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THE EMPTY WOMB:
A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON INFERTILITY

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November 11, 1993

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION: ONE COUPLE'S STORY.	1
1. GENERAL SURVEY OF INFERTILITY IN AMERICA.	6
2. GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGE	10
Marriage for Mutual Companionship.	11
Marriage for the Proper Enjoyment of Sexual Union.	14
Marriage for the Procreation of Children	17
3. EVERYTHING IN GOD'S HANDS	20
4. WHAT SHOULD WE DO?	37
Use of Medical Technologies.	39
Hormonal Therapies	41
Artificial Insemination.	42
<u>In Vitro</u> Fertilization	49
GIFT and ZIFT.	55
Surrogate Embryo Transfer and Surrogate Motherhood.	56
Summary.	62
5. A WOMAN'S VIEW OF INFERTILITY	68
6. A MAN'S VIEW OF INFERTILITY	76
7. MISCARRIAGE: A SILENT TRAGEDY.	81
8. INFERTILITY DUE TO ABORTION	87
9. EUGENIC VOLUNTARY CHILDLESSNESS	93
10. ADOPTION.	99
11. ACCEPTANCE OF INFERTILITY	108
Shock/Denial	110

Chapter	Page
Loneliness/Depression.	111
Panic.	111
Guilt.	112
Anger/Resentment	113
Hope	114
Return to Normal	115
PRAYERS AND SCRIPTURE REFERENCES	127
Prayers for the Blessing of Children	127
Prayers to Strengthen Infertile Married Couples	129
Prayers to Bless Medical Treatment	130
Prayers for Wisdom in Use of Reproductive Technologies.	131
Prayers after Miscarriage.	132
Prayers for Adoption	135
Prayers to Rejoice with Others in the Gift of Their Children.	136
Prayers for the Acceptance of Infertility.	137
APPENDIX	141
Table One.	141
BIBLIOGRAPHY	144

INTRODUCTION: ONE COUPLE'S STORY

Randy and Shelley were college sweethearts. Following college graduation, they were married, but chose not to begin planning for a family for at least a couple of years. They wanted to enjoy finally being together since they had spent their last two years of college several hundred miles apart from each other. After a couple of years, the yearning to become parents became stronger. They decided the time was right to begin their family. Plans were made, timetables imagined, and then the wait began. They never suspected that anything would hinder their plans toward parenthood. After a few months, they wondered why they were unable to become pregnant. When the months lengthened into a year, they consulted a doctor who assured them that at least a year and a half without Shelley becoming pregnant was certainly to be expected.

When that milestone passed, the thought that a pregnancy might not result was becoming a nagging possibility. Again, the months stretched into years. Randy's sperm count was taken. Shelley took her temperature every morning before sticking her toe out of her bed. Sexual intercourse became a chore performed on demand when Shelley's basal temperature was right.

After four years of countless disappointments and numerous prayers, Shelley became pregnant. Randy and Shelley were thankful that their prayers had been answered. At last, their family was begun.

About eight weeks into the pregnancy, Shelley began spotting blood. A pregnancy test determined that she was still pregnant. She was sent home. A few days later, she passed some membranes and blood which were found to be part of a placenta. The doctor felt she had suffered a miscarriage. He encouraged her with the assurance that since Shelley had become pregnant once, she could probably become pregnant again after a few months of rest and healing.

Shelley went home, crushed, but still hopeful. A week later, the doctor called back and indicated that a lump, found in her abdomen during her exam had caused some concern among doctors who had been consulted on the case and that they recommended a surgical investigation into its cause. Randy and Shelley headed for the hospital with the prayer that the lump would not mean cancer. Once again, God answered their prayers. The lump was not cancer, but when Shelley awoke from the anesthesia after surgery, Randy had to tell her that the lump had been caused by an ectopic pregnancy. This required not only surgical removal of Shelley's uterus, but also the removal of both ovaries.

Questions, doubts, tears, heartbreak--what had they done wrong in all those years of trying to start a family? Would things have turned out differently if they had sought more medical advice, done more tests, consulted specialists, and pursued the early-onset problems occurring in Shelley's pregnancy?

A time of second-guessing themselves and questioning God's plans followed. Didn't God himself tell them as a married couple to be fruitful and multiply? Didn't Scripture say that the man is blessed who has many sons, and that children are a gift from God? Why were they denied this gift? What had they done or not done that eliminated them from God's list of the blessed?

The characters in this case study are actually my wife, Darlene, and me. When we went through those trying years, the doctors seemed not to be too overly concerned by our childless plight. They believed that time would solve our infertility. In the 1970s when this was occurring, there were not nearly as many medical options for treating and/or overcoming our infertile status. Also in those years, there was not much help of a spiritual, biblical nature to get us through. We faced it alone--the two of us--and our shared faith in God which trusted that even this was for our good.

Many couples share the pain of infertility. They have lived through the grief that it brings. Some infertile

couples may very well one day conceive a child. It may take weeks, months, or years. No matter how long it takes, it can seem a very long and lonely time. I would like to come to you in this paper with the reassurance that your problems and your perceptions of them are real, that your feelings are normal, and above all, that our Lord will be there to lift you and sustain you through all the dark days and months that may still lie ahead.

There are those of you who may find that medically there is no realistic hope that you will ever conceive a child. This paper is also for you as you make decisions concerning your options.

This paper is offered as a resource also for pastors and lay Christians who seek to gain more knowledge and understanding of infertility as well as the role of scriptural principles and guidelines relating to infertility.

This paper will discuss how couples can learn to cope with their infertility, some of the problems facing couples as they try to deal with it, and give biblical encouragements to you as you try to find and follow God's will in your life in the area of children and family. Each chapter will begin with a brief scenerio of a couple's struggle with infertility, based on the situations of many couples I have known, pastored, or who have agreed to be

interviewed. The names and situations are altered to protect their privacy.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL SURVEY OF INFERTILITY IN AMERICA

Jon and Carrie have been trying to have a family for almost the whole six years that they have been married. They have felt like they are all alone but in seeking some advice from their pastor about infertility, he told them of at least nine couples in their congregation who are struggling with the same problem. They had no idea that there were that many couples in their congregation of 450 communicants.

Statistics show that infertility effects at least 15% of married couples or four and one half million couples in the United States. Infertility is usually defined as an inability of a couple to achieve conception after a year of unprotected intercourse, or the inability to carry a pregnancy to term.¹ Forty percent of the time the infertility is caused by a problem with the female, another 40% of the time there is a problem with the male. About 20% of the time there is a problem with both the male and female. Three per cent of the time the problem is unexplainable. About 1.6 million visits to the doctor's office are made each year by couples seeking to build a

family. As a result, those couples will spend about one billion dollars in the process. Despite all their efforts, only about 50-60% will achieve their desired outcome--the conception of a baby. For many couples the answer will be adoption, whereas many will choose to remain childless. According to one study, the stress of infertility is second only to the loss of a close loved one.²

The statistics concerning infertility in America only tell part of the story. According to Arthur Greil, author of *Not Yet Pregnant*, the majority of Americans with infertility problems don't do anything about it.³ They choose to accept the situation or decide that they don't have any other options. In addition, Greil states that the problem is worse among lower income couples. They are the ones that have the least financial resources to explore medical help. Unfortunately, most insurance companies will not cover the cost for infertility treatments. The cost may be covered if it relates to diagnosis of a medical problem, but when it comes to therapy for conception, it may not be covered. In addition, most couples living outside of major urban areas will have to drive to a distant city where there is a fertility center. Making the problem worse, these trips require a day off work. The husband will not always be able to take a day off work to accompany his wife. Likewise, it must be done on a moment's notice just when the

physical conditions are right for ovulation. It is difficult for a wife to do it alone, as some of the tests leave one feeling lethargic and ill.

Infertility is a growing medical and marital problem. For example, the "time-clock" for millions of "baby-boomer" couples is rapidly ticking away. Many of the baby-boomers postponed starting a family so that they could pursue a career, become financially stable, or develop other interests and hobbies. When the couple discovered they were experiencing fertility problems, the time was too short to correct it. In addition, our modern lifestyle has contributed to the problem. For many couples, birth control measures have resulted in difficulty to conceive. The use of IUDs and the birth control pill may have contributed to the problems of infertility.⁴ The sexual revolution and its resultant promiscuity of today has resulted in an increase of sexually transmitted diseases which make it difficult to become pregnant.

Infertility is a problem that strikes couples in every community and congregation. Whether it is a problem brought about because a couple waited too long, became infertile because of sexual experimentation, or whether there is no known cause, it is a problem that penetrates to the very heart and soul of the individual and a couple's relationship.

For most couples who have no problem conceiving a child, the problem of infertility isn't very significant. The most common remedies touted by well-meaning friends are: "Just get a bottle of wine and go to a motel," or "Don't be so concerned--it'll just happen," or "Sometimes I'd just like to give you all my kids." It is difficult for people not affected by the problem to understand.

¹Beth Spring, "When the Dream Child Dies," Christianity Today 31, no. 11 (August 7, 1987): 30.

²Karen E. Rehder, M.D., "Childless Not by Choice: Infertility Problems/A Medical Perspective," Symposium presented at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, September 1992.

³Arthur Greil, Not Yet Pregnant (New Brunswick & London: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 28.

⁴Spring, 30.

CHAPTER TWO

GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGE

Tom and Elaine both came from very religious families, were baptized, went to Sunday school and church. Confirmed in the eighth grade, they continued to grow in their faith as they went through high school and college. Tom was from a small family but was always around children. He always assumed that, when married, he would have several children. Elaine was from a large family with three sisters and three brothers. Her family was always a place of activity. She could not imagine a marriage without children. When Tom and Elaine were dating, they frequently talked about children. They both desired to have as many children as they could afford.

In their pre-nuptial meetings with their pastor, the importance of children was discussed. In fact, the pastor said that one of the reasons marriage was established was for the purpose of bringing children into the world. Since Tom and Elaine had a strong desire to be parents, they started looking forward to the blessing of children.

The story of Tom and Elaine is one that is experienced by many Christian couples. In this chapter, and as we begin to get more at the heart of the book, it is important to

establish the important purpose of marriage and how children fit into that purpose.

Marriage for Mutual Companionship

In establishing God's purpose for marriage, there is no other place to begin than in the book of Genesis. According to Genesis 2, God placed Adam, the first man, in the Garden of Eden and gave Adam the task of caring for the garden and all the animals. Adam went about his task, but God observed that "for Adam no suitable helper was found" (Genesis 2:20b). Adam cared for and named the animals, but there was no proper fellowship and companionship with the animals. Therefore, God determined the perfect way to solve this problem--the creation of a woman.

So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh (Genesis 2:21-24).

This passage reveals something extremely important about a fundamental understanding of marriage. God first created marriage with the purpose that man and woman are to be in fellowship (one flesh) and helpers to one another. In the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) Document, *Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective*, it is

noted: "Against the background of all the stately cadences of creation 'very good,' we hear now a different divine utterance. It is 'not good'--not good that man should be alone."¹ God's creative love established marriage so that man would not be alone. Male and female were created to be different from each other. The difference between male and female became the factor by which each knows self better and becomes a mutual companion to the other. Woman would become a companion for man, a companion that Adam recognized as "Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh". This relationship of mutual love and support is the principle reason for which marriage was established.

It is easy for a childless couple to feel that their marriage is incomplete because they don't have any children. After all, if it is God's will, procreation is a blessing of marriage: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number'" (Genesis 1:28). But as the first blessing of marriage, God doesn't mention anything about children. Husband and wife are to live in lifelong union with one another. As husband and wife, a marriage is full and complete. It is not a half-marriage or incomplete marriage. It is a marriage that God has established. It is full and offers satisfaction to the husband and wife.

What all of this means for childless couples is that their marriage is a full-fledged marriage. The essence of

marriage is not children, but the mutual companionship and life-long union of male and female. The propers for the marriage ceremony signal this message:

The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy, for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity, and, when God wills, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord.²

Couples, initially, do not marry for the purpose of having children. A man and woman are attracted to one another on the basis of shared interests and love for one another. They marry to be together and express their love. A childless couple is every bit as married as a couple with children.

One of the struggles which childless couples must cope with is the well-intentioned people who keep saying, "When are you going to have children?" People assume that couples who have no children are childless by choice. Making that assumption, many give the impression that if you only had children, your marriage would be more complete, your life would be more full. There often seems to be a feeling of sorrow for the childless home. People may say, "Children bring so much joy to your home," or, "I don't understand what people do who have no children." Sometimes it is automatically assumed that the childless couple is selfish because they don't have children. Other peoples'

perceptions of them may be that they are just interested in themselves and material things.

While there is no doubt that children are a blessing to the marriage and do bring much joy, it is wrong for people to assume that a childless marriage is less than satisfying and complete. Marriage, as God chooses to "gift" that marriage, is full and complete. God chooses to bless some marriages with many children, or a few children, or even in some cases, no children. The marriage is still a marriage. Husbands and wives, seeking God's direction in their marriage, can still find joy and love in their marriage.

Marriage for the Proper Enjoyment of Sexual Union

Genesis 1 records the fact that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God, he created him; male and female he created them" (1:27). God created mankind as being distinctly sexual. The maleness and femaleness of man bears out that truth.

A great part of the sexual relationship for husband and wife is the physical enjoyment and total union expressed by that sexual intercourse. Marriage is the place where God has ordained that a man and woman can express that sexual urge that God has planted in man. Paul Althaus describes Luther's concept of physical love in marriage. He writes:

Luther gives high praise to love between the sexes. Among all the forms of earthly love it is "the great-

est and the purest." All other kinds of love seek something other than the loved one: this kind wants only to have the beloved's own self completely. If Adam had not fallen, the love of bride and groom would have been the loveliest thing.³

In the Bible, sexual union is described as "knowing". In Genesis 4:1 (KJV), "Adam knew Eve." The description of the sexual relationship with the word "know" tells the closeness of this union. It is shared only with the God-given helpmate. This is more than the satisfying of a physical sexual appetite. The satisfying of an appetite could be done with anyone. The person becomes the object necessary to satisfy the desire. C. S. Lewis describes the situation where sexual appetite is the only thing desired apart from mutual love. He says in the slang language of the street: a man says that he wants a woman. "Strictly speaking, a woman is just what he does not want. He wants the pleasure for which a woman happens to be the necessary piece of apparatus."⁴

In addition, since the fall into sin, that which God created "very good" is now marred by sin. This includes the beautiful sexual relationship of man and woman. Marriage then becomes the place where God allows that human sexual desires be expressed. St. Paul writes these words of instruction to the Corinthians answering the question, "Should a man marry?" His answer: "It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each

man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband" (I Corinthians 7:1, 2). "But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (I Corinthians 7:11).

Marriage becomes then, under God's goodness, a place of remedy. Our untameable appetites and romantic impulses are here brought down from their lofty pretensions to earth and bound to the good of one other person.⁵

What does all this mean if you are unable to conceive a child? It is easy for the sexual dimension of marriage to revolve around the bringing forth of a child. This is especially easy if a child is sought, and unfortunately, unable to be conceived. The purpose of sex, and even marriage, can begin to center upon the effort to bring forth children. In other words, sexuality can become a "job" if it is solely for that purpose. Charts, basal temperature readings, monthly cycles, and sex on demand can take all the love out of sexuality. Perhaps, for the worse, if there seems to be no chance for children, or certainly confirmed infertility, then the question arises why have any sexual relations at all. It is easy to wrap the significance of sexuality with the begetting of children. Whether a couple is having "sex" for the purpose of conceiving, or whether there is no chance at all, it is essential to remember the importance of sex as the expression of mutual love.

Marriage for the Procreation of Children

You can say all that you want to about the essence of marriage being mutual consent, companionship, and rightful enjoyment of the sexual union, yet the involuntarily childless couple knows that the bringing forth of children is a coveted blessing of marriage. In Genesis 1:28 the biblical instruction, "Be fruitful and increase in number," speaks loud and clear, especially to the childless couple. There are many Bible passages relating children as blessings: "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. . . Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them" (Psalm 127:3, 5), and "Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house" (Psalm 128:3). They speak loud and clear to couples wanting children. These passages then bring questions like, "Why can't we have any children?" "Is God punishing us for something?" "Is our marriage as full and satisfying as it could be with children?" "Why are we not blessed with children?"

The problem for infertile couples is not convincing them that children are a blessing of marriage, but realizing that children are God's gift to marriage, given where and when God chooses. The absence of children in a marriage does not mean that God does not love that couple, that their marriage has little value, or that they are being punished for some deep and dark sin. It may mean that God has in

mind to "gift" that couple in another way. Luther writes about looking for God's will in a troubled and unhappy marriage. These words can also apply to infertility, because of the burden it brings to marriage.

Thus everything depends on whether one enters into and lives in marriage with God or does so with the self-confidence that he can manage it without God, without fear of God, without asking for God's blessing. Are we able to see God's will at work in our own marriage, with all its disappointments and troubles, or do we view everything with selfish eyes?⁶

Certainly a couple wanting to have children looks at the biblical injunction to have children as both command and blessing. A couple needs to feel absolutely no guilt whatsoever in not being able to fulfill the command to "multiply." It is not a couple's "failure" or "success" at their task, but God's gift if they, indeed, do bear children. The conception of a child, the creation of life, is God's gift, not a command that they have failed to follow. Without God's blessing, it is impossible for anyone to create a life.

