

A Father's Love PODCAST

[00:00:00] Hook

[00:00:02] **Ben:** One of the doctors said, "It's not today you should prepare yourself for, but it's tomorrow."

[00:00:07] **Jo:** What happens when the reality of parenting looks nothing like you expected?

[00:00:12] **Ben:** We were in that waiting room while he was having both those scans, and we just prayed for a miracle. I was like, "I don't know what to do. If things go poorly here, I can't even think about what that would mean."

Introduction

[00:00:23] **Jo:** Hi, I'm Jo Chamberlain from Messages of Hope, and today I've got Ben here to talk about fatherhood.

Ben and his wife, Zoe, were very excited to become parents. They planned out when and how it should happen, wanting to have children while they still felt young and full of energy. But then various challenges and career developments got in the way, and things didn't really go to their initial plan.

[00:00:46] Learning from His Own Father

[00:00:46] **Jo:** So Ben, thank you for coming and sharing your story with me today. Growing up, what was your experience of what a father looked like to you?

[00:00:56] **Ben:** Yeah, I think I had a great dad. I was very fortunate in that regard. Dad would spend time and play with us and, yeah, be present. It was really cool. He's a pastor, and so, I just remember Sunday afternoons after he was finished doing his pastor thing, we'd all sit around and it'd be a games day Sunday afternoon. That was a real highlight, right? So yeah, I think I viewed that relationship as, a lot of fun, as well as, Dad also helps provide the boundaries for behaviour, right? To say, "No, that's not what we do in this family."

Jo: What did you learn from your dad that you knew you wanted to instil in your own family?

[00:01:36] **Ben:** Yeah, I think my dad did a lot of teaching, I really appreciated that. I remember multiple times he explained the meanings of words to me. This is when I was very young, four or five. And yeah, I took all that on board. And then, baffled him a few years later when I repeated what that word meant, and he was like, "What? How did you know that?" So yeah, I think there's a lot of learning that

happens without even realising. As well as the fun, there's the learning, and then there's the boundaries. And so that's all stuff that I wanted to bring in to being a dad myself, to have fun with these kids, but also help them learn about life.

[00:02:08] Journey to Parenthood

[00:02:08] **Jo:** I'd love to hear a little bit more about this journey of fatherhood with you. So, what was it like for you thinking about the prospect of becoming a father?

[00:02:15] **Ben:** Yeah, I always liked the idea of being a younger dad and being able to get down and play with kids and just explore that fun relationship. And I guess that was the vision early uni days. But then career kinda kicks in, I started a PhD, and that kind of took the main focus. And my wife and I thought, "let's just hold on and get things sorted, career-wise, get steady, and then plan to have kids." And, funnily enough, that didn't go to plan.

[00:02:43] It turns out that after we started trying that, we had some real challenges, and we ended up having to do IVF. So, we spent three years of trying and, it's a real emotional draw. And, as a guy, it's one thing. But then to see your partner feel probably a lot more emotional weight to that as well. Yeah, it was a big journey. And yeah, funny that things don't really go according to your plan,

[00:03:06] **Jo:** Yeah, especially when you think about, you know, best laid plans. You've got an idea of what you wanna do, when you wanna do it. You've got a map of what is gonna happen when. And when that doesn't happen, and when things don't go according to plan, that must be really hard.

[00:03:18] **Ben:** Yeah,

[00:03:18] Discovering Zoe was pregnant

[00:03:18] **Jo:** Tell us a bit more about that moment where you actually discovered that Zoe was actually pregnant.

[00:03:23] **Ben:** I came home, Zoe had this grin on her face, and I just knew straight away. Didn't need to show me anything. I just knew. Yeah, it was an incredible experience. And we were lucky in the IVF process, we got it first shot. There's a lot of people that didn't get that experience. We were over the moon. It was mind-blowing to think that we had this little person growing alongside us. And I remember, when we went for all those regular scans, that first, like, confirmation scan, I don't know if they even call it that, but they put the ultrasound device on, and I saw one kind of little heads, and then she kept moving it around, and we saw another kind of head, and I thought, "Is that two?" And sure enough, she goes, "here's, your baby, and here's another one."

