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Intro: Hey friends! Welcome to Girls Night. I'm Stephanie May Wilson and I am so happy that you're here. Each week I have a girlfriend over and we talk through one of the biggest questions we have about our lives as women.

We're talking about friendships and faith and relationships and self-confidence, about our calling in life, and how to live every bit of our lives to the full. Life is so much better and easier and absolutely more fun when we navigate it together as girlfriends. And I cannot wait to get started.

Our guess for today's episode is Christen Reed. Christen works as a licensed marriage and family therapist at Ready Nest counseling here in Nashville. And not only is she an amazing therapist, she's my therapist.

Christen has been there with me every step of the way as I've gone through the most gigantic transition of my entire life—becoming a mom. And that's what I'm talking about today. We're talking about becoming a mom, why it's such a big transition, what you can do to prepare for it, and some really practical pieces of advice and wisdom to help you through it, especially in those first few months.

Now, I have a few disclaimers to share with you before we dive in. First, I mentioned this last week, but it is a tad unconventional for you to be meeting my therapist. She and I had tons of talks and signed lots of papers having to do with boundaries and competence reality and making sure that we keep our therapist-client relationship as safe and sacred as it's always been. So I just want to let y'all know that.

Second, I wanted to let you know that this is a pretty messy, vulnerable topic for me. In this episode, you're gonna hear why I had such a hard time in the first few months of being a mom, why I say it's the hardest transition I've ever gone through.

And the reason I want to be so honest about this is not to be discouraging. That is the last thing I would ever want to be. But it's because I don't want you to have to go through any of this alone. I was actually talking to my sister about this a few weeks ago.

You know, maybe your first few months of mom life won't be that hard. And if that's the case, amazing. I'm so happy for you. But if this is really hard for you, I want you to know that you're not alone in that. You're not weak. You're not a bad mom. This is hard. And you're not alone in feeling that way.

One last thing I wanted to say. Christen and I had so much to talk about in this episode that we actually had to split it into two parts. But trust me it is so worth the listen. So today you're going to be hearing part one of our conversation and then next week we'll air part two.

Okay, I actually have one more thing to say. So as you're hearing from my amazing counselor, you might find yourself thinking about counseling in your own life. With that in mind, if you live in Tennessee or in South Carolina and are navigating anything related to motherhood, go check out Ready Nest. They are so great.

But if you're in a different season of life or you live in a different state, that recommendation doesn't help quite as much. So here's one that does. It's one of our amazing Girls Night podcast sponsors, Faithful Counseling. Faithful Counseling is a website where you can get matched up with a Christian counselor for professional online therapy sessions. This is truly the easiest and most affordable way to find a faith-based counselor.

You may have heard me talk about Faithful Counseling before. But just in case you haven't, I wanted to tell you a few quick reasons why I love them so much.

First, it's easy to get started. All you have to do is go to their website, fill out a quick form about yourself, what you're going through and what you're looking for in a counselor. And within 24 hours, Faithful Counseling will connect you with a licensed, vetted, faith-based professional counselor.

Second reason is it's easy to schedule. Once you're connected to a therapist, you can start communicating with them in less than 24 hours. You can also log into your account at any time and send a message to your therapist and you'll get timely and thoughtful responses back.

You can also schedule weekly phone or video sessions. And the best part is you can do it all virtually. No commute, no awkward waiting room time, less time away from work. You can even do your sessions in your PJs, which counseling in your PJs, yes, please.

The third reason I love Faithful Counseling is that it's easy to find the right counselor for you. In order for counseling to be truly beneficial, you have to find a counselor you really connect with. And often we don't find the right person on our first try. So then we're stuck going through the whole process of breaking up with that counselor, which is super awkward, and then starting from scratch to find a new one.

But with Faithful Counseling, if you don't love your counselor, if you find that you're looking for something different, you can switch by clicking a button. It's easy and it's free. They really make it easy to find the best fit possible.

And the last reason is that it's easier to fit into your budget. While I love traditional and personal counseling, it can cost more than \$100 per session, which makes it a total no go for so many of us. But Faithful Counseling is significantly less expensive, and they have financial aid available. Also, if you sign up through the special link they gave me, you can get 10% off your first month.

Friends, if therapy is something you've been considering or something you think might be helpful for you right now, head over to Stephaniemaywilson.com/counseling and that link will give you all the info about Faithful Counseling as well as 10% off your first month. Again, that's Stephaniemaywilson.com/counseling for all the info on Faithful Counseling and 10% off your first month.

Okay, now without any further ado, let's jump into my conversation with Christen.

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Stephanie: All right, friends, I am so excited, I am so excited for who you get to meet today. I'm sitting here with someone who's really, really special to me, someone who has been in my corner for a little over a year now. I'm happy to introduce you to my therapist, my counselor, Christen Reed. Christen, thanks for being here.

Christen: Oh, I'm so glad to be here. Thanks for having me, Steph.

Stephanie: I feel like we should talk about this right up front. If anyone has been in therapy or I know we have women in our community who are therapists who are like, "Wait, I have red flags going off right now." You and I have had a lot of talks about whether or not we were going to do this episode. I've signed paperwork. Talk us through that really quick because I know that confidentiality is incredibly important.

Christen: It's incredibly important. I'm glad to have this space to talk about this aspect. So yeah, we did. We had a lot of conversations. You brought this up to me. You felt really strongly and very passionately that you wanted to share a little part of your postpartum story and bring me into that conversation.

And the first thing I said to you was, "Oh, we got to think about confidentiality." So encouraging you to sit on it, think through it, pray through it a little bit more. And then on my end, what I did was I talked to my boss, our founder at Ready Nest

about "Hey, what are the implications here? What are the legalities? Can we work around confidentiality."

So what we determined was that in order to maintain the integrity of our relationship, our therapeutic relationship is that we would have you sign a release of information waiver and give us very specific things that we're allowed to talk about and not allowed to talk about for the sake of really maintaining as much confidentiality here as possible.

You know, the beautiful thing about a therapeutic relationship is that it's all confidential, giving you the space to come and tell all of your things, all of your deep, dark secrets, or your scary thoughts or whatever it is going on in your head. It's that really beautiful, safe, sacred space to be able to do that.

Stephanie: I love that. I love that. And we really did. You know, our relationship is so special and has been so just wonderfully helpful for me. So the last thing in the world I wanted to do was to jeopardize that. So we really talked about, like, we don't talk outside of therapy. Like we have a very specific, wonderful relationship. And there's so much freedom in that, like you said, to know that that is a really safe, really private place to process and work through things.

But we decided that we think we can in a way that's so good for our therapeutic relationship, and my heart and stuff, open up just a piece of this so that we can share with women some of what I've gone through, some of what you've helped me through.