Although it is a blessing that God gives as He chooses, the fact that children are not given in some marriages does not mean an absence of God's blessing, but that God has in mind some other way to establish a family or some other blessing entirely.

In concluding this chapter concerning marriage, it is important to say again that God has established marriage for various reasons. First, it is ordained for the mutual love, fellowship and support of husband and wife. Second, it provides a God-pleasing place for the human expression of sexuality. Third, it is the place that, through the intimate act of a husband's and wife's love, God has opportunity to create new life--the new life of children that God is eager to receive through the "washing of regeneration" of baptism and adoption as His own children. Marriage becomes a model for the greatest love ever known--the love of God in Christ. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word" (Ephesians 5:21).

¹Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective, a report of the Social Concerns Committee (n.p. September 1981), 14.

²Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Lutheran Worship Agenda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984) 120.

³Paul Althaus, The Ethics of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 84.

⁴Commission on Theology and Church Relations, 16.

⁵Ibid., 21.

⁶Althaus, 94.

CHAPTER THREE

EVERYTHING IN GOD'S HANDS

Ryan and Jessica had tried for four years to have children. They had gone to a fertility clinic in the area that was recommended by a friend of Jessica's. They went through the basic tests to determine any causes of infertility. Ryan checked out okay, and in fact, could reproduce the world's population if he wanted. The doctors could not find any particular problem with Jessica. They suggested the usual taking of temperatures and keeping of charts. After eight months of charts, some fertility drugs were suggested. Following the use of drugs, additional complicated and expensive tests could be done.

Jessica was uncomfortable going on with additional tests. She just was not convinced that it would do any good. Jessica had grown up in a Christian family. They went to church and Sunday school faithfully. Now that children seemed to be "out of the question" for them, Jessica started to remember all the stories from her Sunday school days.

She remembered stories of Sarah, Rebekah, the wife of Manoah, Rachel, Hannah, and Elizabeth not being able to have

children. The thought of these women enticed her to open her Bible again. Surprisingly, Jessica had come to find great comfort and encouragement for a strong faith in those neglected pages of Scripture. In fact, Jessica started to picture herself as a modern day Sarah or Hannah. Perhaps God would miraculously give her a child as well.

For a Christian couple who have at least some knowledge of the Bible and are unable to have children, the stories about the various women who likewise were unable to have children become treasures of hope. When you study the Old Testament, you find that infertility is a common problem. God seemed to use infertility when a child was to be born who would play a special part in God's kingdom or the line of the promised Messiah. In Scripture, God answered the infertility. His answer of the child seemed to say that this child was not a regular product of man's doing, but a special gift that could come only by God's grace.

Does God's Word still speak a message of hope today? It certainly does. Let's spend a few pages to examine the hope that God's Word brings to infertile couples.

For a woman to be barren in the biblical days was considered to be an extreme curse. A wife had the desire to be able to bring forth a child for her husband. Being a patriarchal society, it was even better if that child could be a boy. As people viewed it, barrenness was considered to

have come from God. Sarah talks of her inability to conceive: "The Lord has kept me from having children" (Genesis 16:2). Of Hannah it is said that "the Lord had closed her womb" (I Sam 1:5). Elizabeth, the mother of John, the Baptist, felt the disgrace of not being able to bear children. When she conceived to have John, she said, "He [the Lord] has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people" (Luke 1:25).

Certainly, the same feelings surrounding the inability to bear children that exist today existed in Bible times. Perhaps they were even greater then because the value of children as an asset was higher, and there were fewer things that people in those times could do to change infertility.

For modern-day Christians, it is fascinating that God records the little details of various women struggling with infertility. They are prominent women, to say the least. Sarah was the wife of Abraham, the spiritual father of Israel. Today, through faith in Christ, Abraham is our spiritual father. God had promised to Abraham that he would be the "father of many nations" (Genesis 12:1-3). Yet Abraham and Sarah were unable to have children. Sarah's answer was to give Abraham her maid, Hagar. Abraham could have children through this "surrogate mother." But God intended that Abraham and Sarah were to have the child. In due time, when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah in her

90s, they had a son, Isaac. By God's grace, the promised line would continue.

Isaac's wife, Rebekah, was barren. Scripture records that Isaac prayed on behalf of Rebekah and she became pregnant with twins, Esau and Jacob. In the next generation, Jacob married two wives, Rachel and Leah. Rachel, however, was the wife of his choice. Rachel was barren. Rachel, as did Sarah, gave her maid to her husband. Rachel tried to increase her chances of getting pregnant by eating mandrakes. Mandrakes were thought to be able to assist in conception, but they didn't work. Finally Scripture records that "God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb" (Genesis 30:22).

All of the first three generations of the patriarchs faced the inability to procreate the next generation. Yet God promised that through this lineage the Savior would come. People were looking to this promised Savior to bear their sins and restore a right relationship with God. But it took a special blessing of God to start each new generation. Surely, this speaks something about the nature of salvation and our Savior. God's accepting love comes to us, not because we have achieved it or deserved it, but it comes totally as the gracious gift of God.

The other instances of overcome infertility resulted in the birth of someone very important to the work of God's

kingdom. When Manoah and his wife conceived, Samson was born. Hannah conceived and Samuel was born. Both Samson and Samuel were "dedicated" by their parents to be servants of the Lord. Their lives as judges and deliverers of Israel again "foreshadow" the coming of the Savior. Through these extraordinary births, God demonstrates that He will do something unusual by His grace.

When Zechariah and Elizabeth conceived, a prophesied child was born--John, the Baptist. John stands as a prophet between the Old Testament and New Testament. John has the work of preparing Israel for the coming of the Savior, Jesus. He was prophesied in the Old Testament, "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes" (Malachi 4:5). John is called the "forerunner" of Christ because his work was to "prepare the way for the Lord" (Isaiah 40:3). Again, the miraculous birth of John, to a couple unable to conceive, demonstrates God's gracious love. God's gracious love would receive its full embodiment in the next special birth, that is, Christ. Jesus himself is the grace of God to us as He was "born of a woman, born under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Galatians 4:4).

What do all these special births say about infertility for us today? Do they make an unqualified promise that any infertile couple can conceive if they just believe or if

they just pray or if they are "special"? No, these special instances can not be used as a guarantee that the same thing will happen to any particular couple, but they do point to the grace of God.

They direct our attention to the fact that God would not let any obstacle, even infertility, stand in the way of bringing about our salvation. God's great love for us would find ways of coming to us, even if it meant opening "closed" wombs. And when we think about unusual circumstances of birth, God brought about the birth of Jesus without the necessary "seed" of a human father. Mary conceived as the power of the Holy Spirit came upon her, "so the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Now when we think of Sarah, Hannah, and the others, we are naturally led to think about God's most gracious gift, Jesus.

Secondly, thinking about the experiences of infertility in these great families of the Bible confirms for us that there is nothing that God can not do according to His power and will. As when Mary questioned how she could possibly be pregnant since she was not married, the angel answered her: "For with God nothing is impossible" (Luke 1:37).

Unfortunately, today we have "medicalized"¹ the problem of infertility. In other words, the problem of infertility, as well as all medical problems, are reduced to organic

causes in the body. The body is viewed as a machine. When something is wrong it is because there is a specific cause in the body. According to this medical model, the health care specialists and institutions become the "fixers." With organic causes to problems and medical experts working as the "fixers" there is little room for the belief that ultimately everything is in God's hands.

Certainly there is nothing wrong in looking at the organic cause of various biological problems. However, medicalization limits our view of health and wellness. The answer to infertility then comes to lie in basal body temperature charts (BBT), Clomid therapy, varicocele repair, reanastomosis, the use of a hysterosalpingogram, gamete inter-Fallopian transfer (GIFT) or in vitro fertilization (IVF). These are certainly modern blessings of technology through which infertility may be reversed. But when we look at these medical technologies for the answer apart from God's power, then we are impoverished in our view of well-being.

The highly medicalized model leaves a couple frustrated. Then they are left to percentage chances of treatments working. They are frustrated with the impersonal routine treatment of the medical community, with slow timetables, the high costs of medical treatments, and promises that seem to lie out of reach. When there is "no hope," all

the medical community can say is, "There is nothing more we can do."

However, going back to Scripture and looking at God's dealing with many couples such as Abraham and Sarah, Zechariah and Elizabeth and others, we are challenged to leave behind the strictly medical model and the "god" of medicalization. We realize that while there are all such tests and devices, the solution ultimately rests in God's almighty hands. We come to say along with Scripture that God "closed" the womb. We come to affirm with strong faith that if God closed the womb, God can "open" the womb.

While our forefathers lacked all the blessings of medical technology, we envy them because they could, with simple faith, believe that God could do all things. They were able to say: "I lift up my eyes to the hills--where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1). With trust in God, there is never a time that one can not say: "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this" (Psalm 37:5).

Having such a faith in the words and promises of God really isn't primitive as some would have us believe. Can you imagine, they actually believed that God opened the womb?! Such a faith brings us to depend upon the almighty power of God rather than man or hormonal therapy. If it is

God that we are depending upon, then there is never a point at which we give up. In faith and hope we always realize that "with God all things are possible." As God gave Sarah a baby in her old age, God can also do all things for us according to His will. While there was nothing medically speaking that would indicate Abraham and Sarah could have a child, Scripture records, "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed" (Romans 4:18). For children of God, who know God's power and love shown in Christ, such Scripture passages become treasures of hope.

When God blessed Hannah with the gift of Samuel, she confessed God as the one who blessed her. In Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving for Samuel, she sings:

She who was barren has borne seven children,
but she who has had many sons pines away.
The Lord brings death and makes alive;
He brings down to the grave and raises up . . .
(I Sam. 2:5,6)

What is Hannah saying of God? God has all things in His hands. He has death and life. God brings to the grave, and God also has the power of resurrection. In terms of the barren woman, she has borne seven children. The number seven is a figurative number standing for the perfect, whole or complete number of children (Ruth 4:15). God, in other words, as He closed the womb has opened the womb. The Lord is the reverser,² and He can and does have the power to take the most barren woman and give her many children.

This truth that everything is in God's hands, not really the hands of medical specialists, leads us to come to God in faithful prayer. Christian couples today come in prayer as did Abraham and Sarah, and the many others. We come in prayer because we know what prayer is and what it is all about. God has invited us to pray and bring all our petitions to Him in prayer. Jesus teaches us: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). St. Paul teaches us: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6).

We pray because God has invited and commanded us to pray. God's people throughout the centuries have been people of prayer. They bring their needs, whether great or small, to God in prayer. We know and are convinced of God's love for us; therefore, we pray. We may not know what to pray for exactly, but we know then, "the Spirit helps us in our weakness. . .the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Romans 8:26).

Prayer is a tremendous vehicle of communication with God. It is our opportunity to express to God our needs and feelings. We know that God will hear and answer as He did with many people before. But prayer brings us into the realm of God's will. We need not figure out the answer to

the prayer. We simply bring the prayer of faith as did Jesus: "Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). It takes a lot of pressure off of us to figure out what should be. Prayer puts it all in the hands of God and says: "Dear Lord, you do what is best."

But the prayer has a firm expectation that God will surely answer. Prayer is not just an exercise in talking to one's self. It is a talk to God, and in this case we know that as God opened the womb of many before, He can also do it again.

In some homes you'll find a little sign or plaque on the wall that says, "Prayer changes things." This is done with good intentions, but technically speaking, it is not the prayer that changes things but God and His power that changes things. In prayer we always want to keep our part (the prayer) and God's part perfectly straight. If you have been faithfully praying all along and there has been no answer, then there are those who are ready to step forward and suggest that you have not been praying "hard enough." They may say that a lack of faith, lack of works, unchecked sin, selfishness, and many other things can block prayers from being answered. Such a theology of man's own contribution comes like a knife in the back. "Why doesn't God answer my prayer? I'm trying as hard as I can."

God answers our prayers. The idea that we must pray harder is a terrible monster. Jesus says that "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matt. 17:20). True prayer is prayed in faith, whether it is a little faith or a great faith, it is faith. The prayers of faith are heard by God and answered according to His will.

In days of discouragement when it seems that God's answer or presence itself is far away, let Him speak to you through His Word. Then pray. Have the confidence as did Sarah, Rachel, Rebekah, Hannah and others that God would answer the prayer.

One of the most difficult things for modern man to do today is to be quiet. There are so many noises that fill the air. There are the noises of the street, the noises of business, the noises of entertainment and the noises of our personal conversations. Perhaps there are times when our lives are far too cluttered to be able to hear the answer that God desires to bring to us in prayer. Even with the struggles of infertility, we can be too busy with doctors' visits, charts, schedules and many other concerns. It can also seem that if anything is going to get done, you are going to have to do it. The doctor just says, "Come back in two months." Too often we are expecting a huge billboard in

the sky to announce the answer. But Elijah found out that God spoke to him in a "gentle whisper" (I Kings 19:12). Psalm 46 says: "Be still and know that I am God" (v. 10). Is it possible that our lives are too rushed and hectic to even hear what God has to say to us? Let Him speak to you. In the early quiet hours of the morning let God speak to you through His Word. In the relaxing minutes before bed let Him tell you "all is well" according to the Scriptures. The answers that God brings to the vexing problems of our lives, infertility included, could be amazing!

With the many incidents in Scripture of God "opening the womb" and with the promises of God answering prayer, a Christian couple can be filled with hope. Hope is a very interesting concept. In our day today, hope is a very weak concept. When we use the word hope, it usually means something that is a possibility, a maybe, or an "if-y" sort of thing. But the concept of hope in the Scriptures is anything but uncertain. It is a solid assurance because it is something promised by God.

One of the Old Testament words that describes hope is used to describe a cord or a line that is stretched out toward an object. Such is what hope is all about--hope is stretched out to God. Hope has to deal with the "not yet" reality of our lives, and at the same time it "stretches out" to reach to the promises of God. The "not yet" reality

versus the promises of God creates a tension in the life of a child of God. That tension is the stretched cord--hope--reaching from the present to the future in God's promises. According to the examples of Scripture, the mighty actions of God in the past and present give confidence for certain and firm hope for the future. Generally speaking, in Scripture this hope relates to the promises of God centering around salvation. Since God gave the promise of the Messiah, carried out in the giving of Jesus, given proof through the resurrection, and called us to hold that same faith, we have hope. Hope, then, firmly grounded, is not in self, but in God. "Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him" (Psalm 62:5).

Humanly speaking many times things do not appear very hopeful. Yet when the odds are against us, when doctors say, "I can't give you very much hope," we can say along with the Psalm writer: "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him my Savior and my God" (Psalm 42:5). "We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield" (Psalm 33:18).

When it comes right down to it, all that we have is hope. Why go on trying to have a child if there is no hope? Why go to a doctor if there is no hope? Without hope it is all wasted time and energy. Hope is a very precious commodity. Without it, we give up. With it, we continue

on. You must have a lot of hope. Hope is necessary because the final outcome has not yet happened. Therefore, based on everything we know about God, we come to affirm God as the basis of our hope. God has redeemed us. God has given us everything necessary for our well-being. Such a saving faith in God becomes the basis of our hope. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1).

The place of hope can not be underestimated. "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Hebrews 16:19). The anchor of this hope, of course, is the work of Christ. But our confidence that through Christ God has conquered the power of sin over us, gives us hope that God will also do all things for our benefit. Never let your hope in Christ wane.

In the final analysis, the Scriptures speak to a couple wanting a child much the same as it speaks to any other believer. It is an easy temptation to turn Scripture into an infertility handbook. We could find passages, stories and prooftexts that all speak to the question of infertility. From these various passages we could distill a theology of infertility. However, such would be a gross misuse of Scripture. The Bible's purpose is no more to be a handbook on infertility than it is to be a cookbook, tax preparer's guide, or an almanac.

The Scripture's self-announced purpose is so that we can know Jesus Christ and God's love shown us through Him. "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30). In your daily struggles with infertility, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16) so that you will have full knowledge of God's love for you.

God's objective love is shown to us in the sacraments. In Baptism and at the Lord's Supper we hear God's declaration of love, forgiveness, and acceptance. Knowing God's grace through Christ's sacrifice will make the issue of having children or not having children more understandable. It will give you the confidence to say with St. Paul, "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and fellowship of sharing in his sufferings" (Philippians 3:10).

St. Paul came to understand that it was Christ who brought real spiritual offspring for God. Isaiah prophecies: "'Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband,' says the Lord" (Isaiah 54:1). In a barren world of sin and death, the resurrection of Christ makes us His children by faith. God shows His

love to us in all circumstances. Therefore we, too, always
have reason to sing.

¹Arthur Greil, Not Yet Pregnant (New Brunswick &
London: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 35.

²Ralph Klein, "Homiletics," Concordia Theological
Monthly 41 (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1970): 681.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

Mark and Sherry were unable to have a child ever since Sherry went off the pill almost five years ago. Sherry picked up the new copy of Newsweek¹ magazine. There was a feature article, "The Baby Makers Inc." The article started by telling the story of Daniel and Diane Alston. The Alstons were unable to have any children. Finally they went to Pacific Fertility Medical Center. Over three years, the Alstons gave birth to three children all by in vitro fertilization (IVF). Diane Alston said, "If you really want kids, you just do it."

Sherry filed the article in her mind. Not quite a year later, in March of 1993, Sherry was off work for a week. It just happened that she turned on the Today news program. For the entire first week of March, Today did a special on infertility and the new reproductive technologies available for couples.

