

Infertility Seminar Notes

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Seven Reasons God Allows Suffering

- Judgment
- So we can comfort others
- Transformation
- To give us something better
- To bring us to faith
- That others might come to know Him through us

None of these six satisfied me.

Number seven:

- It's a mystery.

As far as the heavens are above the earth, so far are his ways and thoughts above ours (Isa. 55:9).

How far is that?

- If you travel at the speed of light (186,000 miles/second) for 100,000 years, you will have crossed only our galaxy, (one of an estimated 100 billion galaxies in the universe). Our galaxy represents one trillionth of the universe.

The complementary truth

- Psalm 103:11 - For as far as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who revere Him.

Cat Theology - A visit to the vet

Job's Quiz:

Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations?

Have you ever commanded the morning?

Have you walked in search of the depths of the sea?

Make Biblical Decisions so you have no regrets:

Principles of Ethics

As in each decision if each of these is honored:

Beneficence: Seek to Do Good

Nonmaleficence: Avoid Harm

Autonomy: Respect for a Person's Self Determination

Justice: Give to Each His Right or Due

A Matter of Dominion

Genesis 1

Over what has God given humans dominion?

Plants, animals, four-legged beasts.

What's missing from the list?

Other humanity.

We can seek to heal disease—the Good Samaritan teaches that's a good goal. But when it comes to taking life, we've overstepped our boundaries.

When does life begin?

Conception now = implantation according to ob-gyn dictionary

Fertilization

When Chromosomes Align

Respect life even at the one-cell stage.

Special revelation = what God says in the Word; clearly defined right and wrong

General revelation = what we learn from the world around us, research

Special revelation - black and white

General revelation – not sin issues but wisdom issues

This is where we have to leave room for other views. In the gray areas.

Is infertility a curse?

A History Lesson

Understand blessings and cursings in the Hebrew scriptures.

- Given to a specific group at a specific time for a specific purpose.
- E.g., Hannah - 1 Samuel 1

The infertility success stories are not intended as unabridged texts on infertility.

- Then Elkanah her husband said to her, “Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?”

Hannah's Response

- She was in bitterness of soul and prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish. Then she made a vow and said, “O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your maidservant and remember me, and not forget your maidservant, but will give me a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life. . . . And the Lord remembered her.

Grief: a normal response

- Notice in the Hannah story

She has a normal stress response to infertility: she cries, feels depressed, does not want to eat, does not see things the way her husband does, prays.

- God does not say, “You are overreacting.”

The story has a point

- Samuel goes on to be a great prophet.
 - Samuel anoints Saul as the first king.
 - Samuel later anoints David to be king.
-
- Is the point of this historical narrative “how to cure infertility”?

We end the story at Hannah getting a baby, and fail to see she gave him up to an unrighteous priest in order to be a part of what God was wanting to do. A very painful decision....

Infertility in the Bible

- Abraham and Sarah: Is Anything Too Hard for the Lord?
- Isaac and Rebekah: God Answers Prayer
- Jacob and Rachel: What Do You Love Most?
- A Nameless Infertile Woman: “Pay Attention to *All I Said*” (Samson's mother)
- Hannah: Worship the Fertility god or the God of Fertility?
- Michal: Godly People Don't Dance

Biblical View

- This unfulfilled desire for children can cause profound pain
- God can “open and close” the womb
- The Bible usually connected the “closed womb” with judgment only in cases of Israel 's national disobedience

Desire for Offspring

- Things that are “never satisfied,” that never say “enough”

–the grave

–the barren womb

–land for water

–fire

–Prov. 30:15,16

- “Sons are a gift from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward” Psalm 127:3

Literally – sons are a heritage from the Lord (opposite of what we'd expect); the fruit of the womb is a grant—something unearned.

Even if we have no kids today, we have many of the blessings sons gave them (nursing homes, retirement plans, 401(k) plans, police force, justice system)

Biblical View

- **The desire for children is good, and God-given**

Children are a gift but not THE gift.

Are all the infertile people in the Bible women?

