

CHAPTER ONE



GOD'S HEART FOR THE INFERTILE

*Three things are never satisfied;
four never say, "Enough":
Sheol, the barren womb,
the land never satisfied with water,
and the fire that never says, "Enough."*

—Proverbs 30:15–16

As Christians, we are commanded to speak the truth. The refrain of truth telling weaves its way throughout the entirety of Scripture, from the moral law of God (Ex. 20:16), to Paul's admonishment to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), to Christ's own witness to the truth about Himself (John 18:37). The truth is a reflection of reality, but more importantly, it is a reflection of the character of God, who is the author and source of truth. But the way we communicate can sometimes veil or downplay certain aspects of the reality that truth is connected to. When euphemisms abound, we often forget the weightiness of what we are talking about. For example, we don't say "preborn" or "unborn child" but "embryo." We call the death of an undesired child an "abortion" rather than "murder" and the death of the desired preborn child a "miscarriage," as though mom did something wrong in how she carried her child. One of the clumsier ways many refer to the preborn before we know their gender is to refer to them as an "it" rather than "he" or "she." In one of the most tender

and all too frequent aspects of married life, we say “infertile” rather than “childless.” Why is that? When we do this, we are viewing a slightly tilted version of the truth that alters how we perceive it.

“Infertility” is the prevailing term used to explain why couples are unable to conceive over a defined period of unprotected sex. But we must take one step back and realize that this is a term—though scientifically accurate—that is drawn from a broader domain of science and medicine. When we agree to using the term, we put on a subtle set of blinders that causes us to think that the only way to overcome infertility is within this domain of science and medicine. When one exits the domain dominated by science, searching for an alternative means of **conception**, it is viewed as secondary, perhaps even inferior, to science. Adoption, for example, becomes an afterthought to the devices of our technology and scientific mastery. Who needs to take in and rescue the children that already exist when we can create one of our own? The appeal has the sobering echo of something that was similarly uttered in the first temptation: “*You will be like God*” (Gen. 3:5). This is not necessarily spelled out. But we should seriously pause to consider that “infertility” was not the word of choice in yesteryear for couples who could not have children. What did people in previous generations do when they desired to have children but were unable to conceive? When did our vernacular change from “childlessness” or “barrenness” to something colder and more scientific-sounding like “infertility”?

INFERTILITY—NOT THE WAY IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE

Infertility is simply the inability of a couple to conceive children. The causes can stem from a variety of factors, involving both the husband and the wife. Technically, infertility is diagnosed when a couple is unable to conceive after a year of actively trying for a baby.¹ It is a normal part of a world disrupted by the events of the fall in Genesis 3. Infertility encapsulates some of the most distressing consequences of sin's intrusion into the world: toil intrudes into work (Gen. 3:17), diseases afflict the body (v. 19), the land becomes populated with weeds and thistles (v. 18), and a woman's labor becomes painful (v. 16). It occupies the same realm where death reigns (Rom. 5:14)—a constant and unwavering element of our world, although divergent from God's original design.

When God created the world, He declared it to be “good” (Gen. 1:10), embodying the concept of *shalom* before the events of Genesis 3. There was a state of completeness and harmony where nothing was missing or broken. The fellowship between Adam and Eve in the presence of God depicted in the Scriptures is a yearned-for reality that will be restored in the consummation of the kingdom. However, in the present moment, our world is plagued by numerous afflictions that we hope will be eradicated when Christ returns to renew all things. For now, creation groans, as if in the throes of birth pains, awaiting the arrival of that transformative day (Rom. 8:19). On this side of that great day, couples wrestle, yearn, and endure suffering, often feeling isolated and ashamed, as they

1. “What Is Infertility?,” U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, updated May 15, 2024, https://www.cdc.gov/reproductive-health/infertility-faq/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/features/what-is-infertility/index.html.

long to conceive children. Infertility stands in stark contrast to the intended order of things. In one of the most poignant threads within the narrative of redemption, God employs infertility to accomplish His purposes and to proclaim the hope of restoring creation.