It seemed that more and more newspapers and television programs were carrying reports and stories about the new assisted reproductive technologies. Mark and Sherry sat down and started to talk to each other about what they

should do. But they were at a loss to make up their minds whether it was even a good idea to pursue some of these new treatments. Sure, they wanted children, but at what cost? What cost to their Christian principles? What cost financially?

Many couples are exactly like Mark and Sherry. They know of artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, surrogate mothering and etc. Are all of these methods acceptable options for a Christian couple? They could trust their doctor to give them sound medical advice, but they were not so sure that he could speak from a sound Christian perspective. Should they sit and talk with their pastor? Would he be familiar with the reproductive technologies currently in practice?

This chapter is an attempt to help answer Mark and Sherry's question, "What should we do?" The goal is to answer that question as if Mark and Sherry came and sat down with their pastor asking his advice and guidance from Scripture. Should Mark and Sherry ask their pastor, he would probably give them direction and certain basic guidelines about marriage, children, parenthood, and stewardship of life. This would assist them in asking their medical specialists questions about the procedures and whether they violate their Christian principles.

Use of Medical Technologies

The first question that needs to be answered for any couple is whether it is permissible at all for a Christian couple to seek any kind of medical solution for their infertility. There are some branches of Christianity that believe there is a basic contradiction between Christianity and medicine. In other words faith in God and His healing power eliminate the need for any type of medical intervention.

Are the Bible and medicine at odds with one another? Is it a biblical truth that if we have trust in God, we need not see any physician? If you look to the Lord for healing, can there be any place for doctors, hospitals and medicine?

Such a view of Christianity really distorts the central purpose of Christianity. It is a false distinction to try to pit faith against medicine. Both are God's blessings to us.

Nowhere in Scripture is there a prohibition of using the available medical expertise of the day. The Old Testament laws of dietary regulation, distinction of clean and unclean foods, circumcision, and hygienic rules for cleansing are all laws for the purpose of establishing Israel as God's people. In addition to being special laws for God's people, these laws exhibit a healthy wisdom--what could be called "wholistic" medicine. God could protect His people from disease and pestilence without these rules, but

through the strict observance of these rules, basic hygiene was observed.

In the New Testament, Jesus called Luke, a physician, to be one of his disciples. Jesus never rebuked Luke to forget about the medical wisdom of the day. In fact, St. Paul, who was a sickly man, took Luke with him on his journeys as a physician. St. Paul encourages his younger pastor-student, Timothy, to "Use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illness" (I Timothy 5:23).

For a child of God, there need be no problem in going to a doctor to seek medical advice and treatment. Medicine is a blessing of God's creation which God has allowed man to discover and develop for the alleviation of hardships in this life. It is no more contradictory for a Christian to use medical expertise than it would be to use electricity. After all God could heat and cool our homes, cook our food, and run our appliances directly without electricity. But we know that through the gift of electricity, God gives us a source of energy to do our daily chores. In the same way, medicine is a gift of God for man's rightful use.

For a Christian couple wondering whether it shows a lack of faith to go to a doctor, the answer is "no". Can a Christian couple, in good conscience, seek help from the medical profession? The answer is absolutely "yes". It is important to remember that it is God who is ultimately

working through the medicine and medical treatments. As a Christian, it is always our trust that God will use such procedures as a way of giving the blessing of a child.

A couple need not have a guilty conscience if they use basic medical assistance to help solve the problem of infertility. Infertility can be caused by scar tissue in the womb, endometriosis, a blocked fallopian tube, or an anomaly of the uterus or reproductive tract in the woman. In men, it may be due to a closed vas deferens. These and other causes may be able to be repaired with a simple surgical procedure. If a surgical correction can help a reproductive organ to function again, it certainly seems that there would be no biblical ethical reason to prohibit such a procedure.

Hormonal Therapies

Generally speaking, hormonal therapy is used to stimulate gamete production in either the man or the woman. Such therapy is not as commonly used in the male but may be used in certain circumstances.

More commonly, hormonal therapy is used in the woman for anovulation, (i. e., no production of eggs). The use of hormones can result in "super-ovulation" in one cycle which in turn can result in multiple births. While there is nothing inherently wrong with a multiple birth, it may lead to pre-mature births. Born in a weakened condition, the

babies may not survive. In order to avoid the problem of multiple births, "selective reduction" (culling) may be practiced. Selective reduction is a very slippery term which actually refers to the killing of babies in the uterus.

This brings us to the value of human life. Who is going to selectively reduce the number of living fetuses? On what basis will the decision be made? Needless to say, when parents really think about it, it is a very troublesome procedure to kill certain babies, while siblings living in same womb survive. It seems that a Christian, sensitive to the value of human life, would not be able to opt for any practice that would involve killing of a conceived life. It would be very easy to be burdened later by questions of the conscience. These questions could be vexing especially if there is trouble in the pregnancy or even a problem with the child(ren) that is born.

Hormonal therapy need not be ruled out, but a Christian couple needs to seek care from an expert in the method which can avoid multiple gestations. As Christians who believe that life is a special gift of God from conception, a couple would need to refuse the practice of "selective reduction."

Artificial Insemination

Artificial insemination has been practiced for some time, especially with animals. It is only recently that it

has been used with humans. The success rate is believed to be somewhere between 50-60%. It is estimated that some 6,000-20,000 children are born yearly in the United States as a result of artificial insemination.²

There are two types of artificial insemination. The first uses the semen of the husband (AIH). The second method uses the semen of a donor (AID) which may be necessary because of a low semen count, or sterility of the husband.

Artificial insemination may be used when the husband has insufficient or low sperm production or when there is a blockage in the female reproductive tract. The husband's semen is harvested and stored until there is a sufficient amount for fertilization.

Are there biblical concerns about the use of AIH? Some Christians present concerns because masturbation is required to collect the sperm, whether it is from the husband or from a donor. Masturbation is a problem in that "chronic masturbation falls short of the Creator's intention for our use of the gift of sexuality, namely, that our sexual drives should be oriented toward communion with another person in the mutual love and commitment of marriage."³

Certainly the self-centered aspect of masturbation is true in a chronic situation. However, as the necessary means to bring about conception, there is not an intention

to enjoy sexuality apart from one's spouse. Thus, there does not seem to be a serious objection for its use in artificial insemination.

In terms of AID there are some serious ethical questions. The use of donor sperms introduces a third party into the marriage. This third party could be viewed by some as committing adultery in the marriage relationship. It would seem that the view of this as adultery is exaggerated as the couple is not seeking to give themselves sexually or relationally to another person. They remain "given" to each other. Yet, if AID falls short of adultery, is it good to introduce a third party into the marriage? While both husband and wife may desire a child, will this introduction of the unknown (or known) third party become an element of division in the future? Because the desired outcome (a child) may be so strong, the couple is "willing to do anything." Remember it is a child that is being brought forward. The third party element is not an obscure point. It is asking someone else to step in and do what we are unable to do. Just think about it in this way--would you be willing to have a marriage "by proxy"? Obviously, we would say that such a suggestion would be absurd.

It can happen that the husband will later feel a distance to the child conceived since that child will be biologically related only to the wife. When there are

problems, disappointments, the child rebels, or other things, will the husband say, "It's your child--I had nothing to do with it." This might also be said of adoption since the child is not biologically related, but in the instance of adoption, both the husband and wife are on equal grounds. There is no entrance of a third party in the act of conception.

The Uniform Parentage Act requires that the husband give "consent" for insemination by a donor. Yet will a husband be able to give full and free consent? If a husband sees how desperately his wife desires a child, will he be able to freely say "yes"? Second thoughts can generate feelings like, "I just said 'yes' because I knew how much it meant to you." Again, these doubts seem to come because of the third party introduction.

At this point a couple needs to ask themselves again, if they have not already, "Why do we want a child?" Is it because we desire to be parents and receive the stewardship of life from God, or do we want a child for our needs? A child to make our marriage more secure. . .a child so we can vicariously live through its experiences. . .a child that we can expect satisfaction from? With the introduction of the third party into this conception, a couple needs to be certain of their reasons for "wanting" a child. As with the reproductive technologies to follow, a couple's motivation

needs serious self-examination when they enter into extraordinary means to bring forth a child.

When it comes to picking a donor, what will be the basis of the choice? Most clinics will have a "selection list." The intent is to "match" height, body build, hair color, and so forth. But looking down the list might make one feel like looking at a catalog to pick a championship "sire" for a purebred beef cow--"Well, as long as we are picking, we might as well get the best." Many authors have noted that this process can cause people to begin to view children as "projects" and "products" rather than as God's gifts to us. If we are making a product, then we want the very best. Oliver O'Donovan notes that this is the difference between begetting a child and making a child.⁴ What happens when the desired child does not turn out to be as beautiful or satisfying as hoped? Is there a place to go for an exchange or refund?

What will the introduction of this third party do to the self-esteem of the child? According to the Uniform Parentage Act, the AID is to be kept entirely confidential and in a sealed file. The husband of the inseminated wife is to be considered the natural father.

What does this do to the biological history of this child? Will the child be told of his past? If the child is told, what will he think? Most sperm donors are college

students who make their "donation" for a fee. How will the child react to the fact that his father received \$25 for "shooting" in a little plastic cup, then, after standing as "stud," has disappeared without any intention to be father or care for that which was procreated?

For a young person wanting to know his identity, this mysterious past may cause troubles. "Sure, Mom and Dad wanted me, and I know they love me, but who was the one from which I came and why?"

Adopted children are also concerned about their biological history, but there is a distinct difference between the AID biological history and adoptive history. The differences go right to the conception.

The natural parents of an adopted child have begotten the child. Their act, whether responsible or irresponsible, intended or unintended, has its own integrity and completeness. It is their act, and the child is unquestionably their child. . . .If, having given birth to their child, they disappear from the scene, it will be for others to represent them in the task of parenting. . . .No such thing has been done by the donor of semen. He has not procreated; there is no space in the world which he has made for himself by his act, and which now needs to be filled because he is impeded from filling it.⁵

Therefore, in adoption the biological parents always remain the child's first parents. That biological history is a valid history and one which usually the child finds information about and may at some time search to find his biological past. But where is the child going to look for that secret donor? The biological history is also a history

which the child needs to feel good about, for deep in our heart, everyone needs to know that "my real father and mother loved me and wanted me very badly."

What if a couple has deliberately chosen the donor from the males on the husband's side of the family such as an uncle, a cousin, or grandfather of the child? This is a situation where it would probably be kept secret since there would be a genetic similarity with the father. But is it fair to the child not to know? It seems that here there is a potential problem in the relationship of the adults. As with Sarah and Hagar, there could be strained relationships as a brother-in-law watches "his child" being raised by someone else. At every Thanksgiving, Christmas, and family gathering there would be the constant reminder.

Some physicians may recommend that when the husband's sperm count is low, his sperm be mixed with the sperm of a donor. The thought behind this procedure is that the donor's sperm will provide more volume to enable the husband's sperm to achieve the fertilization. This is primarily a psychological argument to make the husband feel better. Who says that it is going to be the husband's sperm doing the fertilizing? It may be that the husband's sperm will enable the donor sperm to fertilize the egg. It would seem that since the insemination with mixed sperm also

introduces a third party, it too would be subject to the same caution as the donor insemination.

Christian couples committed to the "one flesh" teaching of Scripture will probably look at AID in a negative light. They realize that the challenges will work against a good understanding of marriage and children as God's gift to them.

In Vitro Fertilization

In vitro fertilization (IVF), researched since the 1930s, involves the fertilization of an egg in an artificial environment. On July 25, 1978, Louise Brown, born in England, was the first human baby born using IVF technology. Today the baby-making business using the IVF procedure is a "fertile" market.

Artificial insemination deals with infertility in the man. IVF deals primarily with infertility in the woman. It might seem that what artificial insemination is for the man, IVF is for the woman, but they are not exactly parallel.

A woman is prepared for IVF with hormonal treatment to stimulate the growth of ova. As many as seven eggs are produced in one cycle. Then another hormone is given to regulate the time of ovulation and set the stage for the harvesting of the eggs. A laparoscope is used to see the eggs in the follicle on the surface of the ovary. As many eggs as possible are removed by needle aspiration. The

removed eggs are watched to determine the time for fertilization. Then as many of the eggs as possible are fertilized.

One of two things will happen next. First, three to four of the fertilized eggs will be returned to the uterus. After implantation, the embryos will be evaluated or "screened" to see which ones seem to be the most viable. The ones which appear to be troublesome will be destroyed.

The other thing that might happen is that after three or four eggs are transferred to the uterus to be implanted, the remaining fertilized eggs will be frozen in liquid nitrogen for possible later "use."

What are some of the implications of embryo freezing and "selective reduction" (culling)? In the case of embryo freezing, there is the question of what is going to happen to this new life. Will it be frozen indefinitely? During the process of freezing there is a natural deterioration until the embryo is no longer viable. In terms of stewardship of life, what has God intended life for? Has God vested man and woman with procreative abilities in order that embryos would be frozen? Life is to be lived to God's honor and glory. There is little data on the possible damage that freezing might cause the embryo if later implanted. These issues should be addressed in a precryopreservation agreement.

Finally, legal matters must be considered. In most places, the frozen embryos are viewed as the property of the donating couple. What happens when the couple dies? This situation has already occurred (Mario and Elsa Rios).⁶ What happens when there is a divorce? Will there be a custody battle over the frozen embryos? The option of freezing embryos presents some ethical questions for a couple seeking to be responsible for a human life.

The process of "selective reduction" has to be faced for what it actually is. It is the killing of excess embryos. The process is to destroy one or more of the children in the womb by a "lethal dose of potassium chloride into the child's heart. . . 'selective reduction' carries a relatively high risk of premature delivery to the live child(ren) remaining."⁷ Even if we would have the right to kill in this instance, on what basis would a decision be made? Taking of life cannot be justified even if it results in the much-desired child for a couple.

The terms by which human life are referred to in IVF are troublesome. People are not objects or material goods to be selected, screened, reduced and harvested. Christians view human beings as persons. We know that Jesus laid down His life as a redemption for persons, not objects or property.

While most all IVF doctors and clinics reject the idea of research on the embryos, frozen or not, there must be a certain amount of testing conducted. It is impossible to know how much of testing is done behind lab doors. How much of this testing results in loss of life for the embryos? The testing may not be called testing because it may be labeled "screening" or "evaluation," but testing is the result of it. Testing is necessary to perfect the procedure. But do we as Christians, who value life at every stage from conception to death, want to be part of human experimentation?

It is very likely that the process of IVF may leave us with a less-than-sacred view of human life. Life is and remains a special gift of God. "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7).

These alarming truths need to be recognized by the couple. IVF results in a higher percentage of miscarriages (25%) than normal pregnancies (15%).⁸ Furthermore, there is a very low rate of implantation (10-13%, for embryos returned to the uterus) at the cost of about \$10,000 per cycle.⁹

There are also risks to the general health of women undergoing IVF at every stage of IVF. There are risks

associated with superovulation, the painful collection of ova (whether by laparoscopy or ultrasound), induced multiple pregnancy and psychological injury.¹⁰

It must be remembered that IVF is not a cure for infertility. It simply remedies childlessness in only 10% of the women who adopt this procedure. For the 90% that find it unsuccessful, it can be very devastating, especially after investing so much hope in what they perceive to be the "high-tech" promise of fertility. After going so far and investing so much time and money, the operational motive may be, "We can't quit now! We've already invested \$40,000. If we don't try again, all that money will be wasted. Just one more try--perhaps this time it will be successful." The more money that is invested, the more difficult it will be to finally call a halt to the procedure. Is "We can't quit now," a valid reason for continuing? A couple seeking to make a wise and God-pleasing use of their money may have to ask: "Is this a pleasing use of our financial resources?" Only rarely are IVF procedures covered by insurance companies.

If the IVF process can be freed from the problems of embryo freezing, selective reduction, and related risks that may damage both mother and baby, it would be difficult to argue against its use. However, these problems make a

conscientious couple ask serious questions about its proper use in God's eyes.

A couple, in talking with specialists at a fertility clinic, needs to ask these hard questions of those handling human life in IVF. In addition, a couple needs to inform their medical specialists of their religious and moral convictions about human life in certain and positive terms. Physicians and hospitals are obligated to respect your convictions. In the long run your conscience will be more comfortable knowing that you've been true to the Scriptures and your Christian principles.

The same considerations mentioned in relation to artificial insemination need to be mentioned here. The procedure tends to remove the procreative and relational dimension of sexuality. Again, in IVF the view of children can be changed from a gift of God to a combined "project" of the couple. While there may not be the third party of donor sperm or ova, there is definitely the third party of physicians and lab technicians in what is normally a private act between a husband and wife. Their necessary and intrusive presence may be a negative addition to the "one flesh" union.

The technology keeps changing and new issues arise. As I write, researchers may be discovering ways to get around these troublesome issues that demean human life. Again, the

responsibility falls on the couple to know their convictions, concerns, marriage, parenting, and God-pleasing use of our resources. Ask the tough questions and be a wise and informed consumer for you are buying a service--a very expensive one--both in terms of human life and dollars. The old adage is always appropriate, "Let the buyer beware."

GIFT and ZIFT

The procedures of Gamete Intrafallopian Transfer (GIFT) and Zygote Intrafallopian Transfer (ZIFT) may be considered briefly under IVF although they are distinctly different from IVF. GIFT, simply put, artificially places both sperm and egg in the fallopian tube. Fertilization is then allowed to occur "naturally" in the fallopian tube. The one catch is that for this treatment to work, a woman must have normal fallopian tubes. Male masturbation is part of this procedure.

