

Pregnant with Hope

Good News for Infertile Couples

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Preface



Although it ended years ago, I remember our infertility journey vividly. It seemed incredibly long and profoundly lonely. At the time, my husband and I kept our struggle secret. We knew of no one else going through the same experience—except the strangers we saw, month after month, in the doctors’ waiting rooms.

We felt singled-out for suffering we could not understand. Trapped in a story we could not escape. None of it made sense to us.

I had grown up believing in a God who is generous, loving and faithful. Now, my faith was confronted with questions I could not answer: Why is this happening? Where is God in all this? Why are we suffering and struggling when it seems so easy for everyone else? When will we have a baby? Will we *ever* have one? What have we done to deserve this? What do we do with our anger at God? Our grief? Our fear? All of the other emotions we seem to be taking out on each other? And, how do we get our lives back without giving up on our dream?

Our church offered little comfort. Despite thousands of members, no one—neither pastors nor congregants—ever openly acknowledged the infertile couples in their midst. And sadly, none of us ever self-identified.

We were separated by our silence. Alone in our quest.

After the long-awaited birth of our daughter, I realized what an oppressive burden silence had been. At a gathering of new mothers, one woman self-consciously admitted that she'd used Clomid to stimulate ovulation. The floodgates opened. Within minutes, we discovered all of us had experienced infertility; no one had been able to conceive without help.

We had all made the same incredible journey—every one of us feeling isolated and alone. What a relief to break our silence and to realize that none of us had been singled-out for suffering. All of us had faced the same uphill battle.

In an instant, I saw that we could have provided one another such comfort and support, if only we had shared our secret. Instead, our silence had compounded our suffering.

At that epiphany moment, I promised myself: no more secrecy. I would share our story... any time, with anyone. I would do whatever I could to help other couples who were trying to conceive find comfort and community.

Over the past decade, I have fulfilled that promise—first, by training and serving as a Stephen Minister, and then, by leading a nondenominational Bible study designed specifically for infertile couples. This one-of-a-kind ministry offers couples a forum for wide-ranging discussions of the spiritual questions and relationship challenges that often accompany infertility.

If you joined us, we would welcome you—regardless of your faith tradition—and invite you to participate in our search for answers, and for hope. I would reassure you that the purpose for meeting with one another is to confront infertility head-on, to seek God in the midst of it, and to ask hard questions about whether the Bible has anything relevant to say.

The couples who have participated in the class have described their infertility journey as transformational. It no longer represents only suffering and loss. Through studies and discussions, they have come to see this period of their lives as a time of profound spiritual growth and preparation for their future as parents.

God may have the same plan in mind for you.

At the suggestion of those infertility alumni, and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, this book was written to speak directly into your heart—as if you were meeting with us, and sharing your struggles with people who understand the journey.

Welcome.

Welcome

What is the best news someone could give you today? You're pregnant, of course. That would solve everything... wouldn't it? But chances are, if you've been struggling with infertility, God has something else in mind.

That can be an unsettling thought.

Would it help you to know what? And *why*?

You, along with six million other infertile couples (just in the U.S.), are part of the surreal world of infertility, combining high-tech science with profound uncertainty and extreme anxiety. The experience is certain to test your outer limits—and the strength of your faith in the promise that God will not give you more burdens that you can bear [Psalm 145:14].

Be assured God has a purpose for you in this. You are free to choose whether to seek an understanding of that purpose, or to ignore His desire to redeem your experience. To that extent, you are in control. Which sounds like good news. But somehow, that alone is probably not enough to make you feel better.

Right now, worry, frustration and despair are consuming tremendous stores of emotional energy as you and your partner try to get out ahead of your problem.

Maybe you just need a better plan. Or a better doctor. Or better information. Or a better procedure. Or... *something*.

Will it ever happen? That's all you want to know. What if it doesn't? It doesn't feel safe to dwell on that. And where is God in all this?

Wrestling with infertility will shake the foundation of your relationship, and repeatedly test your commitment to the shared dream of parenting. It will expose your fears and exploit your vulnerabilities. It will challenge your faith head-on.

Whether you allow God to work in and through these circumstances will determine whether this becomes a period of spiritual growth for you, or simply one of intense, prolonged suffering.

How do I know? My husband and I have grieved more lost children than we have been able to bring safely into the world.

The two who survived the process of conception and delivery benefited from our access to experts in reproductive medicine and neonatal intensive care. One underwent open heart surgery when she was just four weeks old. The other entered the world six weeks premature. He was briefly considered a candidate for brain surgery after just three weeks of life.

