



August 2015

# SEC Family

Connecting Lives for Eternal Living

A Publication of the South England Conference Family Ministry Department

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## The Silent Cry: The Pain of Infertility

Pr Les Ackie

The issue of infertility surfaces early in the biblical record through the experiences of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, as well as Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 17, 18, 25, 28 & 29). Their narratives clearly indicate that in the culture of the day, childlessness was considered to be an affliction or even a curse from God. The Old Testament also records the experience of Hannah the mother of the prophet Samuel, of whom the Bible says, “The Lord had closed her womb” (1 Samuel 1:5). Hannah’s depression over her inability to conceive year after year caused bitter weeping and deep anguish, affecting even her desire to eat (1 Samuel 1:8,10). Her experience gives a brief insight into the profound effect infertility can have on emotional wellbeing.

Not only does the Bible record the distress that often accompanied childlessness, but it also indicates the social stigma that was attached. In response to the conception of John the Baptist, his mother Elizabeth declared, “The Lord has done this for me . . . In these days he has shown

his favour and taken away my disgrace among the people” (Luke 1:25). While in our Western context the stigma connected with infertility does not carry the same level of intensity as evident in biblical times, we still live in a society that places great store in the birth of babies and the value of family life. For Christians who believe that, “children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward” (Psalm 137:3), it is possible to conclude that God does not deem them worthy of the gift or that they have somehow incurred His displeasure.

For Christian couples who struggle to understand the apparent unfairness of their situation, “Why us?” is a natural question. When a couple has cherished the desire to bring a child into the world as the fruit of their love, the unsuccessful attempt to conceive can represent a journey from expectant hope to crushing despair. The reality of infertility can become a heartbreak that constantly lies in the background of their life experience and surfaces regularly to blight their happiness. Couples often feel less than complete without children and may even question their true femininity or masculinity due to feelings of defectiveness or erroneous perceptions of apparent failure. This pain can often be compounded as they experience pangs of jealousy and self-reproach at the joy of others. Heartbreak and anger may mingle as they witness countless parents withholding from their children the love and support these childless couples crave to have the opportunity to share.

Infertility is not as uncommon as we might expect. According to national statistics, about one in six or seven couples may experience difficulties when trying to conceive. Infertility by definition is a difficulty in conceiving despite having regular unprotected sex for over a year. However, there is no definitive time after which a couple is clinically diagnosed as ‘infertile’. Statistics do suggest that the probability of a couple who have been trying to conceive naturally for more than three years with no success, is 25% or less. Solomon declared that, “Hope deferred makes the heart

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sick (Proverbs 13:12). The continual monthly round of raised hope and sinking disappointment can erode the belief that conception will ever be realized. Approximately a third of infertility problems are attributable to physical problems with females, a third to males, with the remaining third having no discernable cause. For a physically healthy couple, the uncertainty of whether infertility is a

temporary or permanent situation can create challenging dilemmas in regard to how long they should wait before seeking advice, explore some form of intervention or alternative options. In the absence of clear answers, couples can experience a whole gamut of emotions including anger, sadness, envy, guilt, loneliness, and doubt, to name a few. Such emotions may create inner personal doubts and struggles, tensions within the couple relationship and affect effective functioning in other areas of life.



We should never underestimate the intensity of the pain of infertility. Research has shown that some women who have experienced both divorce and childlessness rate the pain of infertility more acute than their divorce. Others have placed the pain on a par with terminal illness. Such reports are difficult to comprehend for those on the outside looking in, who may simply see healthy individuals who just need to “count their blessings” and get on with life. However, infertility is a grieving process, which may be experienced as acutely as an actual bereavement. While there is no funeral, there is a death. It is the death of a cherished dream. Sadly, those who are suffering may be reticent to share their anguish for fear of appearing to overstate their pain, or trivialising the grief of those who have actually lost loved ones. Infertility is one of those issues that we just don’t talk about in church, most probably through a simple lack of awareness. Couples who are affected don’t tend to broadcast the fact and those for whom it is not an issue just don’t think about it. When people are aware, they can become sources of additional stress with uneasy reactions, thoughtless remarks and unwanted advice. Unthinking questions like, “When are we going to hear the patter of tiny feet?” may seem like innocent teasing. Yet such questions can be like a dagger in the heart that adds additional pain to those who are already crying the silent cry.