The GIFT procedure avoids some of the troublesome issues involved with IVF in that there is not embryo screening or problems with embryo freezing or selective reduction of embryos. However, a couple can still have the ethical questions of dealing with donor sperm and/or egg as previously considered.

ZIFT is more related to IVF in that a zygote (a very young embryo) is planted in the fallopian tube. ZIFT requires that the zygote be fertilized in vitro. Instead of

being placed in the uterus, it is placed in the fallopian tube and hopefully will implant naturally in the uterus. Since ZIFT requires all the troublesome procedures of egg harvesting, screening, and possible freezing, it brings with it many of the same ethical questions.

Surrogate Embryo Transfer and Surrogate Motherhood

Another option is Surrogate Embryo Transfer (SET) and surrogate motherhood. We will consider these two options together, as some of the basic issues are very closely related. In either situation, there is the use of a surrogate mother.

SET involves the artificial insemination of a surrogate mother with the husband's sperm. If there is fertilization, the embryo is lavished from the surrogate mother's womb after five days and is transferred to the womb of the infertile woman.

There are ethical complications with SET. If the embryo cannot be lavished out of the surrogate woman's womb, she will either have to carry the pregnancy to term or have an abortion. SET also requires the synchronizing of both women's wombs so they are in exactly the same phase for the embryo transfer. If this synchronization cannot be achieved, it will require the freezing of the lavished embryo until the timing is perfect. The embryo freezing increases the risk of embryo destruction. Questions that

couples need to work through if SET is considered involve embryo freezing and the introduction of a third party as a woman donates an egg. Therefore, with SET the child will be the biological child of only the husband. Couples need to consider the possibility that legal agreements may require the surrogate mother to have an abortion if everything does not go correctly. Further questions about the role of a surrogate mother will be discussed after a presentation of the surrogate mother concept.

Surrogate mothering requires that a woman be artificially inseminated, carry the pregnancy to full term, and give birth to the child. After the child has been born, the child will be surrendered to the infertile couple.

There are some very serious ethical questions that need to be considered in surrogate motherhood. There is the possibility for abortion if genetic tests indicate a problem with the unborn child. As previously discussed, human life is a sacred gift that cannot be wiped out simply because it does not meet our human specifications.

Secondly, there is the introduction of a third party as with AID and SET. Will this third party weaken the "one flesh" union? As previously discussed with AID, the child will be biologically related to only one parent unless the parents have undergone IVF and are using a surrogate womb. In this instance, unlike the sperm donor, the identity of

the surrogate mother will be known. Will a child be pleased to learn that his "real" mother was paid \$25,000 or more to "get pregnant?" In fairness, the payment is intended to cover expenses, inconvenience and risk, not to "buy a baby," but there is the involvement of a "payment for services rendered."

Thirdly, will the surrogate arrangement distort the biblical view that children are a "gift" rather than a "project" undertaken. Who is to blame if this "project" (experiment) doesn't turn out as expected? The biological father? The surrogate mother? The infertile couple? Will the surrogate mother be forced to keep the "goods" if they are defective? Perhaps no one will claim the child, leaving society with the burden of its care.

Fourthly, there are many legal questions. Will an abortion be required if a birth defect is detected? What if either party changes their minds? Will there be recourse for suing if either party doesn't fulfill their obligations? What if the surrogate mother smokes, drinks, or engages in any other behavior that might harm the fetus? The ultimate question that the law must answer is: "Who is the 'real mother' the 'adoptive mother' or the 'biological mother?'" These questions require much thought and expert legal advice. The laws of each state need to be thoroughly reviewed to determine what is required.

The legal nightmares involved with surrogate mothering were clearly demonstrated in the famous Baby Doe case. In that case, an infant was born with microcephaly, a severe form of mental retardation. Neither the surrogate mother and husband wanted the child, nor the infertile couple. In such cases, a child becomes like the bruised fruit in the produce bin that no one wants to take home. In such cases, the surrogate mother may argue that it was due to "defective sperm." The infertile couple may argue that it was the fault of a "defective ovum." In either case, the child is the greatest loser of all.

Legislatures can and have enacted laws to regulate surrogate mothering. Those may say that the infertile couple are "required to take the child if all the obligations of the contract" were fulfilled. However, should the begetting of children fall under such legislative scrutiny? Perhaps it is an indication that due to the fallen and sinful condition of man, all such arrangements are plagued with the problem of sin from the beginning.

Fifthly, the surrogate arrangement may take advantage of people. Obviously, the ultimate goal is to have a baby, but in bringing about that good, there is the possibility of exploitation of those who may be poor and without any other opportunities. "Womb for rent" may become a sales slogan for a young girl to earn some extra much-needed money.

Certainly this is not to imply that every woman who becomes a surrogate mother has a mercenary spirit. In fact, many may just want to give a much desired gift to a couple who cannot have a child.

No matter what the situation, is this the way that we, as Christians, want to view human life? Not only is there the danger of looking at children as products, but also sperm and egg donation, as well as surrogate wombs, may be seen as necessary ingredients in the assembly line of human procreation. In our day, when an "up and coming" young professional couple can more conveniently "hire" someone to carry their baby, it is easy to view the surrogate mother as just another person in the work force. A couple may say, "We will have a nanny raising the child later--what is the difference?" In such a case, why have a child at all?

Recently newspapers, magazines and a TV movie have told the story of a mother who consented to be the surrogate mother for her daughter's baby so that her daughter and son-in-law might have a child. In no way can one speak against the love and self-sacrifice that made such a gift possible for a daughter. Truly the motive and sacrificial love is heart warming. Because of the love and sacrifice of many who would want to make this gift possible for others, even at the risk of their own health and life, some may find it difficult to argue against. Yet, even in these

circumstances with family, there is a real possibility that everyone will not "live happily ever after."

Some will say that the example of Sarah giving her maid, Hagar, to conceive a child for Abraham is biblical support for surrogate mothering, but the situation with Sarah and Hagar is a little different. First of all, God never condoned this as a solution. Second, Hagar was Sarah's slave. Hagar had nothing to say about the matter. Third, after Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, Hagar looked with "contempt on Sarah." Their relationship was never the same again. It finally led to the sad reality that Hagar and her son, Ishmael, had to leave. It generally seems that in the Old Testament when a wife gave her maid to her husband for conceiving a child, it led to division and jealousy.

Some will point to the Old Testament practice of Levirate marriage as a support for surrogate mothering. In the Levirate marriage, a brother-in-law, or nearest of kin, was required to take his brother's wife and marry her to give her a son if her husband died leaving her without a son. The Levirate marriage was a legal requirement according to Old Testament law. There are a couple of differences between this and surrogate mothering. In the Levirate marriage, the brother's wife actually became the lawful wife of the brother. Secondly, this was done in order to provide a "legal heir" for the deceased brother so

that his family line would continue. All children born in the Levirate marriage were actually the children of the wife and the Levirate brother. Only the first born son was considered the legal heir of the deceased brother. The Levirate marriage provides neither support nor opposition for surrogate mothering. It was done, not because a couple "wanted a child," but to provide a legal heir and support for a widow.

Summary

In bringing to focus all the ethical considerations arising from the new technologies, an attempt is being made to speak a word of caution. The areas of these technologies that denigrate a marriage, the value of human life, and personhood need to be carefully thought out. A couple, in a very heartfelt desire to have a baby, may be willing to ignore such considerations in order to achieve the goal--a baby. However, if such procedures go against God's laws, then that law and our conscience should not be ignored. Therefore, for one's peace of mind and good conscience, these questions need to be answered before the conscience is compromised.

Perhaps some of the issues may be a matter of perspective or interpretation. Are we viewing a child as a "gift" or a "product." It is certainly possible that a Christian couple can view the child conceived through IVF as

God's gift to them even though they made a lot more choices than in a natural pregnancy. Yet, it is crucial that a couple be made aware of the "project" mentality and the consequent meaning of that lurking behind the door.

Procedures that involve the taking of life, albeit pre-born, even if it is to bring about a live birth, cannot be accepted. Isn't this an area that belongs to God? It is true that not every naturally fertilized embryo implants, but that was entirely God's choice. It becomes a matter of our decision making when we "selectively eliminate" some. Certainly, these are difficult decisions. The important directive is not to let one's desire for a child cloud the morality of the issues.

To speak a word of caution in no way minimizes the desire to have a child. No one should underestimate the desire and longing to have a child. God has given the mandate to be "fruitful and multiply." It is a noble desire to be parents and bring a child up in the "fear and admonition of the Lord." In fact, God has given it his whole-hearted blessing. The desire to have children is real and cannot be written off as though it doesn't mean very much.

What has been offered by churches may not be very helpful. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations suggests that a couple

consider adoption. Considering adoption is fine and good but in today's society, adoption is very difficult. It is further suggested, that "They permit the absence of children itself to be creative and fruitful in new ways in their shared life."¹¹ What does that mean? The Vatican Council suggests that Catholics "consider adoption, various forms of educational work and assistance to families and to poor or handicapped children."¹² Greil notes that couples he has interviewed are "willing to adopt, but would not find the Vatican's other suggestions for coping with infertility very helpful."¹³

The church recognizes that the pain of infertility is real. It supports, within guidelines, a couple's use of every available means to become a parent. The cost of becoming that parent must not be so high that it violates God's Word and our conscience.

But what if we have already tried some of the procedures described--does that mean that we are condemned sinners?

What if we don't see the danger that you have described and intend to go ahead and use IVF--will that put us outside the communion of the church?

Here is where the beauty of Law-Gospel Lutheran theology shines as a bright star in the heavens. The Scriptures have not been reduced to a rabbinic law book of

unkeepable regulations. Surely, there are laws in the Scriptures, but these laws, in relationship to the Gospel, primarily serve to point us to Christ, our Savior. Where we feel convicted that we have done wrong by God's law, it serves to bring us to Christ, that we might be washed clean. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). If you believe that you sinned in regard to these things, then Jesus will wash you clean and you will be free!

As far as planning in advance to go out to do something you know to be wrong, no one in good conscience can advise in favor of that. Romans 6:1-2: "What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

Christian couples should be aware of the consequences and Christian responsibility and the use of guiding Scriptural Principles in looking at the decision making process regarding the issues of infertility. To help review the consequences of the major medical procedures regarding the procreation of children and the establishment of guiding Scriptural Principles developed from these consequences and Christian responsibility, please refer to Table I in the Appendix.

If you have a reasonable doubt that something might be wrong, perhaps the question ought be studied again. Possibly, it will become more clear. Find out more information from Scripture about the value of human life, the prohibition against killing, the nature of marriage, or other vexing questions. Find out more about the exact nature of the procedure that you are considering. Be specific in questioning your physician. Demand exact information, and let him know that you have studied the issue from both a religious and a medical view point. Then, above all, let Scripture be your norm. Be assured your pastor will gladly help you in this search. You will never regret making a decision that is in harmony with your Scripture-guided conscience. You can be assured as when God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, Issac, as a test, that God will provide a "ram caught in a thicket" (Genesis 22:13). Should your decision finally be involved in a "gray area" that you cannot absolutely determine its rightness or wrongness, then again we know that the cross of Calvary stands tall above all our sins.

God has blessed us today with a variety of medical procedures for dealing with infertility. We need not feel guilty for making use of procedures that are curative which enable our bodies to do their job naturally. However, there is also a "cafeteria-line" of options that are not curative.

They may supply a child, but at a cost. Be very wise and careful which ones you choose to put on your plate.

¹Annetta Miller, Carolyn Friday and Patricia King, "Baby Makers, Inc." Newsweek (29 June 1992): 38.

²John W. Klotz, Men, Medicine and Their Maker (University City, Mo.: Torelion Productions, 1991), 141.

³Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective, Report of Social Concerns Committee (n.p. September 1981), 15.

⁴Oliver O'Donovan, Begotten or Made? (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 39.

⁵Ibid., 74.

⁶David T. Ozar, "The Case Against Thawing Unused Frozen Embryos" Hastings Center Report 15, no. 4 (August 1985): 7.

⁷Pauline Connor, "Is IVF Good Medicine?" Ethics and Medicine 7:1 (Spring 1991): 12.

⁸Karen E. Rehder, M.D., "Childless Not by Choice: Infertility Problems/A Medical Perspective," symposium presented at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., September 1992: 7.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Connor, 12.

¹¹Commission on Theology and Church Relations, 19.

¹²Arthur Greil, "The Religious Response to Reproductive Technology," The Christian Century (January 4-11, 1989): 13.

¹³Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

A WOMAN'S VIEW OF INFERTILITY

Darrel and Jennifer live in a small town in the midwest. They both want to have children, but Jennifer's desire for children far exceeds that of Darrel's. She is consumed with the desire to have a child. Darrel is quite happy with their life as it is. When friends announce that they are expecting a baby, it causes her great pain. Darrel and Jennifer are trying to understand each other, but their disagreement over the importance of their infertility is making it very difficult. Jennifer feels all alone because her family and friends don't understand her, and it seems that even her husband doesn't understand her desire to be a mother.

Men and women are different. This comes as no surprise. Every one of a woman's cells contains the chromosomes that make her uniquely female. Their basal metabolism is lower than a man's. Skeletal structure differs with a woman having a shorter head, broader face, less protruding chin, shorter legs and a longer trunk, larger stomach, kidneys, liver and appendix, but smaller lungs. A woman's blood contains more water and fewer red

blood cells. A woman's heart beats more rapidly and she usually has lower blood pressure. Her larger thyroid is responsible for her smoother, less hairy skin.¹ And obviously, a woman's body is made to conceive, bear and nurture children. And because she is different from a man, her reactions to infertility will be different, too.

When a woman's body is unable to bear children, it takes away a very important part of her self-concept, her role as a wife, and possibly her future as a mother. A woman's life, especially if she is not employed outside the home, tends to be centered around the home and it's inhabitants. Her husband tends to focus on things outside the home such as his job. A woman who is employed outside the home still has a greater tendency to be the one who "feathers the nest" and makes the house a home. If children are part of that home, it will probably be the woman who will spend the most time meeting the demands of the children.

It's hard for anyone who has never experienced infertility to completely understand this barrenness. Hannah (1 Samuel 1:7-8) was so sad about her lack of children that she wept and would not eat. Her praying was so intense that Eli, the priest, thought she was drunk (1 Samuel 1:12-16). Infertility is a painful experience!

An infertile woman can begin to feel that she has been left out, or is not in control. It is likely that, even before she married, she had an idea of how many children she wanted. Even though she and her husband may have used birth control measures early in their marriage, they felt that when the time came to have children, they would come easily and on command. Many of her friends have children or are pregnant, seemingly doing so easily and without much ado. It doesn't escape her attention that some of her friends are even becoming pregnant when they aren't too happy about the idea. Every time another friend comes to tell her about her recently-discovered pregnancy, it's like an arrow through her heart.

It hurts physically and emotionally to be happy with her friends as they have children and their families grow, apparently effortlessly, while she is suffering quietly with her grief over her own inability to conceive.

While a woman is trying to become pregnant, there is the monthly hope that it will happen this time. The arrival of her monthly period is a vivid reminder of her failure to become pregnant--again! She prays, cries, hopes, and despairs by turn. If she is blessed, she will have a friend she can share her deepest feelings with. A truly blessed woman will have a husband who, though he can't really understand how a woman can feel about infertility, at least

he is supportive. A woman needs to be able to look to her husband for encouragement and understanding. In many cases, it doesn't seem to matter as much to the husband that there is difficulty in conceiving a child. This can be a discouragement at times, or an encouragement for the woman. Sometimes it may seem that her husband just doesn't care as much as she does that they are having difficulty. It can even seem that he doesn't really want children!

But this same husband can look at the situation with less emotion, more logic, and defuse some of the urgency felt by the woman. He may be able to help the woman relax and realize that it's okay to have to wait another month, or another year. Above all, it's important that the woman feel that the husband does understand her disappointment. He should be able to discuss her hopes, frustrations, and even fears when the month passes and it's obvious that she has not become pregnant. He needs to understand that although it's only one more month since the last time there was disappointment, she is wondering if this means that it will never happen. He needs to be her best friend through all this. Most husbands are the only ones to whom the wife can repeatedly speak to about her sorrow. In a very real sense, the time of infertility is the "sickness" part of the "in sickness and in health" part of the wedding vows.

Not all women will react in the same degree to their infertility. Some women (and men) are just a lot more patient than others. Others become consumed with becoming pregnant. It's not uncommon for a wife to become angry with her husband who may think of infertility as a disappointment, but not a tragedy. The woman is often the one who wants to pursue medical tests to find the cause of infertility. Likewise, it is often the woman around whom the tests will revolve. For the male it's mostly a matter of whether he produces sperm or not. Other tests tend to poke and prod and woman's reproductive tract. Infertility produces a lot of tension between a husband and wife.²

The infertile woman can't escape thinking about having children by working outside the home. Pregnant women are in the workplace where an infertile woman must be confronted with them on a daily basis. Women are invited to baby showers, and baby showers are held at work. She may have to carry a greater workload on a day when a pregnant co-worker goes home because she is not feeling well due to her pregnancy. Photos of her co-workers' children are passed around at the office, and she has none to share.

