



Springs of Hope Virtual Retreat
An Infertility Grief Observed
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God has not been trying an experiment on my faith or love in order to find out their quality. He knew it already. It was I who didn't.

C.S. Lewis, A Grief Observed

Infertility is a loss to be acknowledged and grieved

- We grieve tangible losses as well as *intangible* ones (not just the *loss* of something/someone, but its *lack*, too)
- *Disenfranchised grief* is unexpected, may not be a “tangible” loss, carries feelings of unworthiness and isolation, and may impact our identity, sense of purpose and faith in God
- It's healthy and important to acknowledge the grief, sadness and complex emotions associated with infertility. But if the sadness is overwhelming and too much for you to cope with (or if you're experiencing clinical depression and anxiety as a result of your feelings over infertility) **there is no shame in seeking professional help** (counseling) **and spiritual help** (trusted pastor or spiritual director)
- **Infertility is not your fault!** Don't take on guilt and responsibility for your infertility or loss of a child. **God is not punishing you!** If you have these thoughts, know that *they are lies and tricks from the devil!*

Men and women handle infertility and the grief and emotions *differently*

- We're all different, and our unique personalities and formation from our family of origin (and any baggage we bring from it) affects how we process and express feelings
- *Generally speaking*, women feel the emotions associated with infertility in particularly acute ways, since *it is in our bodies* that conception occurs, and within us new life is nurtured and protected. We receive monthly reminders of what we're lacking, and it generates lots of emotions and responses
- *Generally speaking*, men experience emotions *related to their wife's response* to infertility. It's not that men *don't* feel sadness and loss, (they do!) but they carry the weight of their wife's sadness with feelings of helplessness and a desire to "fix" the situation, which may cause frustration
- Be patient with each other. Remember why you married, and nurture your relationship. It's not only okay, it's *necessary* to love and enjoy your spouse! Doing so does not betray your dream of having children or negate the sense of loss
- **It is good that you are in the world! Your marriage is good!** Infertility *does not* negate your marriage, make it invalid or change the fact that **you are a sign of God's love in the world**
- The many ways **you and your marriage are fruitful** are > than infertility!

Positive Steps/Actions

- Pray! **Tell** God your story, He knows it, but He because He loves you He wants to hear it from you. Give Him your grief, anger, frustration, jealousy – all of the emotions you feel. **Ask** Him to heal you and give you peace. **Surrender** yourself to Him, even if it's hard or you don't want to let go of the negative emotions. Say something like, "Lord, I surrender to You; *help me* to surrender!"
- Develop a prayer routine. If you are married, ask your spouse to pray with you. If you're not used to this practice, start simply and work your way up to more in-depth prayer times

- Nurture your marriage. Try not to look at one or the other as the “cause” of infertility, but recall why you married, what it was like to first fall in love. Be grateful for each other! Infertility is a loss, but your marriage is a beautiful, messy, authentic witness to Christ and the Church! God’s desire is for you to be *fruitful* in unique ways *only you* can bring to life
- Engage in positive self-talk. When negative thoughts invade, notice it and replace them with the positive, even if you don’t believe it at the moment: *God loves me! Infertility does not mean I/my marriage is not creative and blessed. People say insensitive things, but those comments don’t define me or tell the truth of our marriage.* When you’re tempted to beat yourself up or indulge in thoughts of jealousy or anger, take a breath, ask God for help, and turn the thought to something that affirms you/your marriage
- Create a “Gratitude List.” Write down the things you’re grateful for, share it with your spouse. When negative thoughts intrude, or grief becomes overwhelming, pull out your list, and thank God! If we are grateful, praise God and recall our blessings (even the simplest ones) our hearts and minds will slowly catch up
- If you’ve been isolated from friends (especially those with kids or who are expecting), reconnect with them. Explain what you’re going through (as much as you are comfortable; no one has a *right* to know everything about you), and let them know how they can help you
- Disconnect, or take a break from social media. You don’t need to “unfriend” anyone (unless they are a toxic presence), but you can unfollow or mute certain people/posts for a period of time. If social media is feeding sadness, anger and jealousy, consider disconnecting from it. Start with a day, or a week away from social media, or limit use to one hour a day

Final thoughts:

- You are a beloved daughter of God! You are a beloved son of God!
- Your marriage is good!
- Your identity isn't defined by infertility
- You are not "less of" a woman/man, wife/husband because of infertility
- **God loves you so much!** You are His child, His great love. He isn't punishing you or withholding His blessing. You may not experience *this* particular miracle of a biological child, but God can, will – *is working miracles in you every day!*

For your reflection...

Have I thought about my particular *season* of infertility and taken time (allowed myself) to grieve through it? In what ways can I begin to address my emotions and move toward healing?

What are some "trigger points" that elicit sadness, anger, jealousy, etc.? (A baby announcement on Facebook, TV commercial or show, etc.) What are some positive steps I can take to deal with my grief in those moments?

Think about your relationships: spouse, family, friends, co-workers. Who are the people you can rely on for support when grief is triggered or feels overwhelming? How might you express to them how you're feeling and what kind of support you need most?

What are the ways in which I am a spiritual mother/spiritual father to others? Think about all of the ways you help and support others – not just children, but family, friends, strangers and those who are older than you (the need spiritual mothering/fathering too!)

Action...

Remind yourself daily that you are a child of God, loved and cherished by Him! Our brokenness does not define us; it allows us *to be cared for by Him* (and those we love) and opens us to a creativity uniquely given to us by God.

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit. Psalm 34:19

Create a “List of Affirmations,” positive statements about yourself, your spouse, and life. Write them on post-it notes and put them on the bathroom mirror, a wall in your bedroom, on the fridge – anywhere that you can readily see them. Consult this list often for a reminder of the good things in your life, that you are loved, and that it is good that you exist!

To be grateful is to recognize the love of God in everything. Thomas Merton

Be of service to others. When we go outside of ourselves we feel useful, creative and have purpose. Think about the many ways in which you *already* spiritually mother/father others when you care for them: helping a friend or family member, playing catch with the neighbor kid, consoling a friend who is hurting. These are all ways of being fruitful!

...make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, virtue with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with devotion, devotion with mutual affection, mutual affection with love. If these are yours and increase in abundance, they will keep you from being idle or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:5-8

Tell God your story, and give Him all of the emotions you’re experiencing. Pour out your heart to Him, asking Him to transform you. Let your feelings out. Entrust yourself to God, allowing His healing presence into your heart

The one who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” Then he said, “Write these words down, for they are trustworthy and true.” Revelation 21:5

The Lord took his wounds with him to eternity. He is a wounded God; He let himself be injured through his love for us. His wounds are a sign that he understands and allows himself to be wounded out of love for us. These wounds of his: how tangible they are to us in the history of our time! Indeed, time and again, he allows himself to be wounded for our sake. What certainty of his mercy, what consolation do his wounds mean for us! ... And what a duty they are for us, the duty to allow ourselves in turn to be wounded for him! ~ Pope Benedict XVI

You are not alone
We are praying for you!