As a church family we can do much to give the silent cry audible expression by intentionally breaking the silence and affording couples places of safety to share their heart, should they feel the need to do so. When it comes to supporting couples, the old adage, “If you don’t know what to say, say nothing” is particularly appropriate. Being present for those in pain is often more important than saying the “right thing.” Spiritual rationalizations are rarely helpful and often patronizing. While researching for this article it was not difficult to find views that implied that couples are infertile as a test from God and if they just had enough faith, God would give them a child. Such opinions are not only based on a faulty concept of faith, they can also be spiritually abusive, coating heartache with layers of guilt-tripping. Throwing Bible texts at childless couples can be a way of convincing ourselves that we are ‘helping’ without actually engaging with those who are in pain.

The reality is that we don’t know why God allows couples to experience infertility and unless He has revealed His will on the matter, we should hold our peace and refrain from speculation. We can help the hurting by giving them permission to grieve, to weep bitterly, and to ask hard questions without feeling that we have to provide an answer. Those who ask angry questions of God follow a retinue of biblical personalities including Job, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk, who did the same. Even Jesus circumstance in Gethsemane forced from His lips the anguished cry, “My God, My God! Why have you forsaken me?” We must give people time to process their feelings and a context in which to do so, bearing in mind that spouses grieve in their own individual way and in their own time. Support may include counselling, small groups, friendships, prayer meetings or any safe space that allows people to hurt and heal.



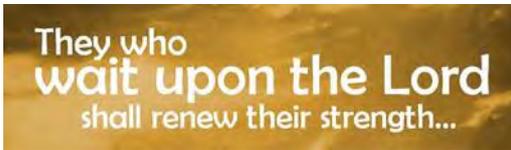
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By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35

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David experienced numerous challenges that dragged him into the depth of despair. Yet he was able to pray to the Lord, “You number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book? (Psalm 56:8). In the book of Lamentations Jeremiah pours out a litany of complaints, yet in the midst of his protests he still concludes, “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. <sup>23</sup>They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. <sup>24</sup>“The Lord is my

portion,” says my soul, “Therefore I hope in Him!” <sup>25</sup>The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him” (Lamentations 3:22-25). Waiting on the Lord is not a passive, arms-folded, finger-drumming inactivity. It is an active resting that trusts in the goodness of God in hopeful expectation that He will fulfil His purpose in us, through us and for us.



They who  
wait upon the Lord  
shall renew their strength...

While the Word of God provides great solace to those who struggle with childlessness, their comfort may not be found in the major biblical references to infertility because in each example mentioned at the beginning of this article, the women all end up with babies. Such examples may simply prompt the question, “What about us?”. Can God perform the miracle to bless a childless couple with a baby? Of course He can! And He does! However, the issue is not whether couples have enough faith to force God’s hand, but whether they have enough faith to trust Him whether He works the miracle or not. One of the most significant features of Hannah’s story is not so much that God rewarded her faith by acceding to her request, but that she remained faithful to God throughout her ordeal. The reality is that God will not always answer our prayers in the way we want, but He will always be an ever-present help. Jesus declared that an integral facet of His mission was to “heal the brokenhearted” (Luke 4:16). He does not promise that we will not suffer, but He does promise that He will never leave us and He will not allow us to suffer more than we can endure.

He holds those in pain through a grieving process that allows them to let go of the dream and process the reality of the loss. Solomon states that, “Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better” (Ecclesiastes 7:3). Fully embracing personal grief paradoxically allows it to subside, enabling joy and positive feelings to be regained. Healthy grieving is a therapeutic process that eases pain while making room for new blessings that the Lord has in store. Embracing His purpose for their lives enables sufferers to redirect their energies to focus on what they have and what is good in their lives. Paul states, “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content” (Philippians 4:11). This does not mean that we should seek to purge ourselves of our natural desires or that we should not do everything within our power to realize our dreams. It is legitimate to come to God with our specific desires in a given situation, but we should also follow James’ counsel that when praying, “you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills’” (James 4:15). Being content means that we trust God to meet all of our needs even when He does not fulfil our wants. It is totally valid for us to intercede on behalf of those who wrestle with infertility in order that God will bless them with a child. When God grants our request, it is easy to “rejoice with those who rejoice”, but we should also be prepared to “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15) when our request is not fulfilled.