Men, on the other hand, aren't subjected to these constant reminders of their infertility. They aren't invited to baby showers and aren't as likely to pass pictures of their children around to their buddies. Their

conversations rarely center around labor and delivery room experiences. In stores they aren't likely to be shopping in areas where they are constantly reminded of children--baby food and diapers in the grocery store, children's clothing (almost always located near the women's department) and toy departments in other stores. They can pretty well avoid these reminders as they pick up items for the lawn or car.

On the other hand, some women have even changed jobs and quit going to church because the constant reminders of their own infertility were so visible at those places in the form of other people's children.³

The woman's age has much to do with the sense of urgency. Couples who have waited until their 30s to have their first child may start feeling like they must beat the biological clock and can experience a feeling that conception must take place immediately or they may miss out. It can be ironic that a woman may have spent years and hundreds of dollars on contraception only to find out that once conception is desired, it eludes her.

Sometimes through the period of childlessness, it becomes hard to know who your friends are. Friends, as well as family members, can say some things that are just plain insensitive. Usually the comments they make are said in a joking manner which can make them hurt even more because you don't feel like joking about something that is so painful to

you. Once in a while, they can even misunderstand your values. Some believe that you are deliberately choosing to lavish yourself with material goods rather than have children. Sometimes you can be tempted to tell them exactly what the problem is, but it's hard to share such intimate details with anyone but the closest of friends. By doing so you will probably have to answer questions about your intimate life that you don't want to discuss on their cue. So you let them continue teasing you.

When couples decide to pursue medical tests and treatments for infertility, it is the woman who usually must undergo the pain and invasion of privacy of the tests. Whether or not they find a reason for the infertility, there are several medical ways of becoming pregnant, all of which involve more invasion of the woman's body. Her very life can become dictated by temperature charts, medication schedules and doctor's appointments. If the decision is made to pursue one of the new reproductive technologies, it is the woman to whom the procedures are done.

Couples who are medically or surgically sterile resulting in no further possibility of conceiving a child endure other struggles. The main question for these couples is totally different. There is no longer the question of whether or not you will conceive a child, but whether or not you will become parents through adoption, new reproductive

technologies, or live as a family complete in yourselves. The issue of adoption will be discussed in another chapter. Even though this is a very real option, it is still fraught with emotion and requires mature, thoughtful decision making.

¹James C. Dobson, "Vive la Difference!" Focus on the Family Magazine (February 1993): 5-6.

²Arthur Greil, Not Yet Pregnant (New Brunswick & London: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 13-15.

³Ibid., 58-61.

CHAPTER SIX

A MAN'S VIEW OF INFERTILITY

Bob and Candy dated throughout high school and were married after Bob graduated from high school. Bob enjoys casual involvement in competitive sports: hunting, fishing and camping. Bob is an average sort of guy. He is neither a super "macho" type nor a weak "noodle."

When Bob and Candy discovered they were having difficulty in having children, it started bothering Bob. He had never thought about fertility and infertility. Like all the other men he knew, he had the basic equipment for making children. He assumed that everything was in good working order. But what if their infertility was his fault. What if he was sterile? Would that mean he was less than a man?

What does it mean to be a man? Perhaps the child's poem says it:

What are little boys made of, made of?
What are little boys made of?
Snakes and snails and puppy dog's tails,
That's what little boys are made of.

In most cases "little boys" grow up to be men, or as the saying goes, the difference between boys and men is the

price of their toys. Traditionally, in our culture men are the strong ones while the little girls are made of "sugar and spice and everything nice".

Much of a man's "manhood" is wrapped up in his sexuality. The boy's high school locker rooms abound with stories of each guy's virility. Males tend to look at sexuality in terms of the physical act. Females tend to look at it in terms of the relationship with the spouse. Sexuality, then, is more of a physical act for men, rather than relational.

Because of this perception of sexuality, infertility is a direct affront to a male's manhood. It can be a direct blow to his self-worth. Of course, sexuality has to do with being able to "procreate". A man may perceive that the inability to procreate makes him less than a man, less than whole, and less than desirable for any normal female. Having children may not be a consuming desire for the average man. However, when he cannot father children due to his own infertility, it becomes a more coveted priority, if for no other reason than to demonstrate his ability to do so. Women tend to say they couldn't imagine life without children, while men remain indifferent.¹ This shows that for most men infertility is a problem because they are "less than a man," not because they cannot have children.

Women can talk to other women about blocked tubes and other infertility problems, but no man in his right mind is going to tell another man that his sperm count is low. He might as well confess that he has been castrated. At least with a vasectomy the potential is there--the gate has just been closed. Even the thought of having his sperm tested may be too dangerous for many men to accept.

It is especially humiliating for an infertile man to face his wife. Physiologically speaking, in procreation the man's sole responsibility is to provide the "seed". What if he has no "seed"? He feels inadequacy and guilt when facing his spouse, especially if she desires a child with all her heart. Adoption or artificial insemination with donor sperm may produce the desired child, but his infertility remains. It takes a mighty secure man to finally deal with his perceived inadequacy. His nagging thought is that his wife would probably rather trade him for a man who could really "father" a child.

The more intense the wife's desire for a child, the greater such self-doubts can be. No matter how much his wife assures him that a child does not really matter, he may always question the validity of that assurance in his subconscious.

Another difference between men and women's reaction to infertility has to do with what they see as the purpose of

having children. Women look forward to having children for the purpose of mothering. "There is, in American society, no 'fatherhood mandate' with the same force and intensity as the 'motherhood mandate.'"² The motherhood and nurturing instinct seems to be more strongly implanted in the woman than the man. Women talk about the pregnancy, morning sickness, the first kick, the delivery, nursing, and so forth. Men, generally, look at fathering in a different way. Raising children becomes a matter of carrying on something important to the man such as the family name or business. The average man knows that life is more than "eat, sleep and work". Through children he has the opportunity to make the next generation better than his own. It is a way of making one's mark in history. It can even be seen as achieving a sort of earthly immortality. In this sense, infertility becomes a disappointment for the man, not because he will not have "war stories" about babies, but because he will not leave his "mark" in history. When he dies, his story and place in this world will be over. According to this way of thinking, infertility causes a man to struggle with the very meaning and purpose of life.

Infertility is a different situation when the man is virile and the infertility stems from the woman's inability to conceive. Then the husband may not understand the importance of the whole situation. Men may see the

infertility as a disappointment, but not necessarily a tragedy for one's entire life. The man will more likely look for satisfaction in work, hobbies, or other aspects of life.³ He will not necessarily stand in the way of seeking medical treatment, but may not understand his wife's all-consuming goal to get pregnant. Usually, he will be supportive and try to understand. He will go along to the doctor and learn what he can, but primarily looks forward to the day when this whole thing can be laid to rest in their lives.

¹Frank M. Andrew and L. Jill Halman, "Infertility and Subjective Well-Being: The Mediating Roles of Self-Esteem, Internal Control, and Interpersonal Conflict," Journal of Marriage and the Family 54 (May 1992): 410.

²Arthur Greil, Not Yet Pregnant (New Brunswick & London: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 64.

³Ibid., 3.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MISCARRIAGE: A SILENT TRAGEDY

Brent and Amber were married for nearly sixteen years. They were in college for the first two years of their marriage, and then set up housekeeping. They didn't try to have any children for the first four years of their marriage. After trying unsuccessfully for a couple of years, they started to get concerned. So they went for an initial medical workup. When there wasn't any particular reason for the infertility, they decided to keep on trying without any further medical treatment. After eight years of marriage and an infinite number of wisecracks, such as: "When are you going to have children?" they started the process for adoption. After being in the adoption program for 27 months, they received a healthy baby boy. What a blessing little Luke was for their lives.

The question of their infertility had long been something that they had put aside. It would still be nice to get pregnant, but they had more or less given up. After sixteen years of marriage, Amber missed her period. She didn't think anything of it, but then other signs prompted her to take a home pregnancy test. It turned out positive.

Brent and Amber were literally on cloud nine. They immediately told all their family, friends, co-workers and people at church. Everyone rejoiced with them.

Then without any notice Amber started to bleed and pass some tissue. Amber experienced a miscarriage at about ten weeks. What a tragedy. Now their high had crashed to a despondent low.

At the time of a miscarriage there is a tremendous sense of loss, especially for a couple who has experienced problems with infertility.

A miscarriage is often called a "silent tragedy" because all of the machinery that is engaged to help cope, express grief, and provide support at the time of death, does not seem to work well at the time of a miscarriage. Normally at the time of a death, people come to express their grief. The house is full of people who have come to express their sympathy. They bring lots and lots of "cream of mushroom" casseroles, jello, cakes and pies. There are flowers, sympathy cards, and a funeral. With a miscarriage, there is usually nothing.

Most people are uncomfortable with death. When it happens, it is difficult to know what to say. It is especially difficult to know what to say to a couple that lost a baby in miscarriage. Therefore, people either say nothing, or awkwardly say the wrong thing, or the couple may

simply choose not tell anyone about their tragedy. They suffer in silence. They may not even choose to let their pastor know about their loss.

It seems that people want to try to comfort the couple by minimizing the loss. Comments such as these: "The baby was probably deformed, retarded or something like that," "You can always have another baby," "At least you have your other children," "You can be thankful that it occurred early" are made to help "lessen" the loss. These statements may have some truth, but they minimize the loss. They tend to give the impression that this life really didn't count for much and was insignificant.

Your loss is real and your hurt is deep especially if you have been struggling to have a baby. When a pregnancy finally occurs, there is an extraordinary joy that the blessing has finally happened. When that bubble of joy is burst, there is sadness, anger, resentment, guilt, hopelessness, and loss. That loss needs to be recognized, acknowledged, accepted and shared. A hug with the words, "It really hurts doesn't it--I'm sorry. Tell me how you feel, I want to know," go a long way. What is needed is someone to listen to all the hurts that are stored up inside.

That miscarriage cannot be ignored. It results in the loss of a real life. It is true that you had not had lots

of time to establish a relationship with this new life. But it is a real life, a life that needs acknowledgement. Funeral services are held in the church, not for the benefit of the dead, but for the benefit of the living. A funeral provides an opportunity to express grief, hear God's Word of promise, and receive support from the family of faith. But ordinarily there is no funeral service for a miscarried baby. In fact, the tissue may be kept in the hospital. A caring pastor welcomes the opportunity to minister to a couple during their experience of loss in miscarriage. A pastor will probably be open to conducting a private memorial service for your family to commend your unborn baby into the hands of a gracious and a loving God.

The Scriptures recognize that unborn life in the womb is real and known by God. It is not just an impersonal blob of tissue. The Psalm writer tells us how God even knows the life of the unborn, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. . .My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body" (Psalm 139: 14-16).

A question that occupies the minds of parents who loose a "wished for baby" is: "What has happened to my baby?" From the Scriptures, we know that "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"

(John 3:5). "Is my baby in heaven, and will I see him again in eternity?" There are some questions that Scripture does not choose to answer directly. This is one of those questions. But here we do have the comfort of the Gospel. We know that God did not let anything stand in the way of His love for us. He was willing to give His only-begotten son, Jesus, to bring about salvation. Therefore, we can surely commend this little baby into the hands of a gracious God, "Who shows mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments" (Exodus 20:6). While God has bound us, His church, to the Word and Baptism for bringing people to faith, God has in no way bound himself to those means. Therefore, lacking Baptism, we commend the unborn child to God knowing that God is gracious, and Jesus' sacrifice covers all sins.

God called such a little one to himself before there was even a possibility of Baptism. We know that it is not lack of Baptism that condemns, but lack of faith, "He that believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Therefore, according to God's Word, He is able to work faith where and when He chooses. Your child is commended into the loving hands of Jesus, who said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14).

You need to know that your miscarriage was not your fault. At a time like this, it seems that our conscience is more than willing to convict us of things that are not even our fault. Vexing thoughts come to our mind, "If I had only gone to the doctor sooner," "I should have taken it easier yesterday," or "I should have done this or that." It is not your fault that the miscarriage occurred. Perhaps the reason for it will never be known in this life time.

While we may not be able to figure out the reason, God invites us to do something very beautiful--to bring our questions, grief, loss, and even anger, to Him. He promises to hear us. As He listened to the complaints of Job that "It's not fair," so God will also listen to us. Our relationship with God is not so artificial or fragile that God cannot stand questioning. God welcomes our questions because it allows Him opportunity to speak to us through His Word and the Sacraments to assure us that ". . .neither heighth nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39). In due time, this love of God will enable us to say, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

CHAPTER EIGHT

INFERTILITY DUE TO ABORTION

Larry and Julie were married in their late twenties. They met at a church singles group. Julie had gone to a state university in a nearby city. Larry had gone to a tech school after high school and gotten a job as a computer technician for a local computer service center. When Julie was in college, she had fallen in love with a guy who promised her the world. Julie became pregnant. She was faced with a lonely decision of what to do. When her guy found out that she was pregnant, he was "gone with the wind." Julie couldn't face going home to tell her parents, so she decided to have an abortion. Julie knew that it was wrong, but the thought of going home and facing her parents compelled her to have it done.

When Julie met Larry, she could tell that he was a different sort of a guy than the guys she had met in college. Larry's faith was evident in his life. He was the kind of man that she would like to have as her husband. Julie never told Larry about her previous relationship and her abortion. She thought that it was all part of history now, and it wouldn't serve any purpose to tell him.

Larry and Julie wanted to start their family right away since they were both approaching 30. But they didn't succeed in becoming pregnant. Julie didn't even want to go to a doctor for an exam. In fact, she fought Larry's suggestion because she was afraid the doctor would say that their infertility was due to her earlier abortion. Julie remembered that after her abortion she developed a very serious infection that needed treatment with antibiotics. Perhaps the infection was the cause of her sterility.

One of the sad facts of our day is that there are 1.3 million abortions each year. Of this number, at least 25% are performed on teenagers each year.¹ Abortion has become an accepted method of birth control. Of the million plus abortions performed each year, it is reasonable to assume that there are a number of Christian women included in that number. They have elected for abortion for several reasons. They may not have fully understood the facts or may have been motivated out of fear or a strong desire to continue school or a career. Pressure from a boyfriend or a lack of understanding of the sanctity of human life serve as excuses for an abortion.

Unfortunately those advocating the continued use of abortion fail to tell the whole story about abortion. Abortion can leave emotional scars that can emerge later in

life when the aborted woman is more mature and informed, especially when she realizes a human life was taken.

Unfortunately those advocating the free choice of abortion claim that there is no health risk whatsoever in abortion. But to the contrary, medical complications can result from abortion. In some instances, abortion can result in later problems with infertility. Possible medical complications of abortion are laceration of the cervix, bladder, or bowel, hemorrhaging, perforated uterus, premature births in subsequent pregnancies, sterility, and ectopic pregnancies.² Post-Abortion Syndrome is an emotional disorder in which many women experience guilt over taking their child's life in abortion.

For a small percentage of couples infertility may be the direct result of an abortion. This presents a real spiritual challenge for a couple. The spiritual challenge undoubtedly comes from the resultant guilt of the abortion. When a child is desired in pregnancy, the hidden truth comes to light that a human life was taken in abortion.

This guilt is something that will probably be felt more by a woman than a man. Whether there was any outside pressure to have the abortion or not, she will probably feel that it was her baby and she should not have made the decision to take its life.

There is only one way to deal with the tragedy of guilt due to an abortion. Bring it in sincere repentance to God, asking His forgiveness for Jesus' sake. It really makes no difference whether the abortion was intentional or not, informed or not. It must be confessed and God's forgiving and accepting love in Christ received. This, of course, can be done privately in your personal prayers with God. The preferred approach is to bring it to your pastor. Your pastor knows the devastating anguish of unrepentant sin. "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer" (Psalm 32:3-4).

As Christians, we know that we "stand in God's grace" (Romans 5:2). Therefore, we are always forgiven, whether we have just asked for it or not. But sometimes due to the nature of a particular sin we need to make a verbal confession and hear with our own ears that it has been washed away. There is no one better equipped to make that pronouncement than your pastor, who has been called to be that servant of the gospel. He will confidentially hear your confession. He can take you to your church's altar, and there at the communion rail, announce: "Receive the forgiveness Christ won for you by His Passion, death, and resurrection. By the command of our Lord Jesus Christ I, a

called and ordained servant of the Word, forgive you your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

We are to believe that this word of absolution is as valid as if Christ has said it Himself. Therefore, we are to believe and live as if we are forgiven, for indeed we are forgiven. But sometimes we must hear it said directly to ourselves so that we can believe it.

The question may still remain, however, "Is God punishing me by making me infertile?" The answer is "NO." Remember the word of absolution spoken by the pastor? Jesus suffered and died for all our sins. There is no punishment for sin left for us, "He was crushed for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5).

It is true that sin sometimes brings its physical consequence as a result of that sin. Playing with fire may result in getting burned. However, a consequence of an action does not mean that it is punishment for this action. Knowing that we are forgiven and punishment for all sins, abortion included, has been left at the cross of Christ, there is acceptance. If there is an infertility problem as a consequence, we need not punish ourselves, but look to God for acceptance and ask that He open and heal that hurt.

¹Centers for Disease Control (Atlanta: United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1987), n.p.

²Dr. and Mrs. J. C. Willke, Abortion: Questions and Answers (Cincinnati: Hayes Publishing Co., Inc., 1985), 90-118.