Their arrival—and survival—was miraculous to us, and life-changing. It was the fulfillment of a hope God had placed in our hearts long before. Long before the temperature-taking and ovulation-predicting, the daily injections and IUI's, the endless doctors' appointments and stressful waiting for test results. Well before we knew what a long-lasting, faith-challenging journey infertility would become for us.

Our first-hand experience with infertility, along with several other life-threatening challenges, brought us to tears—and sometimes, to our knees. But, thanks to those experiences, we came to know God as relentless and intentional in His pursuit of us. And, full of grace. We learned that He is neither reckless nor random; every life experience has a purpose.

Over the course of a person's life journey, God can transform loneliness and despair into intimacy with Him, heart-ache into wisdom, and seemingly tragic life events into the path to joy. *If* we will allow Him to.

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Infertility will
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• • •

That's why I began leading a Bible study for infertile couples. As a Stephen Minister, I have been trained to comfort people suffering through life's most difficult challenges. And

as an infertility alumna, I am familiar with the journey infertile couples are facing.



This is a
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In reading and discussions, our groups have confronted deep doubt about God's faithfulness, issues of suffering and feeling separated from His love, questions of judgment and condemnation, and fears of hope dying along with embryos.

We've provided a haven for hurting souls seeking much more than commiseration. Every couple arrives hungry for spiritual wisdom and understanding that reaches soul-deep. They acknowledge fears and admit



failures in search of spirit-sustaining hope. They need a God-centered, faith-based reason to believe it will happen for them. And God delivers.

Week after week, we cross through territory filled with emotional and psychological land mines. Ultimately, we arrive, transformed by the journey, in a promise land of new hope.

This book was written to welcome *you* into our discussions—to bring you comfort and insight into the reasons for a season of infertility. That understanding can bring you peace. And hope.

You will not hear reasons as the world defines them: “because you have an ovarian cyst,” “because the sperm count is abnormally low,” “because an STD caused irreparable damage.” Instead, we'll discuss God's reasons: because He loves you, because He has an incredible child to entrust to you—when you are ready, because He wants to give you His best.

God longs to use your circumstances for your benefit. The potential has been created; the opportunity exists. And, the Bible says He will – if you will let Him [Romans 8:28]. So, approach this book with an open mind and a willing spirit. Each chapter will deliver news of God's goodness and faithfulness deep into your heart. This will strengthen you for your journey.

Realize that, as you read, you may feel an instinctive need to guard your heart. That's because infertility often brings with it a sense of vulnerability, and an impulse for self-protection. Remember that your presence here is part of a divine appointment. This book was written for *you*. It's a gift from the God who loves you and will protect you. So, you can lower your defenses and still be safe.

The world's need for pretense falls away in our group discussions. We all know the struggle isn't easy. So, instead of pretense, we offer acceptance—of you, your spouse, and the way things actually are. There is no judgment. No second-guessing. Only love, and grace, and encouraging good news.

The other souls who are reading this book are your journeying companions. Like you, they are en route to a future as parents. It may feel, initially, as if you've been forced to join a sad little club. But in truth, these strangers are destined to become incredibly committed parents. Like you, they care deeply about the role they're longing to play. Even if you never meet or talk with them, find comfort in the knowledge that *you are not alone*. They, too, are on this arduous journey.

You may choose to seek out other couples who are struggling with infertility—to form a group that can approach this book in a structured, intentional way. Or, maybe you prefer to protect your privacy—to read and think alone.

Either way, plan to commit your mind, your heart and your spirit to interacting purposefully with these lessons. Give yourself over to the process as completely as you can. Trust that God is at work—that He has a specific purpose for the time you spend with these ideas.

Anticipate questions appearing in each chapter, almost like speed bumps, *to slow you down*. Take the time to consider each one of these. They will help you dig deeper and understand more of what God is trying to reveal to you through this experience. The questions will also keep you from racing ahead, as if finishing this book quickly could somehow speed your passage through infertility.



Find comfort
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It can't. And unfortunately, it won't.

In fact, one purpose for this time of waiting may be to *slow you down*, to teach you to wait for God.

However you choose to proceed—urgently or with patience, alone or with others—know that the Holy Spirit meets you here...to comfort, to strengthen, to guide. Christ promised he would be with you always [Matthew 28:20].

Trust that the longings of your heart and the cries of your spirit will be heard as you make your way through these lessons. Try to approach each one with grateful anticipation, trusting that—ultimately—this will be a life-giving and hope-sustaining journey.

Shall we begin?

“... I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, ‘Do not fear; I will help you.’”

Isaiah 41:13