

Birthing Hope: Giving Fear to the Light

Rachel Marie Stone

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At its most basic, Rachel Marie Stone's memoir, *Birthing Hope: Giving Fear to the Light*, is about the time she picked up a just-born baby with her bare hands, not realizing the mother was HIV positive, and the resulting process of prophylaxis and testing; however, the book evolves into much more. It is a meditation on family, motherhood, birth, death, fear, and privilege, set against the backdrop of faith and global responsibility.

After Stone picks up the baby, she realizes what she has done and has to grapple with anxiety and fear while she waits for her test results. She uses this opportunity to reflect on motherhood and the differences and similarities of motherhood in the States versus in Malawi and other countries. Notably, she remembers the ways in which fear and anxiety are laced through her own family and the sacrifices and risks women—mothers—take all the time for their children.

While Stone's writing is vivid and authentic, at points the book veers into digressions. Stone excels at setting scenes and painting pictures of moments in time. Her observations of her young sons and her memories of her grandmother are exceptionally written; analyses of privilege or her own motivations for being in Malawi are more clunky and uncomfortable, even if well intentioned. At times, these ideas feel naïve or even problematic.

While *Birthing Hope* is filed as a Christian book, Stone's story is so universal that it also fits generally among memoir, women's health, and parenting titles. Stone's faith is a large motivator for her and something that is woven throughout the book, but her story is relatable and its themes sympathetic regardless of religion or belief system.

JAIME HERNDON (May/June 2018)

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