CHAPTER NINE
EUGENIC VOLUNTARY CHILDLESSNESS

Lonnie and Laura have a very difficult decision to make. Laura's mother had died of Huntington's Chorea, a hereditary disease that appears in middle life. It is a progressive deterioration of the central nervous system resulting in devastating physical and mental changes. It finally results in premature death.

Laura is thought to be a carrier of the disease. Statistically her children have a fifty percent chance of carrying the disease. Laura has witnessed how it devastated her family as she personally watched her mother die of Huntington's. She does not want to take a chance of bringing a child into the world that might suffer as did her mother. Additionally, she knows that she could develop the disease herself and become incapable of caring for her own children.

Both Lonnie and Laura would like to have children. They both believe that God has intended marriage to be blessed with children. Should they voluntarily decide to have no children? They wonder if they are being disobedient to God by deciding to not "be fruitful and multiply."

There are a number of couples faced with a decision similar to that of Lonnie and Laura. There are some 6000 disorders that are of genetic origin.¹ Sickle-cell anemia, Tay-Sachs, cystic fibrosis, and hemophilia are just a few hereditary disorders. In addition to hereditary disorders, some couples may feel unable to care for a family due to physical handicap or mental disorder, or pregnancy may pose a serious health threat to the wife. For these couples a hard decision needs to be made.

The first thing that needs to be said is that it is no one's fault that a certain disease or handicap is carried in their genetic make up. As people, we have an amazing capacity for assigning guilt, especially to ourselves. When there is a debilitating disease or problem we may somehow feel that it is our fault. We feel guilty. Jesus tried to deal with a similar feeling when His disciples asked them about a man who was born blind. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus did not choose to speculate on guilt. Rather He said, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, . . .but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (John 9:2,3). We know that the atoning work of Christ on the cross is the payment for all our sin and guilt. "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (I John 2:2).

Jesus' answer to the disciples eliminates the speculation that we or our parents were guilty of some dark sin that caused this to happen. We are all guilty before God, but thankfully Jesus has given His life as the ransom. Now it remains for God's gracious work to be "worked in our lives" as a result of it. Problems, failures, diseases and other burdens today may have no traceable meaning other than they point to the grim truth that we live in a fallen world where our efforts bring forth, "thorns and thistles" (Genesis 3:18-19).

The mandate of Genesis 1 to be "fruitful and multiply" must not be used to bring about a "guilt trip" for a couple concerned about passing along a hereditary disease. A couple can, in good conscience, make a decision not to have children in such circumstances. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations advises that couples deciding not to have children because they "have been advised by a physician that the birth of another child would be hazardous to the health of the mother, or for those who for reasons of age, physical disability, or illness are not able to care for additional children"² need feel no moral constraint to have children. It is advised that a couple not take their decision lightly, but "examine their motives thoroughly and honestly and take care lest their decisions be informed by a desire merely to satisfy selfish interest."³ There is a big

difference between a couple who decides voluntarily to be childless to avoid the risk of continuing a hereditary disease of suffering and a couple who decides not to have children because children don't fit into their lifestyle.

In such situations where couples are faced with the possibility of passing on a genetic disease, genetic counseling is available. A couple may wisely make use of genetic counseling to determine the risk involved with passing along a certain disease. Genetic screening may determine whether a couple will actually pass along such a disease. In some instances, counseling will inform a couple that the disease or defects may be lessened by surgical procedures, medications, hormones and prenatal treatment of the child in utero.⁴

An area of investigation that is exploding onto the health care scene is genetic engineering. The use of genetic engineering would actually make it possible to "alter" the genetic code that would bring about certain hereditary diseases. It is hard to argue against genetic engineering if it could wipe out certain hereditary diseases as Huntington's Chorea. But a couple needs to ask hard moral questions before making use of such procedures. Does the experimentation involve related risks elsewhere? Would an abortion be required if genetic alteration does not go as planned? Does it change our view of the dignity and

integrity of human life? Are we again changing "procreation" into "production." Certainly while much good can come from correcting certain hereditary diseases, we recognize that due to original sin man has an amazing ability to turn things to sinful uses.

After all things are considered, suppose a couple wants to go ahead and have a child knowing there is a 50-50 chance the child will be born with Huntington's or the mother's health is endangered. Such a couple, believing that God desires them to have children, wants to go ahead. They believe that God will take care of them. If the child is born with a problem, it will be a special creation of God, and God will provide. Are we to say that such a couple is foolhardy and "tempting God"? Absolutely not! It is not anyone's position to judge the faith and actions of another. Certainly we know that if there is a fifty percent chance a child will have a disease, there is also a fifty percent chance that he won't.

Ultimately, everything is in God's hands. God adopts us all to be His children by His grace shown us in Christ, whether we have cystic fibrosis or retardation. In making a decision such a couple must be ready to stand by God's decision and be ready and willing to love and care for their child should it happen that it is born with the disorder.

Knowing that God will give them the love and means to care for their child, they can not be faulted.

In the final analysis, a burden of guilt can not be placed on the couple regardless of their decision. Whether they have children or decide it is best not to, the motives need to be carefully examined so that the decision is not in one's selfish interest.

¹John W. Klotz, Men, Medicine and their Maker (University City, Mo.: Torelion Productions, 1991), 125.

²Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective, Report of Social Concerns Committee (n.p., September 1981), 19-20.

³Ibid., 20.

⁴Klotz, 132.

CHAPTER TEN

ADOPTION

Steve and Connie married after college and worked for a couple of years to establish their home. Their plan was to have several children as soon as possible. Connie went off the "pill" and they started trying to have children. However, nothing happened. At first they weren't very concerned, but after about eight months, Connie started to be alarmed. She suspected that there might be a problem. They decided to try for a few more months before going to a physician. After 11 months of trying to become pregnant, Steve and Connie decided to go to the doctor.

They went through the basic infertility workup. There wasn't anything unusual uncovered. Steve and Connie both had adopted children as friends in school. They both had adopted children in their extended families. They felt comfortable with the idea of adopted children, so they decided to get started in the adoption process. They figured they would become parents whichever way happened first--adoption or biological birth.

Many people have turned to adoption as the solution to their infertility. Everyone has heard stories about successful adoptions, but there are those horror stories of the kid who went wrong and caused their adoptive families all kinds of grief. Is adoption something you should consider as a means of becoming parents?

Adoption can have good or bad connotations to you as a couple. Obviously, when you adopt, the genetic code of your family is interrupted. You will not see in your children any genetic heritage. You may not know much medical history of the child you adopt. There may be hereditary diseases or predelections that won't be pleasant to deal with in years to come. For instance, the tendency toward alcoholism seems to be passed on to biological children regardless of the environment they are raised in, and it is characteristic for certain groups of people to have astigmatism that requires glasses to correct.

In recent years, it has become normal for the birth mother, and possibly even the birth father, to meet the adoptive parents, possibly selecting them to be their baby's adoptive parents even before the birth of the child. Even if the adoption is not this open, the birth parent(s) may want to receive photos and letters telling of her baby's development. Other birth parent(s) may not desire any contact at all.

As the adopted child grows, that child will have questions regarding his beginnings and his heredity. This curiosity can range anywhere from mild disinterest to a consuming need to meet the birth parent(s). Would you feel threatened by this curiosity or would you be willing to assist your child in finding his birth parent(s)?

A child that has been adopted at an older age may have many problems that came from his upbringing before the child came to your home. These emotional scars are often harder to heal than physical problems and require someone who is willing to stick with the child and help them, if possible, to overcome them.

Many foreign countries will release their children for adoption in the United States. Would you be willing to graft a different cultural stem to your family tree? What would the impact be upon the child you adopt as well as your immediate and extended family and the community you bring the child to?

Other choices in adoption are the healthy same-race baby or the older, often difficult to place, child. Children are available with various handicaps, from mild to severe, born either in the United States, or in another country. There are children available who were born of drug-addicted or alcoholic birth mothers, or mothers with AIDS. Children with health problems often require medical

attention that may strain your budget to a point that you could come to resent.

Before a decision is made to adopt, prospective adoptive parents need to face these and other issues and try to anticipate what their reactions will be when these issues arise. An adopted child is an adopted child for life.

The wait for a healthy caucasian infant can be years. If you would be open to adopting a foreign child, an older child, or one with handicaps or disabilities, the waiting period would be cut dramatically. This course should not be pursued unless you have the financial and emotional resources to handle these more difficult situations.

In contemplating whether adoption is a route that is open to you, consider these thoughts--Jesus was raised by Joseph, a man who was not his biological relative. Moses, as an adopted child, was placed in a position that God used to bring His people out of slavery. Queen Esther was raised by her cousin, Mordecai. The Bible talks about us as receiving "the adoption as sons" (Romans 8:23, Galatians 3:26-27) in our Baptism. Scripture here is using the term "adoption" in a redemptive sense. We have been redeemed by Christ to be made co-heirs along with Christ who is the rightful heir. Scripture's use of the term "adoption" here in the redemptive sense shows a recognition and acceptance of adoption in an earthly familial sense. We can be

confident that God approves of adoption and that He uses it to bless families with children.

For centuries, adoption has been a successful way of raising children whose parents were unable to raise them. In our own nation's history, children were raised by aunts, uncles, grandparents, or anyone else that was available, in case of death or disability of one or both of the parents. Of course, there are stories of adopted kids gone wrong, but aren't there also stories of biological kids gone wrong? There is the old adage, "Everyone loves a baby," and this is because babies are often times very easy to love. Could you love a baby or an older child that you have not given birth to yourself? You are not now nor will you ever be biologically related to your spouse, yet you love them as completely as you love yourself.

Could you parent a "special needs" child (a question that you have no choice about when parenting biologically). The world is full of babies and older children who have virtually no possibility of leading a normal life. Some AIDS babies will never see the outside of the hospital in which they were born. Children born in some Third World Countries with a cleft palet will die because the surgical resources are not available to them. In the United States this could be surgically corrected. There are children who are blind, deaf, and crippled, who are mentally retarded due

to birth defects such as Down's Syndrome, or alcohol and drug usage by their birth mother. There are children who have been physically, sexually, or mentally abused.

"Special needs" children are available. However, you should proceed cautiously and not rely on a shorter waiting time as the determining criterion for adoption. These children will require an extra measure of compassion and understanding as they learn to relate to a person who treats them differently from what they are used to. Not only may this require time and patience, but also a sizable financial outpouring for physicians and various therapists.

If you have considered the type of child which you would be willing to parent, you also need to consider what the reaction of your parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and friends will be to an adopted child. It's important to find out before you adopt if there are any prejudices in your family that would cause your new child to be treated as an outcast. Most importantly, you should evaluate your own opinions about adoption and adopted children. Do you feel that adoption is a second-best option, or that adopted children aren't "real" children? Is your goal to be parents or to have a biological child? Can you cope with insensitive comments from people like: "You had your baby the easy way," or "I think it's so wonderful of you to adopt a child. I could never do it!"?

Adoption can bring a child into your home. It does not solve the problem of infertility. If you adopt, you will have a child in your home, but the husband will still have to deal with feelings of impotence. He may feel a lack of manliness in his inability to produce a biological son or daughter. Women may feel cheated of the experience of feeling the child grow in her body, kicking and squirming. She may regret never having gone through labor and delivery. She may never have the experience of nursing a baby from her own breasts. When all her friends gather together and exchange their "war stories" about their deliveries, she will only have stories about the telephone call from the agency and the trip to pick up the child.

It is extremely important to realistically assess what you can and can't handle as parents. You do not need to feel badly if you have evaluated your talents, your financial resources, and your expectations of your children, and feel that you cannot handle a "special needs" adoption, or even a healthy infant adoption.

If you have prayerfully considered the possibility of adoption and decide to go ahead with it, you will need to contact a social service agency. Don't be surprised if you are told the wait will be seven years or longer. Some agencies require that you have your name on file only at their agency and that you are not pursuing adoption through

other channels. You will be asked what type of child you would be able to parent. You can be as specific as you care to be about sex, ethnic background, eye and hair color, and so forth. Be aware that the more specific you are, the longer your wait is likely to be. You will also be asked how open you are willing to be with the birth parent(s). Will you be willing to meet with them and/or share information and photos of your child as he/she grows?

Some lawyers will do private adoptions, not working through agencies. There are certain risks involved with this type of adoption that you need to become aware of before you would pursue this route. You should become familiar with your state laws concerning private adoptions.

If you choose to pursue an international adoption, your social service agency should be able to provide you with a list of agencies that are currently placing children. Some countries are easier to work with than others. If a country is involved in war, that country can be an unstable source of children available for adoption as the country's government may be unpredictable or unreliable.

If after prayerful consideration, one or the other or both of you feel that you could not parent an adopted child, then it is best to abandon this option. Adoption is a life-long commitment and you should both enter into it willingly without external pressure.

Adoption is a very positive solution for couples seeking to become parents. From personal experience, I can assure you that an adopted child is the product of the love of his adoptive parents in a very real sense. When adopting a child, you are, in a sense, "pregnant" with a baby, but you have no clue as to the due date and may not have a definite idea of how old the child will be when it's "born" into your family. When that child arrives, the joy is as real and genuine, and the love as complete and overwhelming as if the child were borne from your own bodies. As the child grows, against all hereditary principles, you will see similarities to yourself in physical features, temperament, talents, and personality. Even people who know you may comment on how much your child looks like you. Strangers in the grocery store will ask you how you ended up with a red-headed freckle-faced daughter when you obviously have brown hair and eyes. And you smile at them and say, "God gave her to me," and you mean it completely and feel happy and content in the knowledge that this is true and you have been blessed.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ACCEPTANCE OF INFERTILITY

Howard and Evelyn are now in their mid-sixties. They have been married for forty years and have never been blessed with any children. In the days when they were trying to start a family there were not the medical specialists in the field of infertility as there are today. Howard and Evelyn never really pursued the option of adoption. They always assumed that one day they would have children, but the blessing of children never came. Both Howard and Evelyn really loved and wanted children. Over the years, they have involved themselves with neighborhood children and their nieces and nephews. But it still isn't like having children of their own. They have also involved themselves in work. They are especially busy caring for elderly members of their extended family, and of course, they are quite involved with church activities. They had found fulfillment in many different ways, but would have liked to have had children.

Howard and Evelyn are quite satisfied and content with their life. When asked if they regret not being able to have children, they say, "Oh, yes, we sure would like to have had children, but we know that it is God's will for it

to be this way. We are content with our situation. It just wasn't meant to be," they say.

Most childless couples today don't understand how there could actually be a couple like Howard and Evelyn. Acceptance of infertility and living a life without the blessing of children seems so impossible.

In this concluding chapter Scriptural guidance for coming to acceptance of infertility will be explored and offered for your consideration. Not every couple who goes to infertility clinics will conceive and give birth to a child. Many of the alternatives--adoption, artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, or surrogate mothering--don't really answer the problem of infertility, but simply bring the results of a child. Even in such instances there must be acceptance of infertility.

A number of years ago, it was discovered that there are certain steps to work through in the grieving process. Unless one worked through these steps, one could never arrive at acceptance. It has been learned that these steps need to be worked through in many situations of loss in addition to death. In the case of infertility, there is a very real loss. It is a loss of being able to parent a child. There is the loss of a child that one never was able to have. With that loss comes the loss of many hopes, experiences of joy, dreams and plans for the future. There

is the baby, the birth, the Baptism, and the birthday parties that have never come to be. It is a reality that few people can understand unless they themselves have experienced it. But as there is a very real human reaction to the physical death of a loved one, there is a real reaction to the loss of fertility. Couples must work through the steps for handling grief if they ever hope to re-enter life and live a joyful and content life. They must follow the steps that lead to acceptance.

The steps may not become manifest in this exact order for each couple. You will also find that one step may be harder than another step for you or harder than for some other couples, but probably the steps will occur in one fashion or another. Remember that at the end of the steps there is a contented life waiting for you.

Shock/Denial

The first step is SHOCK/DENIAL. It seems that every couple finds it hard to believe that they are incapable of having children. Having children is something that is supposed to happen. "I've got all the equipment for making babies--why doesn't it work? Others who don't want to have kids can conceive them in the back seat of a car on the first date--why can't we?" The effects of shock and denial are great. While many couples go to doctors and fertility clinics, many don't. The "I can't believe that this is

happening to me" syndrome takes over. Denial of the problem will not be a solution nor will it enable you to come to acceptance.

Loneliness/Depression

The second step is LONELINESS/DEPRESSION. Couples have to deal with the constant reminders of their childlessness. Everywhere we turn, except in places such as Sun City, Arizona, there are children. At the office the other women complain about their children. They say, "Some days, I'd just like to send them all away. But you, Emily, don't have to worry about all these things. You're lucky!" You think they don't know what they are saying. You would give up everything just to have a baby. You feel alone and depressed. Not even your family seems to understand your problem.

Panic

The third step is PANIC. The biological clock is ticking, and you know it, but the doctor doesn't seem to recognize it. He says, "You've only been trying for a year and half." "Keep these charts for nine months." "We'll need to just wait a year before taking the next step." In the meantime, every monthly cycle brings a major emotional eruption with plenty of tears. There is a panic that unless you do something now it will be too late. Perhaps you ought

to go to another doctor or specialist or clinic. There is panic about the loss of time at work and the bills that insurance won't pay. There is a panic that your life and even your marriage is going to crash unless there is an answer forthcoming. There is a panic of just not knowing what to do.