[00:04:09] **Jo:** Wow.

[00:04:10] **Ben:** I was elated. I was over the moon. And I just thought that God's got a sense of humour there. You know, we spent three years trying, and then this pathway is so straightforward here. So very grateful, to that. I think Zoe, being a midwife, she heard twins and her brain's going off. It's like, "Oh, risk factors." But, bottom line, like, once that kind of news sunk in, she was like, "That's incredible. We have two little humans, that are gonna come into the world very soon." I cannot describe that feeling well enough. It's just something that you experience, right?

[00:04:40] **Jo:** Yeah. I can only imagine what joy you would've felt when you first found out not only that, you were having a baby, but you were having twins.

[00:04:47] The twin's birth - Gabe's health

[00:04:47] **Ben:** Man, they were beautiful coming out. If you're a dad and you're like, I don't know, there might be a bit of apprehension about that whole stage, but it's just incredible to see your two little kids coming out and taking their first breath in the world. It's really cool. And I think a lot of young guys steer away from kids because it's kind of like you don't, you don't wanna, don't wanna hurt them. But it was really cool to jump in there and change their nappy, for example, and get to know them before they can even open their eyes.

[00:05:15] **Jo:** So, after a couple of ups and downs during your wife Zoe's pregnancy, your two beautiful twins were born, Abby and Gabe. Abby was healthy and well, but Gabe was faced with a few challenges. Ben, tell me more about what happened with Gabe.

[00:05:29] **Ben:** Because they were a bit premature, they came a bit early. We were in NICU for a while, and they were providing all sorts of support to them. Gabe, unfortunately, got sick. He had some difficulty breathing for a time. And then we solved that, but then he got an infection, and that infection kind of spread throughout his whole body. And it got to the point that we, were very much told to prepare for the worst. So it was a real dichotomy of feeling there. We named one of our children Abby – "the Joy of the Father", and one of our children Gabe or Gabriel – "God Is My Strength." And so, Abby was so straightforward, and she provided so much joy during that time. She was a little angel going back and forth, making the commute to the hospital every day for months, while Gabe was working through his journey.

Yeah, and so that was a real confronting moment. It's pretty different to what we had envisioned, particularly with Zoe being a midwife. She was picturing this very normal, "natural birth," with the biggest inverted commas you can imagine.

[00:06:31] Wrestling with God

[00:06:31] **Jo:** How were you feeling at that time?

[00:06:33] **Ben:** It's probably the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. I remember being pretty, pretty emotionally broken in the bathroom in the hospital, just thumping on the wall, just pretty raw emotion.

So I have a faith. I've walked with God and Jesus my whole life. I've gone through periods of harder moments with that relationship. But man, God is so faithful in everything He does. And this experience, I was like, "I don't know what to do. If things go poorly here, I can't even think about what that would mean." I would be very angry with God, for a while, I would have imagined.

We were pregnant once before, but it, was a miscarriage. And I remember being angry at that moment as well. But I remember walking out at night one time, as I do, and God gave me the message that it's gonna be okay. So, there was a lot of comfort in that, that no matter how squirrely life gets, there is a path forward that God has planned.

So then fast-forward to this, I'm like, "I don't see that plan. I'm in the middle of it. I don't know what to do." My wife is going through all sorts of, processes herself, right? Like she's just given birth. There's hormones everywhere, trying to figure out breastfeeding with one happy, healthy baby, and then this other baby that's, struggling, touch and go kind of thing. Yeah, I was really challenged by that whole stage, trying to figure out what God is wanting, from that.'

[00:07:58] **Jo:** So even in that arguing and, and challenging with God, how have you seen God at work in your journey as a father?