And then also I'm really excited for women to get to learn from you, but also just to kind of give people a peek into what it looks like to have help with this season that their lives or whatever season of their lives so that, you know, it's a reminder that this help is available for all of us. So I'm really excited about this.

Christen: I am too. This is the thing I'm passionate about. So I'm glad to be here. I love this conversation.

Stephanie: So we've kind of like sort of jumped into the deep end, but also I want people to have the chance to formally meet you. Tell us who you are, what you do, and I'm excited to hear a fun fact about you.

Christen: Okay. I'm Christen Reed. I'm a licensed marriage and family therapist that works at Ready Nest Counseling in Nashville, Tennessee. What we do is we really focus on perinatal mental health. And what that entails is conception, pregnancy, postpartum, infertility, loss, and early parenting. So like up until two, three years of age.

Stephanie: How did you... Oh, wait, fun fact. Oh, my gosh-

Christen: Fun fact. Okay, my fun fact is—I don't know if this is fun for everybody, but it's fun for me—is that I am currently training a therapy dog. I've got a beautiful 13-month-old Australian Labradoodle named Charlotte Cambridge that I am currently training to work with kids probably. Or maybe she'll come with me to the office and work with clients that are at Ready Nest. We'll see.

Stephanie: I did it. I mean, I've gotten to see Charlotte, but I didn't know you're training her to do that. That's awesome.

Christen: Yes, yes. It is quite a process. It's really cool. It's very interesting stuff because a lot of the attachment work you and I have talked about is like what I'm doing with her, building that solid attachment. Yes, kind of like parenting and making sure she's feeling loved and secure and safe and knows that when I leave I'm coming back. All of that. So yeah, it's really interesting. It is very fun.

Stephanie: That is so cool. I love that. I love that. So we can talk about a whole bunch of things related to motherhood. But I do want to focus on the first few months because really, truly the transition to motherhood is one of the hardest things I've ever done. Probably the hardest thing I've ever done. So I really wanted to just do what we can to support women who are in that season right now. So knowing that we're kind of zooming into this one particular time.

So I want to hear from you as someone who talks to women a ton when they're in this season of life, what are some common things that women experience in this time? Like what are some of the things that the clients are coming to you dealing with?

Christen: The biggest thing that I've seen in my time at Ready Nest is anxiety. Well, we hear a lot about postpartum depression, but we don't necessarily talk about the postpartum anxiety and what can actually come along with that, right? There's a lot more emphasis on postpartum depression.

But in my experience, and it could be different for my colleagues, but for me, it's been mostly postpartum anxiety. So anxiety around, "Is my baby being loved enough? Is my baby safe? Am I producing enough milk for my baby? Should I be using cloth diapers or disposable diapers? Should I be using formula or breastfeeding? Should I pump exclusively, nurse exclusively?"

All these little things that are going around in a client's head night after night while they're not sleeping. That's the other thing—a lack of sleep, a lack of basic needs being met.

And I see you like nodding your head a little bit as I say that, right? Yeah, that lack of sleep is such a big one. That really is what propels a lot of my clients to get into therapy in the first place for a lot of reasons. That lack of sleep is going to trickle down into all the other areas of our life. It's going to really ramp up that anxiety. It's going to ramp up depression. It's going to ramp up sadness.

You know, the other thing I want to say is not everybody that comes to see me has a postpartum disorder. Sometimes they just need that place to talk through. "Okay, well, have you tried this? Have you tried this? Let's access whatever it is you're feeling right now." And sometimes it only takes three, four, five, six sessions, and they're, "Okay, this is great. I've got you. If I need you, I'll reach out. Otherwise, I'm gonna move on with my life."

But then there are the more extreme, the more intense, if you will, themes that come along with postpartum anxiety or postpartum depression that I'll wrestle with my clients a good bit.

Stephanie: I've so many questions. I know I've sent you a bunch of questions but I'm going to jump around a little bit.

Christen: That's fine.

Stephanie: Talk to me about what is happening in our lives during this season. Like you touched on lack of sleep. But like, "What is happening in our lives, in our relationships, in our bodies that contributes to this being a hard season for a lot of women?"

Christen: So let's talk about the biological piece first. Obviously, you've just had a kid, so there's this massive hormonal shift that's going on. So your body is being pumped full of estrogen, progesterone the entire time that you're pregnant. You deliver the baby, you deliver the placenta, those levels drop like that.

One of the largest, if not the largest, most drastic shifts of any human's life is right after that placenta is delivered. So you've got that going on. So that's this crazy rush of hormones and your body's all over the place fluctuating, trying to get back to regulation, trying to get back to a baseline, so to speak. So that really drives a whole lot of other things.

So think of PMS, and like the most intense PMS that you've ever experienced. Nodding your head along with me, yeah. Think about that. And that's what's happening to your body. With the difference being though you've got this tiny little human that you're all a sudden responsible for, right? You've prepped and prepped

and prepped for this baby to get here, baby is finally here, and you're looking at this baby and you're like, "Oh, okay, you're a real human, and now I have to figure out what to do with you."

So you add that to the mix, you add the fact that this baby is not born with a circadian rhythm at all. So night is day, day is night, right? And developmentally, that's appropriate for your baby. They should not be able to have that skill quite yet. So they're up all hours, you're not sleeping. And that adds to anxiety, it adds to sadness, it adds to tears, right?

Plus, in the therapeutic lens, in MFT world specifically we have these things called life cycles that we really talk a lot about. So you're also being launched into this brand new life cycle. We've talked a little bit about this, I think. I try to talk about it with all of my clients.

And within this life cycle, your entire homeostasis has been challenged. So you've got to figure out, "Okay, there's a new homeostasis. Now, what do we do?" And a lot of this is happening subconsciously, of course, but that's such a big thing that's taking over your brain during this time period that's just kind of adding to everything else that you're going through biologically, emotionally, and mentally, and spiritually for a lot of women as well.

Stephanie: Talk to me a little bit more about the homeostasis. Do you mean in terms of like your schedule, in terms of your... What category? Yeah, just talk to me about the life cycle a little bit more.

Christen: There's different life cycles that we all go through, and we all hit these life cycles at different points. There's no like you have to do it by 20, 25, 30, right? Everybody's on their own time schedule. But with the life cycle that you're leaving couplehood, just the two of you and you're being launched into the new life cycle, which is okay, now we have our first kid. You add another kid, you're being launched into a new life cycle.

But let's just focus on going from just the two of you to now the three of you. So what happens is, okay, you're going along with your partner and you have your rhythms, right? You have your homeostasis of we have tacos every Tuesday. Then on every Wednesday we go out with our friends, and we meet for happy hour, or we meet for bingo, whatever, right? You've got your rhythms. I don't know. People like bingo, right?

So you've got your rhythms. You know, "Okay, you're going to do the laundry, I'm going to do the dishes. You're going to do the cooking, I'm going to dust the house."

