

Infertility

INTRODUCTION: WHY DOES THIS TOPIC MATTER TO US ALL?

- Couples struggling with infertility
- Newly married, engaged, dating
- Church member
- Thinking through unfulfilled dreams

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

1. Childbirth throughout the Bible (Gen. 1:28; 3:16; 1 Sam. 1)

2. Two ways people dealt with infertility:

- a. By sinning and not trusting in God.

“Sarai said to Abram, “Since the Lord has prevented me from bearing children, go to my slave; perhaps through her I can build a family.” And Abram agreed to what Sarai said” (Gen. 16:2).

- b. By trusting God and crying out to him.

“Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife because she was childless. The Lord was receptive to his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived” (Gen. 25:21).

3. Two biblical principles to guide our discussion:

- a. Life begins at conception.

“For it was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. 14 I will praise you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. Your works are wondrous, and I know this very well” (Ps. 139:13–14).

- b. Marriage is God's design to produce children.

“This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

“Didn't God make them one and give them a portion of spirit? What is the one seeking? Godly offspring. So watch yourselves carefully, so that no one acts treacherously against the wife of his youth” (Mal. 2:15).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 18

CHALLENGES FACED BY COUPLES EXPERIENCING INFERTILITY

1. **As individuals**
2. **In the marriage**
 - a. Each spouse may face different kinds of grief
 - b. Effect on intimacy
 - c. Blame/guilt
 - d. Disagreement on how to move forward

ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

1. **Reasons why infertility may occur.**
 - a. Medical issues with the man.
 - b. Medical issues with the woman.
 - c. Other reasons that sometimes can't be medically determined.
2. **Three common treatments.**
 - a. Hormone treatments
 - b. IUI (intrauterine insemination)
 - c. IVF (in vitro fertilization)
3. **Four implications of biblical principles for ART.**
 - a. Any fertility treatments should preserve the parent-child relationship.
 - b. Fertility treatments that involve the destruction of embryos must not be pursued.
 - c. Any fertility treatments must not involve the freezing of an embryo.
 - d. Any fertility treatments must seek to preserve life.
4. **Four encouragements for couples considering ART.**
 - a. Read
 - b. Consider
 - c. Meet
 - d. Rest in Christ

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 18

ADOPTION

1. Parallels with salvation.

“He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph. 1:5).

“For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters” (Heb. 2:11).

“The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children, 17 and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom. 8:16–17).

2. Issues to consider.

- a. Motivation
- b. Biological tie

3. Embryo adoption.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Pray for each other; listen to one another; talk to one another.

“Carry one another’s burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15).

2. Recognize God’s sovereignty and goodness in all things.

“We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

3. Look forward to eternity.

“For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven” (Mark 12:25).

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 18

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON:

- Read the appendix of Frequently Asked Questions attached to this lesson.

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 18

APPENDIX: FAQs

(Adapted from CHBC's Core Seminar Lesson)

What is infertility?

The National Infertility Association defines “infertility” as the “inability to conceive after one year of unprotected intercourse (six months if the woman is over age 35) or the inability to carry a pregnancy to live birth.” They say that one in eight couples (12.5 percent) in the U.S. are affected by infertility; the Mayo Clinic suggests it may be as high as one in six (17 percent). So whether it's ever been a subject of conversation for you and a friend or not, you know people who have struggled (or are struggling) with this trial.

What other uses may there be for ARTs?

Or, this technology might not even be used for infertility treatments but to let people think they have a variety of options in front of them. For example, a single woman in her late 30s may choose to get a sperm donor and have her own baby. Or, a gay couple could use it to have children.

What are other reasons why freezing an embryo may be wrong?

As humans, we can never predict the future and cannot guarantee that any such embryos will be transferred, even with best intentions – there are a number of situations that can arise: pregnancy with the first batch of embryos can be difficult and create health concerns for future pregnancies or advanced age can make it more hazardous to the wife to bear the child. There are so many things that can happen that we should not presume that we know what is best for a life.

The process of freezing and unfreezing an embryo is inherently risky – it is getting better but still only about 90% viability, which means that 10% of the time, an embryo will die.

What's another example where clinics may recommend the willful destruction of embryos?

Clinics may recommend the willful destruction of embryos after they are frozen. If the couple decides later that they don't want to transfer these embryos, they face the dilemma of what to do with these embryos. Some may just let them thaw and therefore die while others may seek to donate them to research. Also, fertility clinics may push couples to conduct genetic testing of embryos as part of IVF treatments. Preimplantation Genetic Testing (PGD) is a screening test that can be conducted on embryos prior to transfer to determine the genetic health of the embryos. From the world's perspective, this can help couples weed out embryos with genetic abnormalities. For the Christian, there is nothing inherently sinful about the testing itself. However, if genetic testing reveals genetic abnormalities in an embryo, the clinic will strongly encourage the couple to discard that embryo. From a Christian perspective, trusting God with the health of embryos avoids the dilemma of what to do if genetic testing reveals a problem.