[00:08:07] **Ben:** I think in the heat of the moment where I found that relationship was strained, God was very generous in the community that he'd placed around us.

Many family members and many friends. My grandmother – everyone she would meet, she would be asking them to pray for Gabe, and that was special. It was great to know that while I was having a hard time praying, there was hundreds and hundreds of people that were praying.

That was a source of huge support. And there was one moment where he was going down for a couple different scans, there was a blood clot near his heart, and there was, he was being assessed for, swelling around his brain, and I remember at one point the doctors were negotiating with the X-ray team. There was a bit of to-and-fro-ing about how many different things they were ordering for him. And the doctor pretty point-blank said, "Look, we have a baby that's in the middle of multiple simultaneous organ failure. We need support right now."

So that's pretty hard to hear as a parent. One of the doctors said, "It's not today you should prepare yourself for, but it's tomorrow." So that was the day we called in someone and we had Gabe baptised and, yeah, very strange feelings.

But we were in that waiting room while he was having both those scans, and we just prayed for a miracle.

SHORT BREAK

[00:09:26] **Jo:** *If today's story impacts you in any way, we'd love to hear about it. You can reach out to us by visiting our website, messagesofhope.org.au, or send us a message on Facebook. Just search for Messages of Hope*

[00:10:50] The miracle

[00:09:41] **Jo:** Ben, you believed God was there with you in that situation and that you could pray to Him at that time. How did that shape how you saw the situation you were in?

[00:09:50] **Ben:** It was a source of comfort as much as it could be. Even though there was this tension of like, "God, what are you doing? Why are you doing this? I know that this whole circumstance is in your hands, but I wish it was solved."

[00:10:02] **Jo:** Was there hope?

[00:10:04] **Ben:** Yeah, I think coming out of that, where we just bared our hearts to God, there was a sense of hope. And then everything just turned around at that point. It was very strange. The scans came back, and the whole team of specialists were confused. The blood clot that was right near his heart had just gone. And it was quite a big blood clot. A junior doctor, said, "Oh, it must have been reabsorbed into the system." But the head of cardiology was like, "not a blood clot that size, not that quick." So they were like, "Don't know where it's gone, but it should have been picked up on the scan, but it's not there."

[00:10:40] **Jo:** That, that's indescribable.

[00:10:42] **Ben:** Yeah. Our God is faithful.

[00:10:43] Reflections on fatherhood

[00:10:43] **Jo:** Wow, what a story! So, as they grow older, I guess you have these other challenges as a parent because you've got now two children who are toddling around.

[00:10:51] **Ben:** Never in the same direction.

[00:10:53] **Jo:** Well, they do have different personalities, don't they? So how do you experience that as a father, wanting different things for your children?

[00:11:00] **Ben:** They are very different personalities and, for Gabe, it's like with what we want for him, it's like just a normal life, right? Like to be able to live and laugh, grow, have friends, learn, see this beautiful world that God has made. And for Abby, it's kinda different. Like she just picks things up so quickly. Maybe that's just got my dad goggles on, but she's really quick at picking up words and concepts, and she can read the body languages of a room to know when she should start saying goodbye, right? So she's really good like that.

And so to work with the kids, where they're at is different. You might be prompting Gabe to do something that Abby could have done months ago. So, they're at different stages of development. And that's interesting, right? Like you have to tailor your parenting, to that stage, and it's...yeah, there's challenges and there's, opportunities to see those two kind of grow together and learn from each other as well.

[00:11:52] **Jo:** Yeah. There's no one roadmap to parenting, is there? You have to take it as it is and know your children and know how best to support them.

[00:11:59] **Ben:** Yeah. My engineer brain wishes there was, right? Where's the recipe and the process to follow? But it's really dynamic, and that's the fun of it.

[00:12:05] What have you learned about parenting?

[00:12:05] **Jo:** Yeah. What have you learnt about parenting from this experience?