These are very, very basic. And then there's also like the grander scheme of you bring in this much money, I bring in this much money.

So all of the things within your world of just the little two of you they're getting ready to change because this third and tiny little human has entered into the system. And then the homeostasis changes.

So we have a couple of options here. We can resist that change. And that's when a lot of just frustration comes along of "Oh, this isn't the way that we've always done it. We have to keep doing it this way. We have to continue to be a perfectly equal partnership or continue to do these rhythms exactly as they used to be."

But what we're going to find is that it just doesn't work. So there has to be this looseness, so to speak. There's this fluidity of "Okay, homeostasis has changed. We're in this new life cycle. This tiny little human has joined us."

And we can fight and we can try to make sure that everything stays exactly the same or we can accept that things are different, and it's a great thing that things are different because of this new little human is in our life. And we can figure out new rhythms.

Okay, so maybe it doesn't work for your husband to do all the cooking anymore. Maybe it makes more sense for you to do the cooking now. Maybe it makes sense for you to take over the finances and he'll do something else, or vice versa, right?

Just figuring out just the tiniest little things about your rhythms and being okay, and being flexible with the fact that things are changing. Things are changing a lot actually because you have this human that you are now responsible for keeping alive.

Stephanie: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. You talked a little bit about the giant hormonal changes that are happening and the fact that, you know, anxiety and depression are really common. I want to just make sure we touch on this kind of early.

This was like my first question, is, how do you know when you are just really anxious because you are now in charge of a tiny life that is so fragile, and you have no idea what you're doing? How do you know when you're just anxious because of that or it's more than that? Like, where's the difference between, you know, my entire life has changed overnight and I'm feeling sad about it versus postpartum depression?

Christen: I think this is a fantastic question. The first thing that I will disclaim is that it looks different for everybody. Everybody's experience is different. But the biggest thing for us clinically that we can do, we offer these very basic assessments.

One is the Edinburgh postpartum depression scale. So that's going to screen for postpartum depression. And the other one, it's called GAD, generalized anxiety... Oh, I can't remember what exactly it stands for. But the abbreviation is GAD, G-A-D. So I offer these to all of my new clients.

And oftentimes at OB and pediatrician offices they'll offer at least the EPDS to every mom that comes in for an appointment. And based on the results of that we can get a pretty good idea of where you fall in the postpartum range of both depression and anxiety. So that's a way that we can know the difference. Once again, that's clinically speaking.

So if, you know, you're home with your husband, maybe your mom, your sister, girlfriend's around you a lot and they're noticing some changes, these are things that they can look for. When it's crossing over to postpartum depression and anxiety territory, it can often look like there's a lack of interest in the baby, there's weeping to an unusual extent.

Now, let's normalize the weeping a little bit. When you're in those two weeks, the baby blues, you're going to cry all the time. You just are. You can't help it. They're going to be happy tears, they are gonna be sad tears, they are going to be tears for no reason whatsoever other than your body's just doing a lot. Okay?

So usually anything past that two week mark, we're going to look at the things a little bit more seriously around "Oh, is this actually postpartum depression, postpartum anxiety?" So, lack of interest in a baby. Usually, typically anything past two weeks, that's when we're going to start looking a little bit deeper, crying to an abnormal level after those two weeks, obsessively worrying. That's the thing.

So if it's obsessive that you are thinking through, "Oh, no, what do I do for this baby?" If you're checking diapers obsessively to make sure that they're urinating enough or drinking enough water. That's how we know the baby is dehydrated or getting plenty of fluids, right? How many diapers are they going through a day?

So if you're like counting diapers and you're obsessive about that, that's usually a clue that, "Okay, wait, weren't crossed over into more of a postpartum anxiety territory? Is it anxiety keeping you up at night? Is it becoming debilitating?"

So if all of a sudden you're paralyzed by having to make decisions by "Oh my gosh, the thought of taking care of this little one is making me so anxious that I literally

cannot do anything else but sit in this chair and feel all of my feelings right now," that's also a really big indicator.

Now, with all that being said, there's a lot of anxiety that's very appropriate, it is very biologically appropriate that we have, right? So our primary responsibility once we become a mother is to keep this tiny little human alive. And there are things that have been put in our body to make sure that we are always on alert to make sure that this tiny little human is alive.

So you're gonna think through things like, "Okay, is my baby getting enough to drink?" But here once again, the distinguishing mark between just "this is appropriate" versus "Oh, we probably need to go talk to our OB or to a therapist and get some outside help," is it obsessive? Is it debilitating? Is it keeping me up at night?"

Stephanie: I am so glad that I asked about this because I didn't know that. I would say that I felt all of those things. This is such a random way to explain this. But the difference between like primary colors and pastel, I feel like I felt those in like pastel colors, not primary colors.

So I was checking diapers, we had the... Because the girls were pretty small when they were born, we were weighing them a lot, we have legal pad after legal pad after legal pad of like all of our notes about each feeding and stuff like that. So I was worried, but I wasn't obsessed. So it's like I totally resonate with everything you're saying but it feels like kind of the muted version of that.

So what do we do if we're like, "I think I might have some postpartum depression or postpartum anxiety?" I feel like the thought of... This is true in general when it comes to needing help of really any kind. When you really need help, it's really hard to get it because you have to figure out who to call and make an appointment. And when you haven't slept in, you know, nine months, that sounds really hard.

So who do we go to for help? Because my kids' pediatrician, what are they going to do? I don't know. Who do we go to for help? What do we do? What do we do when we need help?

Christen: Absolutely. I think this is such a really lovely thing to talk about. A couple of things here. It's always worthwhile to bring it up to your pediatrician or your OB or your midwife. Whoever's responsible for taking care of your body, right? Always worth mentioning it to them. Because maybe they know a therapist, maybe they have a relationship.

I know it Ready Nest with local clinicians, local obese, pediatricians, midwives, lactation consultants, whoever is helping you through this time, mention it to them because odds are they're going to have a good relationship with somebody who can help you.

Just like we do at Ready Nest. We're connected to doulas, lactation consultants, everybody in the birthing community for a reason because we know like women are going to go to them, and then they're going to direct them to us and we can help them from there.

Stephanie: Got it. Got it.

Christen: There are also organizations... I can't remember if I gave this website to you guys, but I will need to email it to you because... It's called Postpartum Support International. They have a directory of all perinatal mental health clinicians... not all but whoever wants to be included in the directory, in your area. They have a 24/7 hotline you can call. They are a wealth of knowledge. They are really leading the charge and getting the word out and doing research and spreading awareness to postpartum challenges.

So I'll make sure that you guys have that link so you can put it in your show notes. But like I said, they have a directory of who's in your area. So you could go to your state and... They may have it by city. I'm not 100% sure. But I know they at least have it by state to where it's just a list of clinicians that are registered through PSI.