Before the call of Abraham to go up from his country to the land God promised him, there comes a list of Terah's descendants in Genesis 11. In that oft-overlooked section of Scripture, we discover this detail:

Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was *barren*; she had no child. (Gen. 11:29–30, emphasis added)

In the very next section of the Scripture, Abraham receives his call:

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Gen. 12:1–3)

That detail of Sarah being barren is one that will add tension and rising action to the story. How can one who cannot bear children receive this promise? The call to Abraham and Sarah is to live by faith. How would God fulfill that promise? They did not know. They saw only in part, as the apostle Paul would write centuries later: "We see in a mirror dimly" (1 Cor. 13:12). Nevertheless, faith was to define their relationship with

the God who called them out of a far country to the place He promised them.

The story of the fulfillment of that promise is one of triumphs and failures while trying to live by faith. When they were visited by angels and promised they would conceive, though they were old and advanced in years, Sarah laughed (Gen. 18:1–15). She laughed because she held the details of their circumstances closer to her heart than the promise God had given them. In an echo of Adam's passivity in the garden, Abraham had listened to Sarah and had taken Hagar to bear him a son (Gen. 16). This attempt to seize and force the promise of God didn't solve Sarah's grief of not having children but exacerbated it. It neither fulfilled the promise nor brought an end to Sarah's barren womb. Nevertheless, God made good on His promise, and, at the ripe age of 100, Abraham held his son. Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me." And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age" (Gen. 21:6–7).

Interestingly, this line that traces back to Abraham ends up connecting with Christ, the promised Redeemer of Genesis 3:15. Abraham's son Isaac would also navigate the journey of barrenness with his wife Rebekah (Gen. 25:21), as would Rachel and Jacob, who was the offspring of Isaac. Perhaps the most poignant expression of the agony of infertility is voiced by Rachel when her sister bore children while she remained barren, crying out, "Give me children, or I shall die!" (Gen. 30:1). Rachel's deep emotional pain is relatable and resonates with couples who struggle with infertility. God embedded within His creation the desire to fulfill the mandate of being fruitful and multiplying (Gen. 1:28). When this longing cannot be fulfilled, the desperation to force it to happen becomes

comprehensible, though it can often lead to a place where one's desires drown out the call to walk by faith.

Many of these stories of barrenness eventually led to the birth of a child. Hannah prayed for a child and later became the mother of the prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 1). Elizabeth and Zechariah, despite their advanced age, were blessed with John the Baptist after many years without a child (Luke 1). However, there are also accounts of women who remained childless for their entire lives. Michal, the wife of the great King David, "had no child to the day of her death" (2 Sam. 6:23). The verse hangs there matter-of-factly and ominously.

The stories of infertile couples finally having children aren't intended to offer the hope that if couples persist, or try harder, God will grant them children. Rather, these stories have always been intended to encourage walking by faith and valuing God as our ultimate treasure, even if God never blesses us with children. This is the same message that applies to couples dealing with infertility today, who do not have a guarantee of conception. Their challenge is to decide, amid real suffering, to honor the Lord with their whole heart and find fulfillment in Him as their reward, even if they never experience the joys of parenting their own child.

OVERCOMING INFERTILITY

The question inevitably arises, what are the morally permissible options for couples to pursue if they cannot have children biologically? This question is understandable, and in the process of constructing a moral theology (what we know as ethics) around IVF, the endeavor is to locate the moral boundaries. To put it another way, when we are presented with all these new technologies and treatments, we should strive to figure out where the ethical lines are: "How far can one go without

sinning?” But the problem with this question is that it can draw us away from the heart of God. The better question to ask is this: “What should I do?” or “How can I best glorify God?” When we ask this, we will be better positioned to align with the Lord’s will when we experience suffering—especially the suffering of infertility.