[00:12:09] **Ben:** I know that I'm still very early on that journey, right? There's certainly a huge amount of humility. We enter in with a lot of expectations about where we want our kids to be at, and a lot of fears. And I think at the end of the day, it's just they're their own little human, and we forget that sometimes, I think, when the world's kind of setting up all these frameworks to say, "Oh, you should be hitting these milestones." They're on their own little journeys. And the, the key part there, I think, is let them see what being a human being and what being a follower of Jesus is about, through our own actions and what we do day to day.

[00:12:47] Distinct role of the father

[00:12:47] **Jo:** Yeah, I see the role of the father being quite unique to the mother as well. I see that there might be so many self-help books out there to how to be a good mum, how to be a good parent, but do you see, as a father, your distinct, unique role?

[00:13:02] **Ben:** I read this article recently about even though kids have a preference about which parent they kind of gravitate towards, the importance of that other parent, usually the dad, should not be underestimated. And primarily that comes down to the socialisation aspect; you've got the mother who's their grounding, their source of support, their everything, their literally their food source.

[00:13:25] **Jo:** Yeah. The nurturer.

[00:13:26] **Ben:** Yeah. And so, this is where they go for comfort. When those needs are met, then they start probing outwards, and who's there but Dad. So being the dad there, that's their first experience of socialising, right? And from there their little brains work out whether it's safe to play with other people. And so, the being the dad there is their first chance they get to play, and form relationships and connections. And that's such an honoured position to be in.

[00:13:57] **Jo:** So how does that look for you and your children?

[00:13:59] **Ben:** Like Abby herself, she was playing with blocks and then at a moment she just stood up and she started like whinging a little bit and I asked, "Do you want Dada to come play with you?" And she just gives this definite big nod saying, "Yes, Dada, please." So we just sit there and we just play. And that's really special, I think. And so just playing with blocks, something so trivial, just being present with the kids is really special. And it means that they know that these different people are safe people.

[00:14:29] **Jo:** Oh, that's so lovely.

[00:14:31] Parenting expectations vs reality

Jo: So in all of your expectations of what you thought being a father would be like, how has that been different from the reality of it, especially with twins?

[00:14:40] **Ben:** I think you don't appreciate just how much is required to look after a single kid, and then to have two kids, there's just no time for anything. And I think there's a common feeling of not providing everything you can for your kids. I think that's a common feeling that a lot of parents feel. A guilt, perhaps that they wanna be providing more, but can't always meet the needs of their kids. And that's just kind of inbuilt.

I think when you've got twins, there's times where they've got no option; if I'm changing the nappy of one and the other's getting upset, I cannot change that circumstance. They need to deal with that. But I think that's something that God provides all the resources we need. We rise to meet whatever circumstances that he puts us in. And I think that's important to remember that as out of depth we feel a lot of the time, we've got these two cool kids that are along the journey with us.

[00:15:32] What have you learned about fatherhood?

[00:15:32] **Jo:** So, what have you learned about fatherhood that could be helpful to our listeners today?

[00:15:36] **Ben:** God is always with us and loving us. That provides me a lot of comfort when, oh, it's 2:00 in the morning, "Abby, you've been awake for four hours. Can you please just sleep?" But no, God is with us there, and he knows the struggles of parenting. And the keeping in mind of what's important, right? Like short term, these things are really hard, right? But they're just short-term fleeting things. The more important thing is that relationship with your kids and God. That's the key part.

[00:16:13] Faith and fatherhood

[00:16:13] **Jo:** When you talk about God being with you, what does that actually look like for you?

[00:16:16] **Ben:** I actually had a bit of a dream before the kids were born. And in that dream was this beautiful girl, I would say seven to 10 years old, like that kind of, that kind of time. And she was spinning around and it was-- she was just a beautiful girl. I had this really strong connection to her, like she felt like my daughter. And then a week later, I had another dream of this little boy. And this little boy, he was like missing legs, which was super interesting. I was like, "He's kind of waddling around, but gee, I love him."