No:

- **The story of Ruth**
- **The levirate marriage laws**
- **Both assume male infertility**
- **Deut. 7:14 – No male or female infertile among you**

Myth: About Prayer

Do I lack faith if I pray and God doesn't remove my infertility?

Consider this . . .

- **The Apostle Paul's "thorn in the flesh"**
- **He prayed three times for God to take it away.**

–God said, "My grace is sufficient for you. My power is perfected in weakness."

- **God is omniscient; we are not.**

It must be God's will...

True:

- **God is in control.**
- **Our infertility is no surprise to Him.**
- **He has allowed it to happen.**

False:

- **The idea that because God is in control, we must remain passive.**
- **Suggestion that because God is involved, we should not be in pain**

God is weaving a tapestry in your life that tells the story of His faithfulness.

Boils down to two questions: Is God good? Will I trust Him?

Don't just read the infertility stories. Get the whole picture.

Will the Pain Ever Go Away?

Revelation 21:3,4

- **And He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.**

SUMMARY: A Christian Approach to Infertility

- **Know that suffering is a mystery.**
- **Honor the limits of human dominion.**
- **Make ethical choices.**
- **Handle the Bible accurately.**
- **Know that God is good.**
- **Commit to trust Him.**
- **Know that this pain will someday end.**

Group lecture – Sat afternoon

Stresses in Family Building

- **Medical**
- **Relational**
- **Psychological**
- **Financial**
- **Spiritual**
- **Social – people make insensitive remarks**

Here's one:

- **"I'll bet you're having a lot of fun 'trying.'"**

Fact

- **56% of couples report a decrease in frequency of sexual relations**
- **Both women (59%) and men (42%) report a decrease in sexual satisfaction**
- **Sexual difficulties are five times those of fertile couples.**

Infertility is a grief cycle

Denial

Anger

Bargaining

Depressing

Mourning

Acceptance

(Not necessarily in this order)

What we know about grief:

- **No way out but through**
- **Not something you can hurry**
- **Interrupted by circumstances beyond your control . . .**
- **9 out of 10 people are not going crazy.**
- **Grief is a normal response.**

Two kinds of people: Trainable and untrainable

Avoid the Suffering Olympics, going for the gold, competing for who's in the worst pain

It's more like the Special Olympics, where everybody helps everybody else to the finish line

How to respond to awful comments:

Publicly gracious

Silence

“Why would you ask that?”

Private rants

Peter: Grow in grace.

Marriage myths:

- Marriage will complete me
- My spouse won't hurt me
- Life will be easy now
- All you need is love
- He/she is *just perfect* !

How husbands and wives differ

- Background
- Personality
- Cultures
- Gender

Exploring Gender Differences

We are not the same!

Women

- 1 Testosterone
- 10 Estrogen
- 25,000 Avg. number of words/day

Men

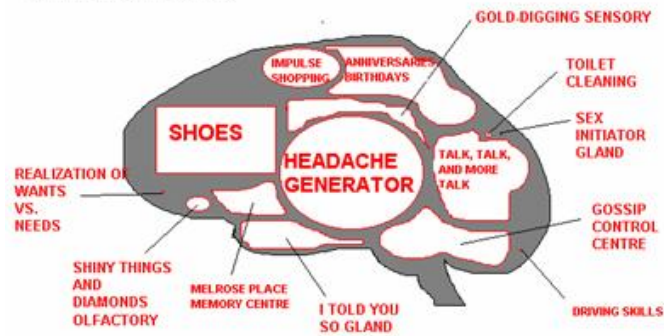
- 15 Testosterone
- 1 Estrogen
- 12,500 Word count

Men and women rank their top needs differently. See *His Needs, Her Needs*.

What do you consider your top five? And your spouse?