Guilt

The fourth step is GUILT. There must be something that you've done in the past to deserve this "curse". Perhaps it was your spouse that did something in childhood, in the teenage years, or in earlier dating. Perhaps earlier you didn't want children because "they were a nuisance." "We shouldn't have used the pill earlier. Now we are paying for our desire to get ahead."

When man is plagued by guilt, blame is very close at hand. Sexuality is no longer an expression of love for each other. It is a chore like the trash needing to be taken out. It must be done on certain days. "If only I had married another person." "If only I had thought about having children earlier." "If only I had not made fun of other families with children." "If only. . . ." The "if only's" of guilt continue on and on. This guilt makes you feel hopeless, no good, and totally unloveable by yourself, your spouse, and God.

Anger/Resentment

The fifth step is ANGER/RESENTMENT. When the dust has all settled, you are angry about your situation. Others who don't want children or care for children can have them without any trouble. It's not fair. Your anger finds expression when the good news comes in the office, "Guess what! Beth is pregnant." You know you ought to be happy, but you are angry. She already has three children, and she never stops complaining about them. You are angry at the doctors who seem to be so insensitive. You are angry at your family who don't seem to understand. You find your anger being expressed even at your spouse. "When I want to talk about our problems, all he can think about are his golf scores."

Yes, you know it is so, but you don't want to face it-- you are angry at God. "God, why have you done this to me!" "It's not fair." "You know I desire nothing more than to have a child to love. Why aren't you letting me have a child?" The "we" becomes "me" as self-centeredness takes over and shuts your spouse out.

Your anger makes you uncomfortable about yourself, and you know it, but can't seem to do anything about it. You know that you are like a firecracker with a short fuse. You are ready to explode at any time.

Along with your anger, there is a closely related catalog of resentments. You are not proud of these

resentments, but they are there. Ashamed to admit it, many of your resentments are toward family and friends who so freely have children. These resentments seem uncontrollable. They are triggered by seeing people with children, TV commercials for diapers or toys, Mother's Day cards at the Hallmark store, and so forth. Anger and resentments combine to give a very sour outlook on life.

Hope

The sixth step is HOPE. Some days seem to be okay. You are sure that the next period will not come as usual and you'll be off to buy a home pregnancy test kit. You are also sure that if it doesn't happen, your life won't fall apart. You have your spouse, your extended family, friends and neighbors. You'll make it. There are many ways to find satisfaction in life, and to listen to lots of your friends talk about it, parenthood isn't everything it is cracked up to be anyway. But above all, your faith in God is bringing support. God's sacrificial love in Christ brings the confidence that "everything will work out for good." It is so good to have hope.

Sometimes the hope stems from little things. There may be a feeling that next time it will happen. There may be a word of encouragement from the doctor. It may just be the kind word of interest and friendship of a co-worker. But none-the-less, the hope is a very welcomed commodity. The

hope that comes to brighten spirits can also disappear just as quickly as it came. Sometimes the hope turns out to be a real let down. A period is missed and right away, even though we don't want to get "hopes up" we're off to "Toys 'R Us" to buy an infant car seat. Then a month later the spotting begins and the hope has evaporated like the morning dew. Hope is so beautiful and essential to our life.

Return to Normal

The seventh and final step is to RETURN TO NORMAL. At some point a couple with infertility has to move beyond trying to have children. There must be a point at which there is an acceptance. A couple and a marriage can not withstand the high tension roller coaster ride of monthly emotional heartbreak.

Making this decision does not mean that now we no longer want children, but it means an acceptance. We have done all that we can do. Now we are going to go on with the rest of our life. Life has to consist of more than temperature charts, surgeries, hormone therapies, and an emotional state of "meltdown." Sure, we will gladly welcome a child, but we are putting an end to our active action plan to become parents.

Couples find a lot of relief when they reach the point for making this decision. It allows them to "grieve" over this dilemma and then go on. Their energy and purpose can

be focused in other directions that are more attainable and therefore, bring satisfaction. There is a sense of peace that comes over them. Now they are more free to enjoy each other, friends, other children, and above all, their relationship with God. As we go back to the concept of marriage and spouses as "gifts" to each other, they may find a real gift of satisfaction in a place that they had never expected to find one.

It is necessary for a couple to work through these steps of grief just as if they had experienced the death of a loved one. Once again, infertility is the death of being able to bear a child. There is no magical way of working through these steps. People do it in different ways, different lengths of time, and in different orders of sequence. The important point is to work through the steps and not get stuck on one step forever. It is always easier to work through the steps together. Husbands and wives can work through them together. Many who have experienced the same problem are ready to help you. They are eager to tell of their experience, and will share what helped them. A Christian pastor stands ready to hear your disappointments and heartbreaks. He is also ready to bring the healing balm of God's love to your heartache. You can work through the steps of grief. There is light at the end of the tunnel. It is true that your sorrow over never having a child might

not be taken away, but acceptance of your situation can lead to a calm serenity and ". . .the peace which surpasses all understanding."

Above all, God stands at our door and knocks. He is ready to lead us to a point of acceptance of our life, whether it is a life with biological children, adopted children, or no children. God's Word is the guide that leads through the questions, doubts, hurts, anger, and brings us to acceptance. The Scripture leads us to acceptance, not because it is a handbook of seven steps to acceptance, but because it introduces, brings, and builds our relationship with Jesus. Therefore, the more we study the written Word of God, the more we know the living, dynamic and incarnate Word of God--Christ--our Savior. In Christ, we come to fully know the love that God has for us. Through Christ, we come to have a living relationship with God.

Scripture leads us through steps of acceptance because they meet us right where we are. The message of Scripture is not a "fairy-tale" message of "once upon a time in . . .never never land." But they are the words of God to us in space, time, and history. The people, places and events of Scripture are real. They are a record of God's dealing with real people as we are real people. The reality of this world is well explained in Genesis 3: "By the sweat of your

brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3:18,19).

The reality of our lives in this world is a reality that is plagued by sin. Our life in this world is marred by sin and raises its ugly head in many ways. We need not be surprised by the fact that there are troubles. Some in the business of "prosperity theology" want us to believe that this life is be a rose garden. If everything is not good, then there must be a reason--an unconfessed sin, lack of faith, insincerity or lack of devotion. The message is proclaimed that if we just tug the right ropes, God will bless us with everything our heart desires.

Scripture meets us with the reality of life that everything is not always going to be good, even for the devout believer. There are "thorns and thistles" and "heartaches and disappointments" sometimes for no other reason than that we live in a fallen world. There is no blame, no guilt, no crush of the law, that we haven't been good enough, just the fact that it is a sinful world we live in. It is a world that is "groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (Romans 8:22). This reality of the present world enables us to deal with the shock and denial of our own situation. It is not necessarily our fault or anyone else's fault. We don't have

to search hard to find some deep fault within ourselves or our spouse to explain this "run of hard luck." Scripture enables us to begin with the hard reality of life in this fallen world.

The Scriptures bring us to the point of dealing with loneliness and depression. It doesn't present a "pie-in-the-sky" religion, but shows that we are never alone. God knows our every thought and certainly every disappointment. God chose not to leave us alone but has "made himself flesh" that He might take upon Himself our every sin and all our hurts and disappointments. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Often we feel like no one knows how we are feeling. It is probably true of other people, perhaps even our spouse. But we know it is not true of God. God knows exactly how we feel. God has already been there in the atonement of Christ. The passage continues, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). God invites us to share our loneliness with Him. He knows how we feel, and like a loving Father is ready to sympathize. We are not and never will be alone through God's grace, because on the cross Jesus was "raised up between heaven and earth" in our

stead. Alone on the cross, Jesus said, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). Matthew, therefore, concludes his gospel with Jesus' words, "And surely, I am with you always to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Surely then when we think of our panic about time running out or nothing else we can do, we know that God has everything in His hands. "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matthew 6:26-27). Our panic can subside, not because we have tugged the right ropes or said the right phrases but because we are convinced that God is in control. Like a loving Father, He will work everything to our good. What a relief it is when we come to this recognition. It is not what I am doing that makes the difference, but it is what God has already done in Christ that makes all the difference. We now pray, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." We know that it is being done each day, as the Gospel has its way in the lives of people. We also confess, "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

Scripture leads us to know and believe what God has done with guilt. Our sin is ever before us. The law works full time to point out our sin. We feel guilty for we know that we have broken God's law. God's answer is not to

ignore our guilt or for us to work at self-justification by saying, "Well, I am as good as everyone else." God has chosen to do away with our guilt. Isaiah 53 prophecies the work of the Messiah with pinpoint accuracy. It tells us that the Savior was "pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). The payment for our sins was no little matter. God placed them upon His "only-begotten Son."

We have been talking about the importance of procreation. What would you sell a child for? Why, no amount of money would be enough. That is exactly the point in God giving His "only-begotten." There is nothing more important or valuable. By God giving His "only-begotten Son," God has shown us that there is absolutely nothing that He won't do to accomplish our salvation. For those of us whose desire of the heart is to have an "only-begotten" child in our marriage union, God's giving of His "only-begotten" speaks volumes of His love. Think of your desire to have a child, what you would give for a child, what you would do to keep a child. Then realize that God "gave his only-begotten for you." "By God's grace through faith" our sins are washed away--there is no more guilt. As far as trying to assign guilt to spouse, doctors, parents, or whomever, we are now set free. We are not guilty ourselves,

and we don't have to make anyone else feel guilty. This is the freedom that Jesus spoke about: "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

God's Word ushers us into a secure relationship with God so that we can express our anger and resentment. We know that God will hear our sorrows and not cast us out. The fact that we are "saved" doesn't mean that we are going to have a "heavenly smile" plastered on our face day in and day out. There are going to be many hardships and crosses to bear. God wants us to bring them to Him. As children of God we are secure in our relationship with God so that we know we don't have to bring our prayer in theologically approved King James language. God invites us to bring our troubles no matter how ugly they may be. As Luther supposedly said, God loves us "warts and all." God will not be offended if we "question" Him. The process of questioning may exercise our relationship with Him. Job questioned God: "Why did I not perish at birth and as I came from the womb?" (Job 3:11). God did not vaporize Job for uttering such a statement. If you believe your infertility is "unfair," God wants to hear from you. God knows how we feel already. "Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24). Habakkuk complained to God, "How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?" (Habakkuk 1:2).

God invites you to bring your anger and resentments. God wants to hear them so that He can show you that He is not just a God of the good times but also a God in the dark and difficult times. God will show you that He is a God over the troubles that plague you as well. God answered Job with the words, "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2). God proclaimed His divinity over Job and all of the creation. God never answered Job directly why all his misfortune had happened, but God proclaimed to Job that He is still God over all. It brought Job peace, as Job said, "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2). Unless, like Job, Habakkuk and others, you can express your anger and sorrow to God, God can not answer you with the assurance that He is still God over all. Having expressed your anger, it loses its power over your lives to turn everything sour.

Scriptures bring you to a conviction of hope. As previously stated this conviction of hope is not a wishy washy possibility if everything goes okay. This hope is a certainty based on God's promise. We have been born into a "living hope": "In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). As Christians, we share in a hope that is "alive." This hope is the sure and

certain promise, that as Christ was raised from the dead by the power of the Father, so also on the last day, we will also be raised from the dead, by God's grace through faith. This is a living hope that is dependent totally upon God and His power. It isn't subject to change or withdrawal. Other hopes may vanish with changing times, but not this living hope.

Now to be sure this hope is not the unconditional promise of a "rich-uncle-in-the-sky" who will fix everything if you just believe hard enough, pray hard enough, or submit totally. This hope is the certainty that God has your best interest totally at heart. God has demonstrated His interest in your welfare by the giving of His son. Based on this action, there is real hope. When the real hope of God's love controls your lives, then you have hope for all other things as well. You are able to go on and live, knowing that God is with you. Your Christian hope continues. The ultimate realization of your hope (faith), life with God in heaven, is still in the future, but you hope for it. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). It will come as God has promised. "But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently"

(Romans 8:24-25). With this ultimate hope, we go on and live.

The relationship with Christ brought through His Word and the Sacraments brings you to a point where you can live a healthy life in this world, regardless of "unhealthy" circumstances. Knowing God's love shown to us through Christ, it is possible to accept any circumstance as a "gift" from God. We may have in mind a family of children. God may have that "gift" in mind. He may have an entirely different "gift" in mind. It might be a "gift" that we would not have chosen for ourselves. But when, trusting in God's love for us, He "gifts" us, we will be blessed. There is absolutely no limitation to the ways in which God can "gift" us. There is also no limitation to the ways in which our perspective can be changed to receive and enjoy unexpected "gifts." If it looks like children are not going to be a "gift" in your life, then you do not so much set out to find something to compensate for the lack of children but come to God and say, "Lord, you have not gifted me with children. Lead me to what gift you have in mind that will give my marriage and life satisfaction and contentment."

God will lead down unexpected paths. It might be volunteer involvement with children in the church or community; it might be (surprisingly) work with the elderly; it might be caring for a neighbor; it might be a new

vocation of service; or it might be something totally different. That is the way it is with God's gifts--they are gifts. Children are a gift! They are given, not assembled, produced and owned. They are gifts to be enjoyed for a short time, and then let go. Childlessness, if it is laid upon a couple by God, is also a gift for that couple. It is a gift that opens other avenues that may not be present for families with children. The exciting thing about this gift will be discovering, as a couple, what God has in mind for the purpose of your married life together. This attitude of "gift" can only come about as we know the depth of God's love for us in His greatest "gift," Jesus.

"And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). Here is the gift that every couple struggling with infertility needs most--"the peace of God." May God graciously give you His peace to lead you in all the decisions of your life.

PRAYERS AND SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

For many Christian couples struggling with infertility, it may be difficult to use the Scriptures as a spiritual resource because of a lack of familiarity. In addition, sometimes it may be difficult to pray because the prayers may be difficult to compose. The following section is offered as an addendum to provide possible Scripture passages for spiritual strength and meditation. Prayers are offered for various situations as a starting point for your own prayer life.

Prayers for the Blessing of Children

I.

Gracious Father in heaven, You have chosen to give Your only-begotten Son, Jesus, to be born of a woman, Mary. We pray bless our marriage with the gift of a child. We seek this special blessing knowing that a child brings life-long responsibility. For whatever reason, children seem to be out of reach in our marriage. As You were able to "open" the womb of Sarah, Rachel, Hannah and others, so we pray that you would "open the womb" for the blessing of children.

Father, give us patience and faith to wait for Your answer. Enable us to grow in our marriage relationship during this time, and above all, to grow in faith toward Your Gospel promise of salvation. In the name of Christ, our Savior, in accord with Your will. Amen.

II.

Dear God, you have invited us to pray and bring our petitions big and small. We know Your love for us in Christ, and we call you Father, through our adoption in Baptism. As we have been joined to be husband and wife, bless our marriage with the gift of children. Give us children that we might show our love, as You have loved us in Christ. Give us patience as we wait, and take away our disappointment as each month passes by without any conception. Give us faith in Your love for us so that we can commit this into Your hands for Your answer. In Jesus' name. Amen.

III.

Almighty God, since You have granted us the favor to call on You with one accord and have promised that where two or three are gathered together in Your name You are in the midst of them, fulfill now the prayers of Your servants, granting us in this world knowledge of Your truth and in the world to come life everlasting; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.¹

IV.

Father in heaven, whose family fills both heaven and earth, give us, we pray You, in the name of Your dear Child and our Savior, divine wisdom and direction as we plan our family. Conception and birth, life and death, are in Your hands. We are tools to be used to fulfill Your purposes. Make us, in our thoughts, words, and deeds worthy of this privilege and service. Amen.²

V.

Dear Father in heaven, our Creator and Preserver, You alone are the Giver of every good and perfect gift. In your time, and according to Your will, crown our marriage with the richest of blessings--children. We talk to You about children in the name of your Child, our Lord and Savior. Amen.³

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES: Genesis 1:27-31; 2:20b-25; 9:1-7; 18:1-15; 21:1-7; 29:31-30:24; Judges 13; I Samuel 1; 2; Psalm 1; 23, 25, 27, 113, 121, 127, 128; Luke 1:5-25; 1:57-66

Prayers to Strengthen
Infertile Married Couples

I.

Dear heavenly Father, in whose name we have been baptized, and in whose name we have been joined to be husband and wife. We thank You for the blessing of our marriage. To be joined to my "helpmate" is Your "gift" to me. During this difficult time of trying to have children, give me understanding of my spouse's feelings. Give us both patience and a desire to understand each other. Use this as a time for us to grow closer together as husband and wife.

As You have forgiven us freely by Your grace through faith in Christ, so enable to us deal graciously with each other, not finding fault or blaming, but showing acceptance as You accept us.

Enable us to grow together, through the power of Your holy Word. Teach us Your wisdom that we might live honorably as husband and wife. Give us the mind of Christ, that we might look at each other with humility. To this end, we pray Your blessing upon our marriage. In Jesus' name. Amen.

II.

Dear heavenly Father, we come to You with our petitions of supplication in Jesus' name. Hear them and answer them in accord with Your good for our lives. You have blessed our marriage and joined us to be husband and wife. Our marriage is strained by the disappointment of not being able to have children. Give us extra understanding for each other. Take away our temptation to blame each other, and make one another feel guilty. Instead enable us to build each other up in the love that You have shown us in Jesus. Give us a constant and unfailing hope that all things do work together for good. In Jesus' name. Amen.

III.