Stephanie: I love that. I don't know if you know about this, but this is the kind of a random thing. I've never called a hotline before even when people are like, "Call this hotline and someone will talk to you." The first time I ever did was at the hospital they told us that there's a Tennessee breastfeeding hotline, and it's staffed 24 hours a day, it's free, and they'll help you with nursing questions.

This is something I wish I had done or been able to do differently. But when I had the girls, it was like vaccines hadn't come out yet. It was right in the height of COVID, so our bubble was really, really tight. So we were trying to see as few people as possible. But I wish that I would have had lactation support in person.

The next best thing though was that I called the Tennessee breastfeeding hotline and I actually called them on Christmas Eve because we were just freaking out. And the most... Well, I could cry thinking about it. The most wonderful woman answered. And I think she was like preparing a turkey or something. And she's like, "Okay, listen." You know, she's talking me through this.

And it just was the most beautiful thing that the people who are staffing these hotlines like get it. And really it was Christmas Eve, she was prepping a turkey and she was talking to me about how to nurse my babies and what I could do differently and stuff. So anyway, don't be afraid to call hotline is the point there.

Christen: Definitely not. Steph, I love that story. You've never shared that with me before. That's so daring. I lost it.

Stephanie: Yeah, [inaudible 00:26:29] to receive breastfeeding hotline. Okay, that's good to know. When it comes to medication, one thing that I guess I'm totally fine with everyone knowing is that... So you guys, everyone listening probably knows this. I absolutely struggle with anxiety.

So a couple years ago, I started taking anxiety meds. They've been so helpful in just helping me feel just normal levels all around. So I still feel anxious, but not in a debilitating way. I still feel all my emotions, it's just I feel like I don't get stuck at the bottom in the same way that I used to.

You know, there's a lot of questions about "what do you do with medication when you are getting pregnant?" And can you still take it? So I was so grateful to have really great doctors walking me through that and making sure that I was on a kind of medication that was safe during pregnancy and stuff. But one thing that I did do was after the girls were born, we did up my dose because I was going through so much and I was so anxious.

I was able to bring it back down. Like I didn't need that much help for a super long time. But I just want to say that. That if you are on medication as far as everyone's told me, you can still take it while you're pregnant and you can take it postpartum, and it's really helpful. Also, if you need to change your dose postpartum like I did.

But I do know that if you aren't on medication and you feel like you might need to get on medication, can your OB prescribe you with something? Or do you need to find like... I don't even have a primary care doctor. I was so grateful that I found an actual psychiatrist couple years ago when I really needed one. So they're my person. But do you need to find a psychiatrist? Who can help you with things when it comes to medication?

Christen: My preference would be for you to find a psychiatrist. That's sometimes pretty challenging to do on your own, though. So always a great place to start is mentioning it to your OB. Like, "Hey, I'm really struggling with this. I think I could benefit from medication."

They can get you started at least and then they can also refer you out to a psychiatrist to manage it from there. Your midwife can do the same as well. Most midwives do. Some of them don't have the qualifications to do medication. So you'll have to specify that with him or her.

But for the most part, go to your OB or you know, sometimes a pediatrician can do the same thing. So the bottom line here is just talk to people, say, "Hey, I'm struggling. I think I need a medication. Can you help me with this? And then can you refer me to a psychiatrist from here?"

I will also say this. There are psychiatrists that are specifically trained in perinatal medicine specifically and how medications really interact with pregnancy. They look at those intricacies of pregnancy postpartum if you're nursing, if you're not nursing. And so that really would be your best option. Now, also that is a very, very, very tiny percentage of psychiatrists that are qualified to do that or have that additional training. But that is an option that is available.

Stephanie: Okay. Okay. That's really good. I know we kind of like dug deep in there, but I know that there are women who needed that.

Christen: That's right.

Stephanie: So backing up a little bit, we've talked about how this time is really, really challenging. You know, you bring a baby home... And that was the thing that like I kept saying every mom needs the biggest hug. Because the way that this whole thing is designed is like needs some reworking, Lord. I would like to talk to you about this.

The fact that you are pregnant for almost 10 months and your body is going through all that, and then you don't get a break at the end of it when you're the most pregnant, then you have to have the baby. And so that either means surgery or something that's equally, if not more—I don't know, you know, that can be debated—taxing on your body to actually deliver this baby.

And then you're in charge of the baby right away. There is no post-pregnancy vacation. There is no post-birth spa weekend. It is you're immediately in the thick of it, and you are like... I just remember going, "What? What? This makes no sense. How is it designed this way?" There's no minute to recover and that just is so wild. So that being aside, that's like my own little rant. I'll talk to God about that.

Tell me what, if anything, can we do to prepare ahead of time, like mentally or logistically to make the transition easier?

Christen: I think being realistic about the expectation is number one thing. Realistic about outcomes. You know, we can plan and we can plan and we can plan. But we also need to hold loosely to those plans because we don't actually know what's going to happen once we get to the delivery room. We don't actually know what's going to happen in post-delivery either, right? So plan the whole thing loosely is the biggest thing that I can say.

Now, as far as preparing yourself for going home, okay, well, let's make sure we've got the freezer stocked with meals or we've got that meal train setup. Make sure that your changing stations are ready to go. Is baby sleeping with you? Is baby sleeping in another room? You know, most of the time baby is sleeping in the same room with you. So make sure like you've got a changing station there, a changing station maybe in the living room where you're going to spend a lot of your time.

Also, what a lot of women forget to prioritize while they're still pregnant is taking care of their own personal postpartum needs. So pads, wipes, nipple cream if you're making the choice to breastfeed or nursing pads. That's what I'm trying to say. Nursing pads.

Those little types of things. Like your own postpartum personal self-care—the things that you're going to need for yourself to really be able to allow your body to heal in the way that it deserves to heal. So that's another big component to this.

But then also go into it knowing I'm probably not going to sleep a lot. So how can I really utilize any downtime to get some sleep in? Can my partner and I... How can we go ahead and be expecting to share duties around the house? Now that we're getting more out of COVID, we can start thinking about these things a little bit more of “who can I bring in that's going to help? What can I outsource that's going to help?”

A great gift to give to a new mom is a laundry service. If that's a service available in your area, that is a great thing you can give to a new mom. as much as we can take off of your plate, that's really going to be the thing that's going to set you up for a more pleasurable, enjoyable, successful, whatever the word is you want to enter and use right there, experience.

It's not going to be 100% smooth sailing. It never is. You've got this tiny, little human that you're trying to get to know. But as much as you can outsource, as much as you can prep ahead of time and just have these little things you would not think to have ready like changing stations in all rooms.

I'm talking about like a changing table, a little basket with some diapers and some wipes, diaper cream, right? That's all you need. But make sure they're in the areas

where you're going to be primarily using. And then once again, the postpartum self-care products.