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 18

What might happen to surplus embryos?

We have been talking about surplus embryos. But what if they aren't needed in the future, either because the couple has the child they have desired or because those embryos, after undergoing genetic testing, aren't deemed to have "high development potential"? Couples may keep them frozen indefinitely. The decision to stop freezing an embryo can be gut wrenching so keeping the embryos frozen is a way to postpone the decision. As a result, there are a surplus of these embryos scattered in fertility clinics around the US – estimated at 400,000 embryos, 10 years ago (I couldn't find any more recent data). Thankfully, embryo adoption is becoming more common. Embryo adoption is when couples, after going through IVF, decide their families are complete, have extra frozen embryos, and donate their remaining embryos to those who desire more children. It's basically adoption that occurs with embryos instead of after babies are born. The woman would undergo a frozen embryo transfer (FET) to transfer the adopted embryo to her uterus. If she becomes pregnant, things pretty much proceed like any other pregnancy. As with other forms of adoption, there are various ways to pursue embryo adoption. From legal and financial perspectives, embryo adoption is much simpler and cheaper than other forms of adoption.

Notes about why people might not agree:

First, it can be an emotional topic. Infertility has been around since the beginning of the world; in Genesis, Rachel says to Jacob, "give me children or else I die" – and the desire for children, which is a good desire, is arguably the strongest desire that we as human beings have.

Second, Christians disagree on these topics. You'll find believers with different opinions. My call for us is for us to be gracious and to love other members even if we disagree. That being said, I am grateful that on the essentials, there is much agreement and we can be thankful for that.

Third, the world provides very skewed thoughts on this topic. Distorted ideas about life bleed into this discussion on ARTs. Infertility treatment specialists are incentivized to make you use whatever treatment is possible in order to have a baby. Fertility clinics also report statistics of success to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, so it's in their best interest to make you go through all the fertility treatments. Any advice a treatment center gives needs to be weighed against a Biblical worldview. If you table your cynicism, then you might say their highest goal is help you have a child. As Christians, our highest goal is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Those are different goals that may lead to a very different set of decisions.

Fourth, it's good to note that we living in America are living in one of the most unregulated countries in the world when it comes to ARTs. For example, whereas countries such as Sweden and the UK have legal restrictions to the number of embryos that can be transferred to the women's uterus, America has none. That means that fertility clinics in the US are more likely to adopt an anything goes approach to fertility treatments than even in other places in the world.

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 18

Birds and bees question?

Let me briefly give you a description of what needs to happen for childbirth. Typically, every month or so, a woman ovulates, that is, releases an egg. The egg lives in her uterus for 12–24 hours, during which time if a sperm fertilizes it, a life starts. This is called conception. As the fertilized egg, called a zygote, grows, it becomes an embryo. For the next 9 months or so, the embryo grows into what's called a fetus and a baby is born. That's if everything goes well.

Why is private adoption not recommended?

Legally risky. Easy to fall through. Birth parents can take adoptive parents' medical support for months and then decide to parent. Also no counseling. No support system. No guidance. Emotional minefield. Also easy to make legal mistakes that could bring the validity of the adoption into question

If later a birth parent claims they signed away their rights under duress there is no agency to rebut the claim or document that everything was done proper.

What about adopting a child from a different ethnicity?

In Christ there is no Jew and Gentile and we should be open to doing so. At the same time, I personally think that adopting a child of a different ethnicity requires the parents to understand potential challenges that the child may uniquely experience given his or her ethnic background.

What was Asherah?

Basically, worship of a fertility goddess involved a doing things for her that, in return, would lead to fertility broadly defined, from pregnancy and childbirth to also having a good crop harvest. It is incredible how persistent this worship of Asherah was – it basically tracks the whole history of the nation of Israel, from the time of Moses through Gideon through kings both in the nations of Israel and in Judah. Even after the exile, the people of Israel still persisted in serving Asherah (see Micah).

How is the timing for adoption?

In some instances, domestic adoption is faster than international adoption, but there are many variables for both.

What other considerations are there for domestic option?

Domestic adoption sometimes has what is called “open adoption,” where there is on-going contact with the birth parents -- and associated on-going obligations. There is also wide variety among open adoptions. Most domestic adoptions today involve some degree of openness.

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 18

Should singles adopt?

We believe that the Biblical model is for a child to be raised by a married man and woman. There are lots of ways singles can care for the widow and the orphan (e.g., mentoring a child who does not have one or both parents, supporting/sponsoring a child through responsible organization, supporting work that helps keep children in their families such as anti-trafficking organizations). Singles can also help support adoption by helping a couple in the adoption process or by helping them care for the child.