Dear Savior we pray that You give us in our marriage an abundance of Your perfect love. Only then will we have the patience, kindness, and unselfishness so necessary for a happy and successful marriage. When our love fails and we

become intolerant of the weaknesses of the other, turn us to You for forgiveness and strength. Amen.⁴

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES: Genesis 50:15-21; Romans 8:28-39; Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Hebrews 12:1-13; James 1:2-18; 5:7-11; I Peter 1:3-9

Prayers to Bless Medical Treatment

I.

Loving Father, and our Father, through Jesus Christ. Praise be to You for showing Yourself to us in the work and ministry of Jesus, our Savior. You have ordained that man and woman live together in the estate of marriage. You have also commanded couples "to be fruitful and multiply." As we are joined to be husband and wife, we pray now bless the medical treatments, make our bodies fruitful for procreation of children. Give our doctor the skill and understanding to both diagnose and treat our infertility. Use the blessing of medicine to give us the blessing of a child. Enable us to always know that You stand behind the doctor as the great physician of life.

We thank You that Christ has come as the great spiritual physician to seek and save the lost. Increase our faith in Him that through all things we will be counted among those who believe in Him. Give us patience to wait as we wait on You. In the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

II.

Our gracious Father in heaven, You have invited us to call on You in the day of trouble. You have asked us to commit our way unto You and You will bring it to pass. We pray bless the medical procedures that through them You will have the opportunity to give us the blessing of a child. Enable us to look beyond the practice of medicine to Your healing hand for our every need. Give us a spirit of trust knowing that with You all things are possible. To this end, we pray Your blessing. In Jesus' name. Amen.

III.

Almighty God, unless you build the house, they labor in vain who build it. Lord, we pray bless these medical procedures that they not be in vain but give us the blessing of a child. Enable us to boldly believe that You can do all

things. Enable us to bravely accept Your will and trust Your decision. In the name of our Lord Jesus, we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES: Psalm 27; 37:1-7; 91; 102; 1-2; 119:145-152; Matthew 7:7-12; Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-8; James 5:13-18

Prayers for Wisdom
In Use of Reproductive Technologies

I.

Father of all mercy, You have shown Yourself to us through the wonders of creation but You have chiefly revealed Yourself through the giving of a child, your Son, our Savior, Jesus. We give You thanks for the gracious redemption that is ours through Jesus. Enable us to treasure our Lord more than anything else.

In our desire to be parents, give us wisdom to make right decisions for the use of modern technology. Keep our minds clear to make decisions according to Your will and not our selfish desires. As we weigh options help us to remember the distinctive "two-flesh" union of marriage into "one flesh," that children are Your gifts to us, and the sanctity of life. Enable to us to make decisions that will not violate Your will regarding marriage, human life, sexuality, and children.

Give us honest, skillful, and righteous doctors who will be truthful in providing us with guidance. Give us understanding to ask the right questions. Call to mind our understanding of Scripture that we might have the basis of making good decisions. To this end we ask Your blessing in the name of our Savior, Jesus. Amen.

II.

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with Your most gracious favor and further us with Your continual help that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in You, we may glorify Your holy name and finally, by Your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.⁵

III.

Lord God, You taught the hearts of Your faithful people by sending them the light of Your Holy Spirit. Grant that we, by Your Spirit, may have a right judgment in all things and evermore rejoice in His holy counsel; though your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.⁶

IV.

Renew me, O eternal light,
And let my heart and soul be bright,
Illumined with the light of grace
That issues from your holy face.

Grant that I only you may love
And seek those things which are above
Till I behold you face to face,
O Light eternal, through your grace. Amen.⁷

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES: Psalm 119:73; 139; Isaiah 49:5;
Jeremiah 1:4-5; I Corinthians 2; 6:12-20; Colossians 3;
James 3:13-18

Prayers after Miscarriage

I.

Good and gracious Father in heaven, and our Father through Jesus, our Lord. Our hearts are broken because of the loss of our little child. You know we have desired a baby so much to bless our marriage. With the hope of this child, our hearts were filled with joy. But now there is great sadness. We do not understand your ways and decisions. Give us understanding and acceptance of Your will to call our unborn baby from us. We commit our child into Your loving hands. May we be comforted with the truth that Your love is shown to all mankind in Christ. Give us Your peace that surpasses all understanding. In Jesus' name. Amen.

II.

Loving Father in heaven, hear our prayer of sorrow for Jesus' sake. You have promised to not leave us as orphans. Because of our loss of this special little life, we feel

orphaned from Your love. We do not understand why things are the way they are. Even though unborn, our little one was loved by us. It gives us comfort and encouragement that we are known by You from conception, even from the beginning of time. Therefore, we commend our little one into Your loving hands to receive and bless. Comfort us with Your invitation, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." As our Savior, Jesus, commended Himself into Your hands on the cross, so we commend our child. Give us peace and assure us that we are adopted into Your family by Your grace through faith in Christ. In time, enable us to understand and accept Your ways. In Jesus' name. Amen.

III.

I am Jesus' little lamb, ever glad at heart I am;
For my Shepherd gently guides me,
Knows my needs and well provides me,
Loves me every day the same, even calls me by my name.

Day by day, at home, away, Jesus is my staff and stay. When
I hunger, Jesus feeds me,
Into pleasant pastures leads me;
When I thirst, he bids me go where the quiet waters flow.

Who so happy as I am, even now the Shepherd's lamb?
And when my short life is ended,
By his angel host attended, He shall fold me
to his breast, There within his arms to rest. Amen.⁸

IV.

Be still, my soul; the Lord is on your side;
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
Leave to your God to order and provide;
In eve'ry change he faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul; your best, your heav'nly Friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul; though dearest friends depart
And all is darkened in the vail of tears;
Then you will better know his love, his heart,
Who comes to soothe your sorrow and your fears.
Be still, my soul; your Jesus can repay
From his own fullness all he takes away.

Be still, my soul; the hour is hast'ning on
When shall be forever with the Lord,

When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul; when change and tears are past,
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last. Amen.⁹

V.

Jesus lives! The vict'ry's won!
Death no longer can appall me;
Jesus lives! Death's reign is done!
From the grave will Christ recall me.
Brighter scenes will then commence;
This shall be my confidence.

Jesus lives! And I am sure
Neither life nor death shall sever Me from Him.
I shall endure in his love,
through death, forever.
God will be my sure defense;
This shall be my confidence.

Jesus lives! And now is death
But the gate of life immortal;
This shall calm my trembling breath
When I pass its gloomy portal.
Faith shall cry, as fails each sense;
Jesus is my confidence! Amen.¹⁰

VI.

Almighty God, by the death of Your dear Son, You
overcame death and redeemed and saved little children no
less than others. By Your rising from death You restored
everlasting life that by the power of Your resurrection our
mortal bodies may also be raised from the dead to eternal
life. Grant that we may ever confidently believe this and
finally with all Your saints be partakers of this joyful
resurrection; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.¹¹

VII.

Almighty and eternal God, our hopes have been turned to
sorrow. You gave, and You have taken away. As the heavens
are higher than the earth, so are Your ways higher than our
ways and Your thoughts higher than our thoughts. Help us,
Father, also in this time of sadness to trust in You.
Strengthen our faith into whose life You have allowed this
sorrow to come. Teach us to depend on Your boundless mercy

and to trust that this little one has been invited into the arms of Your Son. Grant us, that we may also come at last into the heavenly kingdom of Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.¹²

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES: Psalm 23; 27; 46; 121; 139; Jeremiah 1:4-5; Mark 5:21-43; 10:13-16; Luke 17:11-17; 9:46-48; 18:15-17; John 11:17-27; I Corinthians 15; II Corinthians 5:1-10; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; I John 3:1-3

Prayers for Adoption

I.

"Abba Father," we pray because You have adopted us into Your holy family through the work of our brother Jesus. We ask that You would increase our faith that we are, indeed, co-heirs of sonship along with Christ and have an eternal inheritance in heaven.

It seems due to Your will that we are unable to have children according to the natural union of our marriage. We pray for the opportunity to be parents of a child through adoption. We pray where there is a child who needs parents to bring it up that we have the opportunity to be parents. Give us the love and acceptance of such a child, so that we might accept it as a child of our own flesh and blood.

In the process of working through a very painful decision, we ask You to be with a birth mother and birth father who have to work through a difficult decision. Give them wisdom and love to make a decision that is for the welfare of their child. As they will grieve over the decision to place their child for adoption, may there be an opportunity for the Gospel of Your love to bring them real peace.

Enable us to know that every child, whether of natural union or adoption, is Your child to be raised in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Give us wisdom to be committed parents. We bring these petitions in the name of Lord.
Amen.

II.

Merciful Father, because of your great love revealed in Christ, you called us to the household of faith in your Son Jesus, our Savior, and chose us to be Your own dear

children. Grant Your blessing to Your people who take children into their homes and families that, loving them as their own, they may nurture them as your own; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.¹³

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES: Exodus 2:1-10; Hosea 1; Mark 3:31-35; Galatians 3:26-4:7

Prayers to Rejoice with Others
In the Gift of Their Children

I.

Loving Father in heaven, Your mercies are new to me every day. Open my eyes to the many blessings that You have showered upon me that I would not be envious or jealous of the blessings that You give others.

It is hard for me to rejoice when others experience the blessing of pregnancy. It so often seems unfair. Others may not want a child as I do and yet they seem to be able to have a child so easily. I am envious and jealous although I don't really want to be. I ask Your forgiveness for not being able to rejoice in the blessing of others as I ought. For Jesus' sake, wash me clean of my narrow and selfish thoughts. Give me a heart that is as full of love as Yours is toward us all. Teach me that my envy really is a questioning of Your decision for my life.

Rather than being upset with the good news of others, enable me to rejoice with them and give You thanks for their blessing. I pray according to Your will that yet one more blessing might come into my marriage--the gift of a child. Into Your hands I lay this petition, and pray your answer, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

II.

Visit, we implore you, O Lord, the homes in which your people dwell, and keep far from them all harm and danger. Grant us to dwell together in peace under the protection of your holy angels, and may your blessing be with us forever; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.¹⁴

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES: I Kings 21; Psalm 73; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 18:15-17; Philipppians 4:4-9; I Timothy 6:6-10

Prayers for the
Acceptance of Infertility

I.

Almighty God, our creator and maker, fill us with the cup of salvation, that we might rejoice in all things. We have prayed and prayed that the blessing of a child might come to our marriage. We know and trust that You can do all things, for nothing is impossible with You.

We have exhausted all the possibilities for having a child, and yet we have none. Take away our disappointment in being childless. Give us the understanding "that all things work together for good, to those that love You and are called according to Your purposes."

Lord, we know that Your ways are not our ways, and now we see but dimly. Whether we are to be parents or not, we leave it entirely in Your hands. We have been led to the conclusion that it is Your will that we find Your special "gift" for our marriage in another way than children. We leave this matter entirely in your hands. We are done trying extrarodinary means to have a child. We still pray Your blessing, but we leave it in Your hands. Give us peace that as our loving Father You give only that which is best.

Open our hearts to greater understanding of Your love for us in Christ, that we might understand and accept being childless. Comfort us with the truth that Jesus, our Savior, knows and understands our every heartache. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

II.

O Lord God Almighty, since You bless Your servants with various and unusual gifts of the Holy Spirit, grant us grace to use them always to Your honor and glory; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.¹⁵

III.

O God, by the patient suffering of Your only-begotten Son You have beaten down the pride of the old enemy. Now help us, we humbly pray, rightly to treasure in our hearts all that our Lord has of His goodness borne for our sake after His example we may bear with patience all that is adverse to us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.¹⁶

IV.

Almighty God, merciful Father, by Word and Sacrament, You have created Your Church in this world to be a godly communion and family. Grant Your blessing to those who dwell in loneliness that they may find a place of solace and pleasant fellowship among people faithful to You; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.¹⁷

V.

Almighty God, by our baptism into the death and resurrection of Your Son Jesus Christ, You turn us from the old life of sin. Grant that we who are reborn to new life in Him may live in righteousness and holiness all our days, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.¹⁸

VI.

What God ordains is always good:
This truth remains unshaken.
Though sorrow, need, or death be mine,
I shall not be forsaken.
I fear no harm,
For with his arm
He shall embrace and shield me;
So to my God I yield me. Amen.¹⁹

VII.

Lord, take my hand and lead me Upon life's way;
Direct, protect, and feed me From day to day.
Without your grace and favor I go astray;
So take my hand, O Savior, And lead the way.
Amen.²⁰

VIII.

Lord, our God, our Helper and our Comforter in time and in eternity, graciously look upon us Your servants, who according to Your holy ordinance have entered the covenant of wedded love and truth. Bless us and guide us by the Holy Spirit that Your good and gracious will may be done in us. May the Word of Christ dwell in us richly, and make our home and our hearts Your dwelling place. Grant that our souls be

united in Christ Jesus to be one mind by love and may our mutual true love never know doubt or change. Bless us in each other, and enable us in wisdom and meekness to bear with patience each other's infirmities. Prosper the work of our hands, and crown our lives with Your loving-kindness and tender mercies. Let even our crosses and afflictions yield us the peaceable fruit of righteousness as an abiding blessing, and teach us in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make our requests known unto You. And when in steadfast faith we have finished our pilgrimage on earth, give us a dwelling place with You in heavenly joy; for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen²¹

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES: Psalm 23; 40; 46; 119:65-72; 131; Isaiah 40:1-2; 55; 2 Corinthians 1:3-11; 12:7-10

¹The Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Lutheran Worship (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 129.

²O. W. Toelke, In the Presence of God (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 24.

³Ibid., 26.

⁴Ibid., 55.

⁵Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, Lutheran Book of Worship (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978), 49.

⁶Ibid., 47.

⁷"Renew Me, O Eternal Light," Lutheran Worship, 373.

⁸"I Am Jesus' Little Lamb," Lutheran Worship, 517.

⁹"Be Still, My Soul," Lutheran Worship, 510.

¹⁰"Jesus Lives, The Victory's Won," Lutheran Worship, 139.

¹¹The Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Lutheran Worship Agenda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 201.

¹²Ibid., 199.

- ¹³Lutheran Worship, 132.
- ¹⁴Ibid., 129.
- ¹⁵Ibid., 125.
- ¹⁶Ibid.
- ¹⁷Ibid., 132
- ¹⁸Lutheran Book of Worship, 47.
- ¹⁹"What God Ordains is Always Good," Lutheran
Worship, 422.
- ²⁰"Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me," Lutheran
Worship, 512.
- ²¹Toelke, 71-72.

APPENDIX

TABLE ONE

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
FOR NEW REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

METHOD: IMPACT ON PERSONS INVOLVED IN THE PROCEDURES: (+ POSITIVE, - NEGATIVE)

ARTIFICIAL	Child:	-
INSEMINATION	Husband:	-
DONOR	Wife:	+ or -
	Marriage:	-
	Donor:	-

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES: AID introduces a third part into the two-flesh-to-become-one-flesh-union of marriage (Genesis 2:24). It asks a sperm donor to separate procreation from parenting (Ephesians 6:4). Children may begin to be viewed as a product rather than a gift of God (Genesis 1:28, Psalm 128). AID removes the procreational from the relational dimension of marital sex (Genesis 1 and 2).

IN VITRO	Child:	-
FERTILIZATION	Husband:	-
	Wife:	+ or -
	Marriage:	+ or -

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES: IVF introduces the third party of medical intrusiveness into the marriage, breaking the procreational and relational dimension of sex (Genesis 1 and 2). IVF may change the perspective of children as a gift of God into a mutual project or product (Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 128). IVF will require the risky freezing of embryos for later use, the "selective reduction" of implanted fetuses, and a higher than average implant failure rate. This conflicts with the scriptural view that life is to be held sacred (5th Commandment, Genesis 1:27). The high cost of IVF combined with the low success rate of the procedure may go against the scriptural directive to be wise stewards of financial resources. Finally, the "quest" to have a baby

may be placing the desire for a child above love for God (1st Commandment).

GAMETE	Child:	+
INTRAFALLOPIAN	Husband:	+
TRANSFER	Wife:	+

(Impact could become negative with the use of donor egg and / or sperm.)

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES: The ethical questions of embryo screening and selective reduction are not involved with GIFT. The sperm and egg are transferred to the fallopian tube of the woman where fertilization and implantation can then occur or not occur naturally. In GIFT there does not need to be a violation of the 5th Commandment, or third party intrusion into marriage. Therefore under ideal conditions there would be freedom in the Gospel of Christ for the use of GIFT.

ZYGOTE	Child:	-
INTRAFALLOPIAN	Husband:	-
TRANSFER	Wife:	-
	Marriage:	-

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES: ZIFT is very closely related to IVF in that a very young embryo is placed in the fallopian tube. The embryo must be fertilized by IVF. Therefore the same scriptural principles that applied to IVF also apply to ZIFT.

SURROGATE	Child:	-
MOTHERING	Husband:	-
	Wife:	-
	Marriage:	-
	Surrogate:	-

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES: Surrogate mothering can occur under a variety of conditions, but always introduces a third party into the marriage and separates the procreational and relational dimensions of sex (Genesis 1 and 2). Surrogate legal arrangements may require abortion if everything does not work properly (5th Commandment). There may be

exploitation if disadvantaged people are used as surrogates (Ephesians 5:13-15). The view of children may be changed from a gift of God into property to be bought and sold (Genesis 1:28, Psalm 128). Finally, the "quest" for a child may distort the proper relationship with God (1st Commandment).

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