Stephanie: Yeah, I love all of that. I feel like it's like anything that you don't want to have to think about once the baby's here. Like figure that out ahead of time. So if it's the middle of the summer and you know that you know, someone in your house is gonna have to cut the grass, let's figure out a person to cut the grass that isn't you-

Christen: Exactly, yeah.

Stephanie: ...so you don't have to think about it.

Christen: Yeah. That's exactly right. You do need to be thinking about something else. The key here is we want this mixture of just kind of soaking in these early days and just really... It can be draining. It can absolutely be draining. Also, it can be really challenging.

So having this healthy balance of okay, I want to sit in this and I just want to soak this up and I want to recover as well as I can. But also there are going to be more challenging aspects of, I mean, just going to the bathroom. That's a big ordeal after you've just had a baby. So how can we set you up for success with things like that as much as how can we set you up for success for things just soaking up your baby?

[00:35:00] <music>

Sponsor: Our sponsor for today's episode is a company I love called [Green Chef](#). Now, if you guys aren't familiar with them, Green Chef is the number one meal kit for eating well with plans to fit every lifestyle. If you guys have been around our Girls Nights for a while, you know two things about me.

The first, my schedule is busy. I know yours is too. And the second thing is that I'm just not a great cook. Truly, I'm pretty bad at it and I don't enjoy it either. Don't get me wrong, I love food and I love eating great food. I'm just not the best at making for myself. And that's why I love Green Chef.

Each week Green Chef sends out meals with fresh produce, premium proteins, and organic ingredients that you can feel good about eating. Everything is handpicked and delivered right to your door. The ingredients are pre-measured, perfectly portioned, and mostly prepped. And because of that, when you use Green Chef you're reducing your food waste by at least 25% versus buying food at the grocery store.

Not long ago Carl and I made their roasted crepe pork chops and they were amazing. They had this creamy coconut yogurt sauce that was drizzled on top and it was incredible. The best part is it was super easy to make. You guys I love what Green Chef is doing because they take over the meal planning, the grocery shopping, and most of the prep for us week after week.

Also, Green Chef is now owned by HelloFresh so there are even more meal plans to choose from. I love switching between the brands and now my listeners can enjoy both brands at a discount with me.

With that said, Go to greenchef.com/girlsnight135 and use code GIRLSNIGHT135 to get \$135 off across five boxes plus free shipping on your first box. I want to see that again just to make sure you have all of the info. If you go to greenchef.com/girlsnight135, and use the code GIRLSNIGHT135, you can get \$135 off across five boxes, plus free shipping on your first box.

Thank you so much to Green Chef for sponsoring our Girls Night. We just love having you.

[00:36:59] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! I'm so excited to get to tell you about today's sponsor. This is a company I've loved for years and I'm honored to get to partner with them. Our sponsor for today is an amazing app called [Calm](#).

Calm is the number one mental wellness app with tools to reduce anxiety, improve focus, and help you quiet your thoughts so you can drift off to sleep. It was the middle of the night and my mind was racing. Anyone else experienced this?

I saw that they have these things called sleep stories and I figured I'd give one a try, and I fell in love. Honestly, I've never looked back. Friends when I tell you that Calm was a mainstay in my life, that is truly an understatement. I listen to their sleep stories almost every single night.

Side note, my favorites are always travel-related. These days I'm drifting off to sleep thinking about wandering through the streets of Dublin or trekking across Spain.

With two toddlers running around my house also tends to be a bit noisy these days. And so when I need some peace and quiet in the middle of the chaos or when I need to get some work done, I listen to Calm's soundscapes. They're like white noise, but better.

My favorite is called Rain on Window and they also have this one that sounds like you're in a museum. It's like a little bit of noise but not too much. It's great for workday.

Calm has been this incredible tool for me in the past few years, helping me fall asleep at night, helping me quiet my mind, and tune out my toddlers on occasion during the day. There's over 100 million people around the world who use Calm to take care of their minds, and I'm so happy to be one of them.

I also love Calm even more because they have a gift for our Girls Night community. For listeners of the show, Calm is offering an exclusive offer of 40% off of a Calm premium subscription at calm.com/girlsnights. If you go to calm.com/girlsnight, you can get 40% off of unlimited access to Calm's entire library. In case you need to hear that again, that's calm.com/girlsnight.

Thank you Calm for being an amazing sponsor and for all the extra hours of sleep you've helped me get over the last few years. We just love having you.

[00:39:11] <music>

Stephanie: What about once the baby's here? Tell me a survival tip for just the transition of like no really... I mean, one thing that people say is they say sleep when the baby sleeps. I mean, at least for me and I know that we had different circumstances having two, but we really truly did sleep every single time the girls were asleep like all the way around the clock because that's the only way that we got enough sleep to function or sort of function. So like anything like that that's sort of a good rule of thumb or know really this helpful kind of thing?

Christen: I think that's helpful advice if you are just having your first kid. If you're on baby number two or three that you're bringing into the home, that's not realistic, right? But let's kind of stay in this realm of you were adding your first kiddo to the family. I think that's great. Sleep when the baby sleeps.

And also maybe hold some space for while the baby's sleeping. I'm going to do a load of laundry and maybe watch a show on Netflix or listen to Steph's podcast or an audiobook, right? You know, hold space for that kind of thing too.

Rest does not always equate to sleep. Sleep is fantastic and you absolutely need it, especially in those early days of parenting when your baby's sleep schedule is all over the place. But also take into account what are some other things that help me feel rested? Is it purely sleep? Great, fantastic, then do that every time your baby is asleep.

But also, what about things like doing some gentle stretching. You know, obviously, not too much. You've just had a baby. Whatever is appropriate and safe for your body. But you know, just some gentle stretching. Does that help you feel rested? Does it help you feel rested to eat a warm hot meal, or drink a warm cup of coffee, or a cup of tea, or watch your favorite show on Netflix?

You know, those types of things are equally as important. And I really like to tell my clients that too. Have a list of things that you can go to that aren't just sleeping, but are equally as restful for you. That's a big thing that I like to talk to clients about.

The other thing is, what can your partner help you with? A thing that we like to talk about with a lot of our new moms, especially nursing moms, is, okay, baby's gonna wake up every two to three hours, right? Especially in those early days it's going to be all over the place to feed.

Okay, well, if you're nursing, have your partner get up, go get the baby, bring the baby to you. You nurse, partner then changes baby's diaper, puts baby back to bed so that you're still getting adequate time to sleep.

If you're bottle-feeding, great, you can still do a similar rhythm. Partner gets the bottle ready or you get the bottle ready while your partner goes and gets the baby. Divide and conquer there. It doesn't have to be like every time the feeding partner is going to wake up and take care of the baby. It can be both and situation where both partners are waking up and one can do one thing and the other can do another thing.

I think that's also a really good thing to implement to help you get through some of those early days of sleep deprivation. So you're both helping in that sense.