Scripture warns us to avoid grumbling and refrain from being discontent (Phil. 2:14–15). Yet, when one has the God-given desire to be fruitful and multiply and cannot do it, it can become an insatiable desire. The beauty of having children can quickly be twisted, leading us to lie to ourselves: “*This* is what will satisfy me. *This* is what will make me whole. *This* is what will give me meaning.” But each of those is a lie that preys upon a hurting heart. If we think that having children can provide something that only God can, then we have erected an idol, even if it is an attractive one. The heart becomes deceived and says of the idol what should only be said of God.

Suddenly, we find ourselves back in the garden, where Satan tempted Eve to partake of the fruit of the forbidden tree—a temptation that was delightful and pleasing to the eyes, promising something it could not deliver (Gen. 3:6). This is the seductive nature of sin: to take something good in God’s creation and pervert it, distorting its purpose and overselling its promises as if it could provide satisfaction. But it cannot. The Word says in Proverbs 30:15–16, “Three things are never satisfied; four never say, ‘Enough’: Sheol, the barren womb, the land never satisfied with water, and the fire that never says, ‘Enough.’”

Before you ever consider the options to overcoming infertility, take careful stock of your heart and its proximity to God. If you find that it is in close pursuit of God and things of God, stay on track! Take your suffering before our Lord, who

Himself suffered. Take your petitions and prayers to Christ; He will perfect your prayers before the Father. Take your sufferings, unfulfilled desires, longings, and hurts to our Savior, whose burden is a featherweight and who cares for you (Matt. 11:28–30; 1 Peter 5:7). If you can find satisfaction in Christ and keep your heart tightly orbiting the heart of God, you are in a position to prayerfully consider and submit yourself to the perfect will of God who *has* never made and *will* never make any mistakes. I encourage couples who are unsure of how they are doing or where their heart is on this journey to seek the Lord's will before considering any of the following choices.

SOME OPTIONS TO CONSIDER

Seek No Treatment²

There is nothing in Scripture that requires one to do anything and everything possible to overcome infertility. Similarly, there is nothing in the Bible that requires parents to seek the maximum number of children possible, what is commonly called the “full quiver” view (referring to Ps. 127:4, “Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth”). John Frame reminds us that children are a blessing from the Lord; as such, there is no requirement in Scripture to *maximize* every blessing.³ It is okay to seek no treatment for infertility, and if you never bear children, let your conscience rest easy, knowing you are not in sin.

2. This list is adapted from Megan Best, “Your Options in Infertility,” *The Gospel Coalition*, March 19, 2014, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/your-options-in-infertility/>.

3. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (P&R Publishing, 2008), 783–785.

Be Patient

Megan Best identifies some of the angst couples feel as simply their own impatience.⁴ I've known several couples in my life who were unable to have children for many years until the Lord opened the womb and blessed them with a child. Perhaps this is simply what one must do as they wait upon Him and His perfect timing. Lamentations 3:25 reminds us, "The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him." On the other hand, the Bible uniformly describes decisions made in haste as folly. "Whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way" (Prov. 19:2). There is great wisdom in waiting on the Lord and not trying to force a blessing from God. Abraham attempted to force the promise, and it brought disaster into his life. Slow down and seek the Lord's will.

Seek a Diagnosis

Some who give counsel advise seeking medical advice if a woman under the age of 35 cannot get pregnant after two years of unprotected sex. There is nothing wrong with couples seeing a medical professional to diagnose if something is wrong. A dear couple my wife and I are friends with was unable to conceive, so they went to an infertility specialist. They discovered that he was not producing sperm, thereby making it impossible for them to ever conceive naturally. For them, there was great sorrow yet clarity about what they could and could not do. There was no point in tracking her monthly ovulations and counting the days in hopes of becoming pregnant. The dream of natural children died that day. But for them, the option of adoption became the only viable choice and one they pursued.

4. Best, "Your Options in Infertility."

Today they have a beautiful adopted daughter and are thriving as a family.