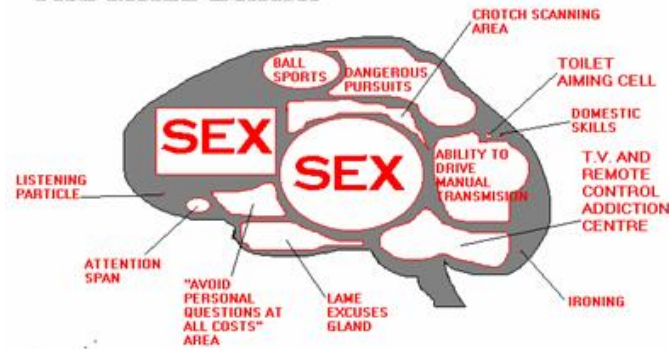
Would you guess correctly?

THE FEMALE BRAIN



FOOTNOTE: The "Put Oil into the Car" and "Be Quiet During the Game" glands are active only when the "SHINY THINGS AND DIAMONDS" Olfactory has been satisfied or when there is a shoe sale.

THE MALE BRAIN



FOOTNOTE: the "Listening to children cry in the middle of the night" gland is not shown due to it's small and underdeveloped nature. Best viewed under a microscope.

Communication

- Most men talk facts, most women talk facts *and* feelings
- Girls use more language; boys make sounds (varoom, umph)
- Men have fewer fibers connecting verbal and emotional sides of the brain than do women.
- When it comes to conversation, women want to build rapport, men to report.
- 57% of married women say it's hard to get hubby to talk.
- 58% think busyness interferes with marital conversation.

Problem Solving

- Men tend to have more distance from their emotions and a greater capacity to detach themselves from immediate reactions.
- Women tend to respond to situations more immediately and spontaneously, and find it hard to distance themselves from the way they feel.
- What women may regard as intimacy can feel suffocating and invasive to men; what men may regard as masculine strength can feel isolating and distant to women.

Most commonly couples say . . .

- Her greatest loss is the inability to conceive.
- His greatest loss is the loss of his wife's previous level of functioning.

You and your spouse will probably have very different responses to your grief!

Some solutions . . .

- Seek to understand each other: think in terms of equivalent losses.
- View it as "our problem."

Have Two Loves Lives . . .

- Babymaking sex
 - The fast train
- Lovemaking sex
 - The slow train

Find Support

- Expect only about 30% of support from spouse.
- Join a support group.

At a recent conference:

- "We had been thinking maybe we weren't meant for each other. But now we see that the stress would be hard on *any* couple and we need to strengthen our relationship."

THE DENVER STUDY

Predicting success

Conclusion:

- It is not our differences--personality, background, gender--that cause key marital difficulties.
- It is the things that we can control that cause the most damage.

Observation:

- The key to a happy marriage is less about finding the right person and more about being or becoming the right person.

Four Deadly Reactions: Work on these first! They are most damaging:

Don't be a WENI!

Deadly Reaction #1

- Clam up - Withdrawal/ avoidance
- This is the most serious of the four.
- 85% of stonewalling in marriage is done by men. --John Gottman, Ph.D.

Deadly Reaction #2

- Blow Up - Escalation
- Most commonly done by women, though not always.

Deadly Reaction #3

- Shoot Down: Negative Interpretation

Deadly Reaction #4

- Put Down - Invalidation

Unparallel pain. In one study 50 percent of women said infertility was the hardest thing they ever went through; only 15 percent of men said the same thing.

Find spiritual strength:

Support group/spiritual guide

Study scripture

Life in a faith community

Infertile couples are no more prone to marital breakup than any other couples. In fact many couples find that they are capable of supporting one another and working through their personal crisis in such a way

that, if anything, their relationships are stronger than ever.

Remember—you are not alone!

You can find much of this and more in [The Infertility Companion](#).

If you live near Dallas, consider worshipping the Lord with me on Mother's Day, *May 8, 8:30, 9:45, and 11:15 AM - A Conversation about Mother's Day*. Northwest Bible Church, Dallas, Texas. www.nbctexas.org

Additional notes

Coping, Comforting, & Connecting

Primary Infertility

- The inability to conceive after one year of unprotected intercourse or the inability to carry a pregnancy to term.

Secondary Infertility

- The inability to conceive or carry a child to term after one or more live births.

How Common is it?