Paul states that, “all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen” (2 Corinthians 1:20). However, the stark reality is that while God has given us a multitude of promises that we have the right to expect in Jesus name, having children remains a precious gift to be received, not a right to be claimed. He has promised that He will never leave us or forsake us and in His presence there is fullness of joy. His presence provides solace while weeping endures and the realisation that in Him we have already received His greatest blessing. We can trust that He will fulfil His promise, “<sup>2</sup>. . . to comfort all who mourn, <sup>3</sup>to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified” (Isaiah 61:3).



Beauty  
for  
ashes

By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35



## General Conference Official Statement on Assisted Human Reproduction-Considerations

Developments in medical technology have led to a number of interventions designed to assist human procreation. Procedures such as artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, surrogacy, embryo transfer, and cloning increasingly provide new options in human reproduction. Such interventions raise serious ethical questions for Christians seeking God's will on these issues.

The hope of having children is generally powerful. When this hope is frustrated by problems of infertility, the disappointment of childlessness weighs heavily on many couples. Their sorrow deserves understanding and compassion. It is not surprising that many who suffer sadness because of infertility turn to new reproductive technologies to restore hope. However, with the power of such technologies comes the responsibility to decide whether and when they should be used.

Because of their conviction that God is concerned with all dimensions of human life, Seventh-day Adventists are committed to discovering and following God's principles for human reproduction. The power of procreation is God's gift, and should be used to glorify God and bless humanity. Through a careful study of the Bible and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the community of faith can identify fundamental principles that guide in decision making regarding assisted reproduction. Among the most important of these are:

1. Human reproduction is part of God's plan (Genesis 1:28), and children are a blessing from the Lord (Psalm 127:3; 113:9). Medical technologies that aid infertile couples, when practiced in harmony with biblical principles, may be accepted in good conscience.
2. Childlessness should bear no social or moral stigma, and no one should be pressured to have children with or without medical assistance (1 Corinthians 7:4, 7; Romans 14:4; Matthew 19:10-12; 24:19; 1 Timothy 5:8). Decisions to use or not use reproductive technologies are a deeply personal matter to be settled mutually by a wife and husband, without coercion. There are many acceptable reasons, including health and the special demands of some forms of Christian service (1 Corinthians 7:32, 33), that may lead people to refrain from or limit procreation.
3. God's ideal is for children to have the benefits of a stable family with active participation of both mother and father (Proverbs 22:6; Ps 128:1-3; Ephesians 6:4; Deuteronomy 6:4-7; 1 Tim 5:8). For this reason, Christians may seek medically assisted reproduction only within the bounds of the fidelity and permanence of marriage. The use of third parties, such as sperm donors, ovum donors, and surrogates, introduces a number of medical and moral problems that are best avoided. Moreover, family and genetic identity are significant to individual well-being. Decisions regarding assisted reproduction must take into consideration the impact on family heritage.
4. Human life should be treated with respect at all stages of development (Jeremiah 1:5; Psalm 139:13-16). Assisted reproduction calls for sensitivity to the value of human life. Procedures such as in vitro fertilization require prior decisions about the number of ova to be fertilized and the moral issues regarding the disposition of any remaining preembryos.
5. Decisions regarding procreation should be based on complete and accurate information (Proverbs 12:22; Ephesians 4:15, 25). Couples considering assisted reproduction should seek such information. Health care professionals should disclose fully the nature of the procedures, emotional and physical

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risks, costs, and documented successes and limited probabilities.

6. The principles of Christian stewardship are relevant to decisions concerning assisted reproduction (Luke 14:28; Proverbs 3:9). Some forms of technology are very costly. Couples seeking reproductive assistance should give responsible consideration to the expenses involved.

As Christians seek to apply these principles, they can be confident that the Holy Spirit will assist them in their decisions (John 16:13). The community of faith should seek to understand their aspirations and the issues that childless couples face (Ephesians 4:11-16). Among the alternatives that infertile couples may consider is adoption. As couples make careful decisions they should be able to rely on the compassionate understanding of the church family.

This recommendation was voted by the Christian View of Human Life Committee at Pine Springs Ranch, California, April 10-12, 1994.

This document was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM), Silver Spring, Maryland, July 26, 1994.



