calms the mind, brings focus and releases tension.
- Deep breathing also eases pain and discomfort.

- **Alternate Nostril Breathing**

- Inhale with right thumb over right nostril, pause and exhale out. With ring finger over left nostril, inhale, pause and exhale again. Repeat
- **Benefits:**
 - a. Calms the mind and allows you to focus, have more clarity and discernment
 - b. Helps the mind stay in the “now” and present moment (releasing old fears, regret, and worry)
 - c. Regulates other systems in your body
 - d. Relieves stress and tension
 - e. Helps harmonize the left and right hemispheres of the brain, bringing balance
 - f. Maintains and helps regulate fluctuating body temperatures

- **Victorious Breath**

- Audible-mind attaches to breath, taking away from a tight sensation
- Inhale in the nose, exhale through the mouth with lips closed.
- Imagine your hand in front of your mouth and you are going to fog it up, but keep lips closed.

- **Breath Prayers/Affirmations**

- Inhale word in, exhale word or phrase out.
- You may also use the breath prayer for a focused time during a daily spiritual practice. Simply repeat the prayer over and over keeping your attention on the prayer. If your attention wanders, gently return to the prayer.

Source of All Blessings by BR. David Steindl-Rast, OSB

*You bless us with breath.
In and out, in and out, ever
renewing us, ever anew making us
one with all who breathe the same air,
may this blessing overflow
into a shared gratefulness,
so that with one breath
I may praise and celebrate life.*

“The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.” — Job 33:4

Submission is hard! It takes daily work, to take our thoughts captive and see, hear and feel the LORD's presence in our lives. In labor, if you work against your body, your pain will increase and you will be significantly more distressed. Even more so in our lives, if we fight God's Word, His design and His gentle guiding, we will struggle with our whole health and be unbalanced.

Submit, allow your soul to open to His direction. Prepare to walk down the narrow path of God's love. Submit your WHOLE self; your mind, your body and your spirit. Not just during pregnancy or birth, but at all times. Never leave nor forsake the Father who never sleeps nor slumbers.

Use this last step of cooling down to submit to your pregnancy. His design for your pregnancy, birth and postpartum time is perfect. Submit your expectations to Him, praying for the Holy Spirit to fill you with His joy and light and peace. Have HOPE that He will finish the work He has put in you, in His timing and in His way. Enjoy this meditation on CHOOSING JOY!

Holy means "to be set apart"; Yoga means "to yoke"

That is what we do... we are set apart as believers and we yoke ourselves to God, to the trinity, through the spiritual discipline of yoga.

Additional resources

- Free meditations on SoundCloud, Spotify, & Apple @holyyogacollective
 - [click here to listen](#)
- Gail Tully's [Spinning Babies](#)
- [Pre/Postnatal Yoga Videos](#) on Holy Yoga TV
- [Pre/Postnatal Specialty Training](#) on HYTV+ and On-Demand

Our Pre/Postnatal on-demand training qualifies for 20 CEC hours with Yoga Alliance and Holy Yoga.

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