

To My Friend Considering IVF

I see you struggling with your infertility as you seek treatment for the issues preventing you from conceiving or carrying a child to term. I am familiar with the desperation you must feel as you process the idea that your dream for a child may go unrealized. I know your journey feels overwhelmingly hard at times and I want you to know that I am here to love you and help you find hope along the way. I am very sorry that you are faced with this hardship. This path is not easy. Please know that you are not alone and you are dearly loved. There are many women going through these same struggles. I am praying for you, your spouse, and your family because I know how much this means to you. Because you are my friend whom I love and cherish, I feel compelled to share the thoughts below with you about the treatment you are considering.

When you feel such desperation and sadness, I know it is tempting to choose the treatment that has the highest likelihood of success. It seems easier to justify the means when you have a higher chance of successful treatment. Out of love for you, your husband, and your eternity, I ask you to please guard your heart and your bodies as you proceed with making such complicated and life-changing decisions. The church's beliefs about Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART), including In-Vitro Fertilization (IVF) and Intra-Uterine Insemination (IUI), can seem overly harsh when your heart is longing for a child and that is the only option you are given to conceive. These beliefs are there to protect your body, your heart, your soul, and the lives that are created, so please spend time in prayer asking God to guide you in your treatments. Although ARTs may have the positive outcome you want, they also have consequences that you may grieve later. God wants so much more for you than that.

Suffering and not getting what you want is okay, even though it is hard. Our society is one of quick fixes. If we have any pain or are not getting what we want, we find a way to correct the problem. While this can be good, it can also lead us into some dangerous territory, like ART. Sometimes when we get what we want too quickly, we take it for granted and we do not learn anything in the process. It is not easy to suffer through the journey of infertility with some days better than others. Trust that you will deepen your relationship with God and your spouse in this time of suffering. Open your mind, heart, and soul to all the things that God wants to teach you during this time. In His time, God can and will redeem your suffering.

The embryo, even though it looks like a drop of water to the untrained eye, is the most vulnerable of little lives. It will be easy to tell yourself, as you begin your first cycle, that an embryo is not really a life because of how it looks and how it is treated. I encourage you to dwell on the life that each embryo is and how you want it to be treated. Think of this little life as a child and how you would treat a child, and think if this treatment really fits in with your beliefs about the treatment of children. Each embryo, at the time it is conceived, is given a soul and is a precious, unique life pulled forth from all eternity by God. Even though it is tempting to think of these lives as less than, they are just as valuable as any other life that gains a heartbeat.

Although going through IVF can seem even more unifying than sex, your child will not be created in the loving embrace you hope for them. Infertility can put stress and strain on a relationship, but experiencing this deep sorrow and pain can also be very unifying because you and your spouse are journeying together through these overwhelming emotions and experiences. Undergoing various procedures and putting the creation of children in the hands of doctors, can feel like you are being brought together with your spouse in ways that couples who have children easily won't ever experience. While that may be true, your child will not be created in the loving warmth of your womb during the most vulnerable act of love in which you and your spouse can engage. Instead, during IVF, egg and sperm are chosen under a microscope, aspirated with a needle, and joined together

in a petri dish and allowed to grow for several days. This precious little life will be created in a temperature-controlled lab where it cannot feel your love or be nurtured by any part of you. It will sit in a petri dish alongside any other specimens the doctors collect that day, separated from you. This life will be on the lab shelf, under the eye of a microscope, for several days while it waits to be put back in your unique and beautiful womb where it should have been all along.

The collateral damage from IVF is more than you think. Obtaining the sperm sample for IVF can be tricky, but there are ways to maximize the preservation of life, so I won't dwell on that. During a fresh cycle of IVF, doctors are stimulating your ovaries to produce as many eggs as possible for retrieval. They will then fertilize as many as they can to try to ensure you have a positive outcome of pregnancy and live birth. This may result in more embryos being created than will be used the first cycle or ever. Embryos will be discarded throughout the process when they stop maturing. If any embryos successfully mature, then you and your doctor will decide how many to implant to achieve success. Any embryos not used will be frozen to use in a frozen cycle later, to donate, or to discard. This a way to help you achieve success in getting pregnant with one baby, but many lives are lost as a result of this process. Each step in the process has an increased risk of death to the remaining embryos. How many lives are you willing to create and destroy for the potential of one?

Cryopreservation is not a viable endpoint for embryos. It is estimated that over about 1,000,000 embryos are in frozen storage in the United States at this time. Couples who have lovingly created these embryos do not want to use them, discard them, donate them to another couple, or donate them for research. By not making a decision about the disposition of these most vulnerable of lives, couples are choosing to keep these souls frozen and abandoned for an undetermined length of time. This is not a viable endpoint for any life. It is easy to toss the final disposition of these lives aside when you are desperate for a child, but you need to really think and pray about how you will feel if you have any embryos left in the freezer. Are you really okay with your children being thrown away, used for science, or being raised by another couple if you decide you cannot use them? Frozen embryos are separated from the possibility of being united with God. Their eternity is put on hold until they are taken out of that freezer. I know you want more than this for the children you create. The freezer is not a final destination.

Successful IVF treatment, resulting in a live birth, will likely not be the end of your infertility journey. It is easy to think that having a baby to hold in your arms will end your struggle with infertility. While you will, no doubt, love and cherish that baby more than you can even imagine, it is very unlikely your infertility journey will end there. You will likely be distracted for a while with the demands of your child, but the healing of infertility comes not from the child you are able to raise, but from the healing power of God Himself. He is the One to trust with your heart and the healing of the incredibly deep wounds of infertility. Believe it or not, He can do that for you with or without a child.

Don't toss aside your gut feeling about these procedures. It is very easy to feel like these Artificial Reproductive Technologies are your best shot at having a baby and there are no other options. Looking at your chances, according to a world view, that may very well be the case. They do offer you and your spouse a chance to create life, but they are not without a lot of collateral damage to you, your spouse, and any lives you create. You are uniquely and beautifully designed for so much more than these procedures offer. You may feel, as you learn more about these treatments, like these treatments are not quite right. In the midst of your desperation to have a child, you may be willing to look away from the destruction and tell yourself it will be okay because

your intentions are good. Research your hesitations. Trust your gut and spend time in prayer, asking God to guide you. He will reveal the truth to you.

Don't miss out on the opportunity to embrace your motherhood. Motherhood comes in many different forms. There are biological mothers, adoptive mothers, foster mothers, and spiritual mothers. All women are called to motherhood and together, the many different types of mothers, make-up motherhood. You are a mother because you are woman, not because you have a child. Don't look so intently at the end goal of having a baby that you miss out on the opportunities God may have for you to be a mother elsewhere. Get involved in opportunities to nurture the lives of those who surround you, not because you will then get pregnant, but because you have a unique purpose and you want God's plan A for your life. The greatest thing any of us can do in life is to help each other along the path to eternity. Embrace your spiritual motherhood, knowing that God will cultivate fertile ground in your soul as well as in the souls of those whose paths you cross.