- Approximately one in six couples of childbearing age
- Eventually half of those couples who seek treatment will go on to experience a live birth

Infertility Includes Pregnancy Loss

- 600,000 in the U.S. each year
- 120,000/year suffer at least their third consecutive pregnancy loss
- Estimated that 30-50% of all conceptions end in pregnancy loss

Six Losses

- Pat Johnston in *Adoption After Infertility*

Loss #1

- The loss of control.

Among the greatest frustrations

- Loss of control
- Of plans
- Of medical treatment
- Of body's normal functioning
- Of future

Loss #3

- Loss of a jointly conceived child

Loss #2

- Loss of individual genetic continuity

Loss #4

- Loss of the pregnancy, birth, and nursing experiences

Loss #5

- Loss of emotional expectations surrounding pregnancy and birth

Loss #6

- Loss of ability to nurture and parent the next generation.

This is the only loss . . .

- . . . for which adoption is a solution.
- Probably part of why it is annoying to be told "just adopt" in the middle of your grief.

Myth

- Adoption Cures Infertility

Does Adoption Cure Infertility?

- Five percent of couples who quit treatment and adopt conceive.
- Five percent of couples who quit treatment and choose not to adopt conceive.

"Helpful Hints"

- Want me to show your wife how it's done?
- Want kids? Borrow mine.
- Just trust God.
- You've got it good!
- Just relax.

Myth

- It's mostly a woman's problem and it's "all in her head." She wants children too much *or* she's too "into her career." Solution: *Relax!*

Fact

- 30% female factors
- 30% male factors
- 35% combination male/female
- 5% unexplained

95% of the time there is a diagnosable medical reason for which no amount of relaxing will help.

Does Relaxing Help?

- Put to death the relaxation myth.
- Infertility causes stress, generally not vice versa.
- Typical to blame the patient when we don't want to say we don't know.

Does Standing On Your Head After Intercourse Help?

No!

Bioethics

- "The disciplined study of the morality of Health Care." —*Ethics in Obstetrics and Gynecology*

Morality

- "The beliefs and practices of human beings and social institutions about right and wrong behavior and

about good and bad character."

McCullough, *Ethics in Obstetrics and Gynecology*

Ethical Systems

- Utilitarianism Depends on the good
- Deontology Duty-based ethics
- Virtue Character based

Principles of Ethics

- Beneficence
- Nonmaleficence
- Autonomy
- Justice

Beneficence

- Seeking to Do Good

Nonmaleficence

- Avoiding Harm

Autonomy

- Respect for Person's Self Determination

Justice

- Giving to each his right or due

Ethical Conflict

- When circumstances force a choice between two well founded obligations.
- *Ethics in Obstetrics and Gynecology*

Myth

- "People of Faith are against any assisted reproductive technologies"

Against Medical Intervention

- God opens and closes the womb.
- Medical intervention is "playing God"
- Doctors take huge risks with embryos.

For Intervention

- Paul advised Timothy to drink "fruit of the vine" for his stomach's sake
- We use chemotherapy for cancer, antibiotics for infections, insulin for diabetes
- Why not use medications for overcoming reproductive ailments?
- Key: *Manage your own care using biblical ethics.*

Response

- If they choose to use these technologies, they need to use them wisely, in a way that honors the dignity of life, even at the one-celled stage.

Infertility Diagnostic Work-Up

Treatment Options

- Medical
- Hormone Therapy
- Ovulation Induction
- Surgical
- Laparoscopic
- Microscopic

Treatment Options

- Insemination
- Husband
- Donor
- Hyperstimulation/IUI

Hi Tech Treatment Options

- GIFT
- ZIFT
- IVF-ET
- Micromanipulation
 - ICSI
 - ROSNI
 - Assisted Hatching

Additional Issues

- Cryopreservation
- Sperm
- Eggs
- Embryos
- Multifetal Pregnancy Reduction
- Selective Reduction

Surrogacy

- Traditional
- Gestational
- Embryo Adoption

Other infertility organizations

- Hannah's Prayer (Christian): www.hannah.org

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