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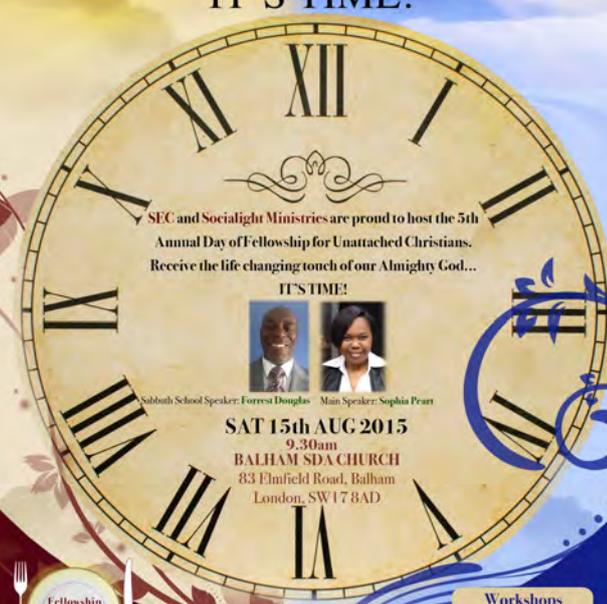


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Account Number: 89169174 (Natwest)  
Please reference payment with your name.

Contacts:  
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## SEC FAMILY MINISTRIES LEADERSHIP TRAINING



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AdventSource  
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NAD Adventist Singles Ministry  
[www.adventistsingleadultministries.org/](http://www.adventistsingleadultministries.org/)

Official SDA Church Statements  
<http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/>

End It Now - Adventists Say No to Violence Against Women  
<http://www.enditnow.org/>

F.O.C.U.S. Singles Ministries  
<http://www.focusnyc.org/default.aspx?ad=0>

Mankind Initiative - Support for Male Victims of Domestic Abuse  
[www.mankind.org.uk/](http://www.mankind.org.uk/)

Raising Voices - Preventing Violence Against Women & Children  
<http://raisingvoices.org/>

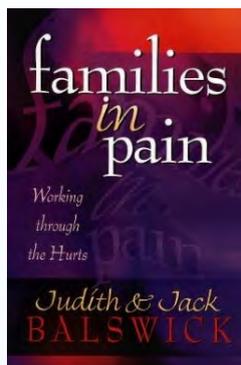
Refuge - For Women & Children Against Domestic Violence  
<http://refuge.org.uk/>

Respect - For Perpetrators of Domestic Violence  
<http://respect.uk.net/>

Real Family Talk  
[realfamilytalk.hopetv.org/](http://realfamilytalk.hopetv.org/)

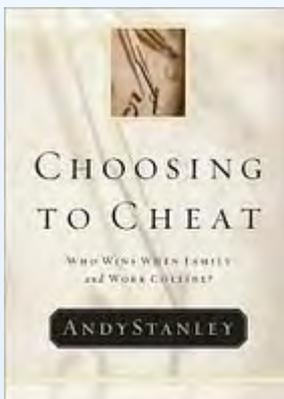
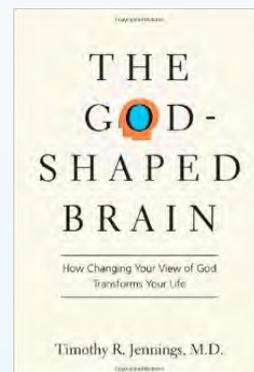
Sounds of Encouragement  
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## Recommended Reading



In *Families in Pain*, Judith and Jack Balswick offer an honest look at the various points where pain enters our families. This book is especially for those who like to research their problem thoroughly and see how they fit into the bigger picture. Faced with the choice of walking away or covering pain with a smile, the Balswicks show a third way - the path of godly courage.

In *The God-Shaped Brain*, Dr Timothy Jennings dispels common misconceptions about God and shows how different God concepts affect the brain differently. Our brains can adapt, change and rewire with redeemed thinking that frees us from unnecessary pain and suffering. Discover how neuroscience and Scripture come together to bring healing and transformation to our lives.



In *Choosing to Cheat*, Andy Stanley tackles the challenge of prioritising our time. With only 24 hours in each day, we simply can't fit everything in. What we choose to "cheat" is a clear announcement of our values. This little book presents a strategic plan for resolving the tension between work and home reversing the destructive pattern of giving to your company and career what belongs to your family.

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**REAL Family Talk**   
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