Do Your Research First

Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) is plagued with ethically questionable and morally impermissible landmines. The way it is often marketed, unfortunately, tells couples what they desire to hear: that the process is straightforward and can help them have a baby. However, one must keep in mind that all these clinics operate very much as an industry for profit. They are businesses concerned with their public image and the best possible interpretation of success rates and statistics. It is here that the aching heart can most easily listen to what it wants to hear. Please, slow down and do your research. Pray. Ask the Lord to give you and your spouse unity. Seek outside counsel. Search the Scriptures and make no decision in haste.

Explore Restorative Reproductive Medicine

Restorative Reproductive Medicine (RRM) is a more holistic and specialized way to identify and address the underlying causes of infertility. ART, on the other hand, attempts to circumvent infertility without necessarily treating the underlying cause. Infertility, in the technical sense, is a dysfunction pointing to some other problem that RRM aims to address by means of a healthier approach that does not seek to force the woman's body to operate against its design but rather with it. A 2025 report by the Heritage Foundation provides several short articles that could prove useful in exploring this approach.⁵

5. Emma Waters and Natalie Dodson, *Treating Infertility: The New Frontier of Reproductive Medicine* (The Heritage Foundation, 2025), <https://www.heritage.org/marriage-and-family/report/treating-infertility-the-new-frontier-reproductive-medicine>.

I have also included an appendix with some valuable resources about this topic.

Consider Adoption

As the final chapter of this book argues, adoption is not just an option to consider. It is one that we, as members of Christ's church, cannot discard simply because we want our own child in our own way. Adoption is not only a blessed alternative; it is the God-provided mechanism to care for the orphans. Even more than this, adoption is a parable of the greatest adoption story ever—the gospel—the means by which Christ reconciles sinners to Himself and makes them His sons and daughters, heirs of the King (Rom. 8:15–17). This is a vital mission that the church must be about.

SUFFERING AND SANCTIFICATION

Infertility can cause real suffering. Do not let anyone tell you differently. During that season of waiting and hoping, people can and will say uncalculated things that are meant to bring comfort but are unhelpful. For example, it's common to hear things like, "As soon as you begin the adoption process, you will get pregnant. God just works like that," or, "Whose fault is it, yours or his?" or, "I never had that problem. We got pregnant when we weren't even trying!" or even, "This is God telling you that you aren't meant to have kids." While friends and family mean well, they can often heap sorrow upon sorrow and stir grief that festers in isolation. During those dark seasons, it's important to preach to your heart the truth that God has promised us. He will never leave you nor forsake you (Josh. 1:9). The valley of the shadow of death is not a "to" place to be dropped off and abandoned but a "through" place, where our Shepherd leads, though sometimes quietly (Ps. 23).

If the Shepherd's crook is comforting, it's because we trust that God's timing and ways are best. It is an act of walking in faith to declare to yourself what God has already said to us in 2 Corinthians 1:3–5, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too." Do you believe that?

The temptation in walking through infertility is to seek satisfaction and comfort through what we long for—a child. But the moment we think that a child will give us something we lack, we have just made fatherhood or motherhood into an idol. Being a parent is a joy, but it is not *ultimately* satisfying. It is a great blessing from God, but it is not supreme. Only God is all-satisfying and all-comforting. Could it be that the reason God has not blessed you with a child is that His desire for you is to sanctify you through this crucible of suffering and infertility? Suffering reveals to us our truest motives. It uncovers what we have whispered to our hearts, *This will satisfy you*. It reveals what we truly find comforting. Everything that is not properly ordered under God, who must reign as our portion, as the one who satisfies, will fail us and fall short. Where do you turn when your heart desires something other than that which God gives?

The sorrow of infertility is real. Don't waste it. God is using the afflictions of this world—this world disordered since the fall—to make you more like Him. You are to be presented, through the washing of His Word, in splendor and as His prize (Eph. 5:27). Your time of suffering and longing may be the season when Christ grabs you, scoops you up, and reminds you, "You are Mine. I have made you My own."

You may never get an answer as to why you can't have children. The comfort that God provides is not in getting that answer. It is in Him. That's a call to live by faith. Whether God is calling you to be patient because you will eventually have children or to seek adoption because you can't have children, He is beckoning you to die to self and walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7).