And it's all very metaphorical, but I felt that same closeness of my son. This was before we found out we were having twins, and I was like, I don't understand this. How does that work? That one was my daughter, that one was my son. I don't get that." And then later I found out we were having twins, and I was like, "Oh, that makes sense." And so, from the get-go, I just viscerally knew that we were having a boy and a girl, and we chose not to find out. And then they came out, and it was a boy and a girl, and the boy had some challenges. So, I have no doubt that God, knew things so far in advance and equipped me with what I needed to know at the time. So that's the kind of thing I keep in mind day to day, that God does have an overarching plan for me as an individual. Yeah, and that's a source of comfort.

[00:17:34] **Jo:** Do you see that then as God preparing the way for you? God preparing your heart, God preparing you for the struggles ahead?

[00:17:41] **Ben:** Yeah, like I don't necessarily know what the future holds, but I do know that God is more faithful than what we are and, more faithful than we can even comprehend. So he will give us what we need when we need it. Yeah, that I've seen firsthand.

[00:17:55] **Jo:** So even in that moment of God with you, I can hear what you're saying about God's strength, God's provision, God's heart, and God's love for you. Are they the things that bring you a source of comfort?

[00:18:07] **Ben:** Yeah. There's the academic knowing that he is with you and providing all these things. Then there's the heart knowledge that, hold on, God really knows what's going on here, he's got it all in his hands. I can stop worrying about this aspect and that aspect. God's really got control over this whole situation. When you can't think 'cause you haven't slept, that's really comforting.

[00:18:26] **Jo:** Yeah, just knowing that somebody else is in control sometimes is a good release to go, "I can be at peace here 'cause I know somebody else is in charge."

[00:18:34] **Ben:** Yeah. It's humbling 'cause you can't be operating at 100% at that point, and you can feel the weight of the world. But then to be able to give some of that burden up, and let go of it is a freeing thing.

[00:18:46] **Jo:** Absolutely. What I'd really like to know is, what have you learned from God that's shaped you as a father?

[00:18:53] **Ben:** I think the best way to describe that would be just how faithful God is when we don't live up to his expectations, right? When I'm struggling to pray, God's right there with us. And that's also the same kind of feeling you get when the kids are having a tantrum, right? And you love them, you're still there with them. You kind of wish they wouldn't be doing that, and that's exactly how God is feeling sometimes, right? When we make mistakes, I've no doubt that he's wishing that we weren't doing that.

[00:19:24] **Jo:** But it doesn't change his relationship with you. He still loves you no matter what.

[00:19:28] **Ben:** Yeah. So I think it's been enlightening to appreciate the depth of that relationship.

[00:19:34] Ben's hope for his children

[00:19:34] **Jo:** what is your hope for your children as a father?

[00:19:37] **Ben:** I hope that they have a rich relationship with God. And that's not just a nice saying. I want them to walk with God as they explore this rich world that we're still exploring. I want them to find out what God wants for them in this world, and that looks unique for each of them.

I don't have all the answers, and thinking very far ahead, it's unlikely I'm gonna be around forever. I want them to have that relationship with God so that I know that they are well looked after and in God's hands.

[00:21:19] **Jo:** Well, thank you Ben, for sharing with us all about parenting and your experience as a father. And I pray that God will continue to surround you all with his love and support, strength and care.

[00:21:30] **Ben:** Thanks very much

[00:21:31] Conclusion

[00:21:32] **Jo:** Just as God was there for Ben in his parenting journey, God is there for you too in whatever challenges you're facing. You can turn to him and trust that he has great plans. To hear more about how much God loves and cares for fathers and for you, visit **messagesofhope.org.au**.

[00:21:50] **Jo:** I'm Jo Chamberlain. I hope you can join us again next week for another message of hope, sharing hope in the world today.