Stephanie: Yeah, yeah. I really like that. One of the things that I know you and I spent a lot of time talking about was... I think this is one of the first things that I struggled with was that my experience of both having the girls and then bringing the girls home didn't totally measure up to my expectations. And I think in some ways I didn't necessarily match up to my expectations.

I think this looks different for everybody. But what this looked like for me was that I had heard so many people say... And honestly I don't know if I've really heard so many people say this, or if it's just like I heard one person say this and it became the norm in my head, which I think happens.

But I thought that the second I had the girls that I was going to feel just this crushing love for them. That I was going to be able to lift a car off of them if I

needed to. That I would like instantly just be overcome with how much I loved them and just how beautiful this whole thing was.

And really when they were born, I felt hungry and like myself, but I just had surgery. And again, I was hungry. I was so excited to see them and was so amazing to see them but I didn't... When I saw their faces for the first time, that was the first time I'd ever seen them. So it wasn't like seeing an old friend. It was like meeting someone new. And I really just felt the same as myself before they were there but a little bit hungrier because I wanted to eat.

And then when I brought them home I didn't feel... I definitely cried a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot in those first two weeks. And the first week for me was mostly happy crying and then the second week was mostly sad crying, which was just interesting. I don't know if that's true for anybody else.

But once I brought him home... And I think I thought that I was going to have this primal download of motherly instinct. Like I thought that I just didn't know exactly what to do with them or how to take care of them immediately, and I totally didn't.

This was kind of hard. Carl was way better with them at the beginning. We took a class where they taught you how to change a diaper, but it's different on a stuffed animal than it is on a baby. I just didn't... I don't know. He had to kind of show me how to do it. I felt like kind of dumb and behind and like maybe there was something wrong with me because I didn't have this sudden download.

So I want to hear just what you have to say about that but then also just about for anyone whose experience isn't necessarily matching up with what their expectations were.

Christen: First of all, I do want to normalize this. This is something I talk about with many, many of my clients. There's this cultural expectation that's put on us that we are going to know instantly what to do. Mother knows best, right? That's a saying. It's been a saying for a really, really long time. And with that comes this idea that as soon as you're pregnant or as soon as your baby is born, you are going to go into mama mode.

And for some women, that's 100% true. But it's not true across the board. And I think that's what we need to normalize that everybody is experiencing this is different. Instead of just using this one cultural message of every woman knows exactly what to do because this is what our bodies were made to do. Yeah, there's an element of truth there. I do believe that inherently, we all know what to do but it just takes some of us a little bit longer. And that's okay because we all have our own journey there. Right?

So I think you know, what's realistic here is to look at this cultural pressure—I think it's a pressure that's put on women who are becoming moms—and then look at, okay, what's the expectation? What is my expectation here? Can I be okay if the moment my kid is born that I don't instantly feel this wave of just happiness and it's not all butterflies and rainbows and I'm not seeing glittery confetti all in air? Can I be okay if that is not my experience?

If you can't be okay with that, then you know what? I would suggest like let's get you in therapy. Let's talk through that. Let's break down this expectation a little bit more so that you can be okay with that. It does not say anything bad about you that that is not your experience the moment that your child and enters into the world.

For a lot of women, it can take several months for you to really feel that bond. And that's also okay. There are a lot of things that you can do to work on developing that bond. You're not going to damage your baby forever if that is your story at all. So let's normalize that piece.

The maternal instincts will kick in. You're going to get to know your baby. It's a brand new human. You're going to start to learn their cries. You're going to be able to distinguish, "Okay, I'm really sleepy and I need to go down for a nap 10 minutes early versus the I'm really starving and I need to eat now.

You're gonna start to be able to distinguish those. But give yourself grace, give yourself time. You're learning a brand new person. It's just like any other new brand new relationship, right? A new friendship, a new partner. You got to have some grace. You got to have grace. You gotta extend kindness to each other. You're both just figuring it out. Even your baby is starting to figure it out, right?

Stephanie: Yeah, yeah. I really like that. And just knowing that the range of experiences are really different for everybody.

Christen: So different.

Stephanie: And I do think that I know things now. I know what their cries mean. I know what they like, what they don't like. I can tell from one word that they say which baby is which, which is question everyone asks me with having twins. I mean, I know everything about them now. But when I first met them, I didn't. So it took a minute to get to know them and it took some time of practicing to feel like I knew what I was doing. I mean, there's still things that I... Anytime something changes, I don't know what I'm doing, but I'm learning more quickly now, which is cool.

Christen: Absolutely. And the other thing I'll say is let's not compare partner to partner. So Carl was able to kind of go into parent mode a little bit quicker than you. Okay, great. Somebody was there to do it, right? And he gave you the space that you needed to be able to catch up.

That is actually fantastic. That's a really beautiful vision of what a balanced or as balanced as one can get partnership can look. Carl takes over the reins a little bit. Your body is recovering. So maybe your body just needed a little extra space and that's why he was able to go into daddy mode really quickly, you know?

Stephanie: Yeah.

Christen: Let's celebrate that instead of comparing and saying, "Oh gosh, why is my partner getting a hang of this faster than I'm getting a hang of this?" Great. One of us figuring it out and that is something to celebrate right there.

Stephanie: Yeah, yeah. I like that. One of the things that I know I struggled with not quite at the beginning but as we got into a little bit more of a new normal—and we talked about this with the life cycles thing a little bit—was sort of the identity crisis. I can't even fully explain it.

But something about that season like... I found myself struggling with things with my identity and being kind to myself for my... It felt like I regressed a little bit in terms of insecurity, in terms of the way that I would talk to myself or treat myself or give myself grace or really not giving myself grace. I felt shaky in who I am for the first time in a really long time. So is that normal? Talk to us about identity and feeling kind of lost from who we are and how we maybe find ourselves again?

Christen: It's totally normal. Every woman that I have ever sat with in postpartum has had this exact conversation with me. And why shouldn't it be the case, right? We've talked about launching into the new life cycle. And anytime you launch into a new life cycle, there's going to be a change in your identity slightly.

I mean, even think about when you and Carl got married. Your identity changed slightly. It's definitely not as drastic of a change as becoming a mother. But instead of being engaged, you were all of a sudden a wife. Right? So there's a shift in your identity there.

And for whatever reason, we give people lots of grace in those types of life cycle transitions. But when it comes to becoming a parent, it's back to this cultural expectation of you should automatically know how to be on, you should have figured out this whole brand new identity, and you should have everything in your life completely put together by the time your baby is born.

There is that pressure that we are constantly trying to navigate. And that's a lot to put on a new mom, not to mention a new dad as well. It's too much pressure. It's just too much pressure.

So I think the biggest thing that I like to share with clients is, okay, sure you're a new person now, you're a new version of yourself. And that's fantastic. Okay, well, what does that mean? Let's give ourselves some time to figure that out.

Let's also take into account your body is healing from a physical trauma. Birth, whether it's a vaginal delivery or a C section, it is physical trauma to your body. So let's actually first give yourself some space to physically heal. And as you're in that process, you're gonna slowly start figuring out, "Oh, okay, I'm someone who instead of out-walking three times a day, now I don't want to walk at all." I mean, that's a very basic example, but it's, once again, a shift in your identity, a shift in who you were pre-baby. So it takes space. It takes time. It takes a lot and a lot, a lot of grace.

Something that I learned from our founder at Ready Nest, one of my mentors, Emily is, let's just get some magazines or get on Pinterest and just casually fit through things and several things that interest you. You don't have to spend a lot of time analyzing, why does this interest me? But just put a Post-It notes, circle it with a Sharpie.

And then go back and then really look at the things that you circled and take into account, "Hmm, that's interesting. I wonder why I like this. And I wonder how I can do x, y, and z to be able to do this really cool activity I've seen in this magazine, or do this really cool manicure that I saw in this magazine." Whatever it is.

But it'll just give you an idea of what interests have changed, what interests have stayed the same once you become a mom. And it's kind of a cool, double win. You get to sit and relax and just flip through a magazine and maybe drink a warm cup of coffee while your baby is napping.

But I think the biggest takeaway that I want all of your sweet listeners to hear is just have grace for yourself in these early days of parenthood because you're gonna figure out who you are. You may not know who it is right away. And that's 100% okay. It's 100% okay.

Stephanie: I love that. I love that. And I think for me there are things that didn't change and I thought that they were... I thought that I would like have a sudden download of maternal instinct and I still was just the same. I mean, I learned things and it

showed up. But I still felt more like myself in some ways than I expected to. And so that was interesting.

But then, you know, there are passions and interests of mine that really have been changed. I think most of them haven't. But then there were new fears, new insecurities, and new layers of myself that I was having to kind of work through. And really that's a lot of the work that you and I have done together.

But I just like the idea of knowing that this might be a huge identity shift for you, or it might not be and it might feel huge at the beginning and then not be. Or it might not feel huge at the beginning and then it might be huge. But regardless, you don't have to figure it out today.

And if you do want to figure out some things today, sit down with a cup of tea and start with a magazine. Like, "What do I like today?" That sounds like a really easy life-giving place to start.

Christen: Absolutely.

Stephanie: I love that. Okay, so let's talk about marriage. This is a really big transition for every part of our lives as we've talked about, and I know that it can be hard on marriages sometimes. Can you talk to me about that? Is that the case for a lot of people? And then is there anything that we can do to help our marriages through this?

Christen: So it's a lot of work... Well, how do I say this? For a lot of people, yes, it is the case. For everybody it's not as hard as it is for some people. But for pretty much I would say all couples, there are going to be challenges. 100% there are going to be challenges.

The biggest challenge that I see in my work is communication. There's miscommunication or lack of communication because there's a lack of sleep, a lack of basic needs being met, right? And something's going to fall through the cracks. And usually it's that communication piece with your partner.

So that's usually the first place that I start. "Well, okay, what does communication look like between you guys? Give me an example. Take me through a recent conflict that you guys have been through? And let's pick that apart and let's see, like, how can we kind of figure this out so that you guys can start fresh and move forward?"

Because the thing is, you know, we've talked a lot about these life cycle transitions. And a big part of this particular life cycle is the strength of the relationship. Like

how do we maintain that? How do we maintain the dignity of the relationship? What is that going to look like?

And you know, we hear a lot about bringing kids into the relationship can make or break the relationship? Well, yeah, that is true. And also there's a lot of things that kids bring to the table in a healthy way that's really cool, and really exciting for a partnership. Like I've said, the biggest thing that I like to look at is the communication piece.

The expectation piece is the other thing. What do I actually expect of my partner? Okay, well, I expect him to take the trash out. Okay, well, does he know that you expect him to take the trash out? Are you constantly frustrated because the trash keeps piling up in the kitchen and nobody's taking it out?

And then you end up doing it yourself and you're huffing and puffing under your breath and you're passive-aggressive towards her husband because you're really ticked off that once again you have to take out the trash? Well, does he know? Have you vocalized to him, "Hey, Carl, I need you to take the trash out. That can be really helpful for me."

Look at things like that. Why are you getting frustrated? What is the source of frustration? And usually nine times out of ten it is not the actual thing itself. It's not the trash, it's the "I want you to read every single need that I have. I want you to be able to know every single thought that I am thinking so that you can meet that need instantaneously." Well, that's a lot of pressure to put on our partner, right?

So having the expectation of a partner can't read my mind. I have to vocalize whatever's going on in my heart, in my head to my partner in a kind and respectful way. Let's also keep that in mind. Right? In a kind and respectful way, I need to communicate to my partner that it's so helpful for me when I don't have to think about the trash. "Can you please just that be your duty? And if one day, like you're so crazy at work that you can't get to it, just let me know that, 'Hey, I'm really crazy at work. I can't get to it today but I'll get to it tomorrow, or I'll get to it in an hour, whatever.'" Open lines of communication both ways. What are the expectations? Communicating those expectations.

Biggest thing is, though, remember that you're both brand new at this. Odds are this is your first time... Each of you it's your first time being a new parent. And let's remember that.

There are things that are equally as hard for dads as they are for moms. There's a lot of pressure put on dads just as there's a lot of pressure being put on moms. I'm

going to speak mainly to moms. So that's usually where my focus is, is with moms. But there are a lot of pressures being put on men once they become fathers as well.

And so remembering that you're not enemies, you're a team. And if we can remember we're not fighting against each other, but we're fighting with each other so that... not with each other but we're fighting together and this so that we can make our partnership stronger for ourselves, for our ultimate happiness, but also so that we can set these really beautiful examples of what partnership can and should look like for our kids that we're bringing into this world.

Stephanie: I love that. I think that really that was most of it for us. Before the girls came, I think that the idea of fighting about the distribution of responsibilities would have felt silly or easy to resolve, but it wasn't. And it was a bigger deal than I anticipated, mostly probably because we were sleep-deprived.

I mean for the first definitely several weeks, I think for the first couple of months, it kind of felt like we were doing like a Tough Mudder together or something. Like I'm picturing, you know, diving over hills or diving over obstacles and climbing under things and being super muddy and yelling instructions to each other.

I mean, it was like a full-contact sport. And it was fast, and it was hard. And we were both really tired. And there was a lot to do and a lot to manage. So the things that we butted heads about the most that I totally couldn't have seen coming were the order of operations for things or like how we prioritize things. You know, do we rest and then we'll get to this task later? Or do we do the task and then we feel like we can really rest?

We had so much on our plates that I think there were moments where we both were like, "Hey, can you help me with this? Can you pick up the slack here?" And it was really hard to realize that we were both caring as much as we possibly could. There were just things that had to fall through the cracks. It wasn't that the other one wasn't helping, it's that our arms were totally as full as they could be.

But I do think that some of the things that were helpful were really talking through all of the tasks that we have to do. Like we sat down a couple of times and listed out literally everything that needed to happen, and we assigned tasks. That was so surprisingly helpful because we were able to negotiate a little bit and be like, Okay, listen, for me, I hate meal planning. Hate it. Hate grocery shopping. Hate meal planning. It is so stressful for me. I think I just don't have that planning ability in my brain. Like it's just missing. And Carl's really good at it.

So I'm like, "What do I need to take from you in order for you to do this?" And so my thing was like after dinner cleanup. So I'm scraping tater tots off the floor, which is every night, which is totally fine because I don't have to be on plan.

But that distribution to be like, "Okay, I feel like I'm doing more than you. Is that true?" And like really laying it out and making sure that we each feel like we're carrying, you know, what feels fair. I don't know if that's what everyone's going for is fair. But you know, what feels fair and what we feel good about. And if there's something that he hates that I'm okay with, or vice versa, like swapping. It just helps a lot. It helped a lot.

Christen: Order of operations. I really like the way that you state that. Because that's basically what it is, especially in the early days is, "Okay, order of operations. How are we going to run this home?" And even your visual of doing like a mud run kind of situation where you're just covered in it and you're yelling, and you're trying your hardest to work as a team so that you can accomplish this race, I think that is such a powerful visual. And just to keep in mind that's exactly what it is. It's 100% what it is.

These early days, they're so messy. They're so messy. Even if they're fun for you they're still really messy, because you're learning a brand new thing and you're learning how to work together as a team in a whole new way. So I love that visualization. I love that you shared that.

Stephanie: I mean, I think, you know, we're a little over a year and a half into this. So I don't know anything about parenting for the long haul. I know that it's in a lot of ways a marathon. But I think those early days really are a sprint because I don't feel like we're sprinting anymore. I don't feel like we're in a mud pit anymore.

Our life feels really sustainable now and there's room for dreaming and room for sleeping and room for naps. I mean, the way that we kind of have been able to figure things out, there's some space again. And I think we both really feel, most of the time, like are ourselves. So it's not always like that. The beginning was super messy and really muddy.

Christen: And I'm glad that you bring that point up too, Steph, because the first part, really the first six months, I think, that's when you're really sprinting. But then you get into really good rhythm. It's still more of a sprint than a nice little solid jog once you get past that six months. But it gets easier the longer you do it. You're sure you're not an expert in it yet, but you're learning more quickly. You're picking up things faster, right? You know your kids a lot better at that point. So it's not quite as all-encompassing. And that's a really wonderful thing to just keep in mind. It's not always going to be this way.

Stephanie: I don't know if I've actually shared this on the show, but I hope so. One of the times that I feel like God has spoken to me most clearly recently... I don't know if that makes sense. I kind of added a bunch of words together. But it was my birthday last year. So the girls were about six months old.

And this was when they were having a really... They were sleeping great at night but their naps were really messy. So they would sleep for like two 30 minutes at a time, and then wake up and wake up at different times. And this was before we really had help that we needed, which we'll talk about next.

So we were just basically living and dying based on their nap schedule. So I remember one time specifically the girls fell asleep, and I was able to go refill my coffee, go to the bathroom, respond to one email, and then they woke up. And I was like, "Oh, my gosh."

Carl and I are thinking, "We're both gonna have to quit our jobs. And then I don't know how we're going to eat. I don't know how we can fit so much life into this tiny moment when they're asleep." So naps were really hard there for a while.

So it was my birthday. And I love my birthday. There are all kinds of ways I want to spend my birthday. I want it to be my favorite day of the year. I've had to work on not putting so much pressure on it, but it's my favorite day of the year. And here I am, it's my birthday, and I'm like sweaty, spit up on me, I'm tired, I didn't sleep well the night before and I'm rocking baby Quinn in the closet because at this point we had separated them to see if that would help them sleep better.

So I'm standing in a dark closet trying to get this baby to fall back asleep. And I'm sitting there going, "This is not how I wanted to spend my birthday." But I'm feeling really frustrated and really resentful, and just feeling kinda like I've lost... I felt like I lost anything that was about me in my life.

And truly in that moment I had this thought drop into my head. And that's why I'm like this had to be from God because I didn't have any... There was nothing in me that could come up with something like this. But it was this thought that "It won't be like this. It won't be this way forever."

And that phrase, "It won't be this way forever" was so helpful to me because there's a double meaning there. One, it was like, "You will not be holding a six-month-old baby in your closets trying to get them to fall asleep next year. Like they will be bigger. So just by definition, time is going to keep marching. This will not last forever.

But then it also was a really good reminder it won't be this way forever. Like there won't be another birthday in my life when I'm rocking six-month-old baby Quinn to sleep in my closet. So I immediately started crying and feeling just so grateful that it wouldn't be this way forever but then also feeling sad that it wouldn't be this way forever. And it just helped me be present in that moment.

So it's something that I've passed on to anyone who will listen. I'm like, "That phrase is so helpful. And actually we made a keychain out of it. It's in my little shop so that we can hold on to it for anyone who needs it.

Christen: I love that.

Stephanie: But I just love that idea. Like it just won't be this way forever. So savor it because this is fleeting. But also don't worry this is fleeting, like you won't be covered in spit up forever.

Christen: That's a beautiful story to illustrate both and not either-or. It feels really frustrating and really beautiful, and it won't be this way forever.

Stephanie: Yeah, yeah. Like it's okay that you kind of want this part to be over and it will be over at some point. But then also there are beautiful things to savor in this moment. So don't miss them.

Christen: Exactly.

[01:08:18] <music>

Outro: You guys, isn't Christen amazing? I love her so much. I'm so happy you got to meet her. Don't forget next week on the show we'll have the second half of our conversation.

In the meantime, if you want to find the links for anything we talked about in the episode or any other episode of Girls Night, you can always find those in our show notes. Just head over to girlsnightpodcast.com to check them out.

All right friends, that's it for today's episode. But we have so much good stuff ahead this season. And with that in mind, now is the perfect time to make sure you're subscribed. Subscribing to the show is the best way to make sure you never miss an episode. We won't send you an email or anything. It'll just make sure your phone downloads the latest episode when a new one is released.

And I did want to take a second to ask you for a favor. If you enjoyed this episode or if you've been a Girls Night fan for a while now, would you take just two quick

seconds to leave us a rating and a review on iTunes? Those reviews help out our podcast so much and it really would mean the world to me. So if you take two quick seconds to do that, I'd be so grateful.

All right, friends, that's it. Thanks so much for joining me for Girls Night. I will see you next week for part two of my conversation with Christen.