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bigIdea small group discussion

IF. Stands for infertility. A big ugly word that hangs over the hearts of more than seven million people. It's also a complicated word. It's a word that lots of people think is an easy fix when it's not. It's a turn-your-world-on-it's-head word. A word that simultaneously brings silence and shouting to deep places in one's soul. A word that touches things inside you that you didn't want to be touched.

The problem of infertility can be a very difficult one, especially for couples who have looked forward to children all their lives. Christian couples can find themselves asking "Why us, Lord?" Surely God wants Christians to be blessed with children to love and nurture.

For many couples, one of the most heart-wrenching aspects of infertility is not knowing whether it is a temporary or permanent situation. If it is temporary, how long must they wait? If it is permanent, how do they know that, and what should be their course of action?



BIG IDEA: God does amazing things in and through empty places.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does God ever seem slow on His promises? In what areas have you had to wait on God?
2. When you yearn for something and it doesn't happen, what do you do?
 - a. Complain a lot
 - b. Get depressed
 - c. Get obsessed with it
 - d. Get mad at God

Make no mistake—both husbands and wives struggle with the pain of infertility. Yet many times, it is the woman who struggles with the feelings of brokenness, depression, social isolation, and anxiety.

3. What in your life gives you a sense of self-worth?
 - a. My children
 - b. My job
 - c. My education
 - d. I'm not sure anything does
 - e. The people I spend time with
 - f. Other: _____
4. *With your Bible or YouVersion, read 1 Samuel 1:1-20.* What about Elkanah's ancestry (v. 1) underscores Hannah's plight? Why is a son so dear to her?
5. What responses does her not having children evoke in Hannah? In Elkanah? In Peninnah? In Eli?
6. What does Hannah intend for her son by her vow (v. 11; see also Numbers 6:1-8, Judges 13:7)? What is the irony in Eli's accusation?
7. Why does Hannah's sadness disappear so quickly (v. 18)?
8. What unchangeable situation have you grieved over as Hannah does? Was it really unchangeable?
9. When has God led you into a time of disappointment before granting your heart's desire? Are you in the midst of a time of disappointment now? What encouragement can you find in this passage? In your own experiences of God's faithfulness?
10. When has the Lord *remembered* you in a time of great need?
11. Has there been a time of great need when you suddenly *remembered* the Lord? What helps in such times? Journalled prayers? Re-reading your prayers? Reading the Bible? Getting around godly people to encourage you? Spending time and isolating yourself from people?



MOVING FORWARD

God does amazing things in and through empty places.

- The bottom of an empty well was the beginning of Joseph's destiny ([Genesis 37:24](#)).
- A poverty stricken widow with children's mouths to fill was at the end of her rope and found hope when God sent provision through Elisha and some empty jars. ([2 Kings 4:3-7](#)).
- The best of all the *empty* things in Scripture is the empty tomb ([Luke 24:12](#)). The empty tomb means that Christ could not be held by the power of death and that He was indeed the sacrifice to end all sacrifices so that we might have forgiveness from our sins ([Hebrews 10:10](#)).

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Trying to get pregnant can be an emotional roller coaster — especially when you're struggling with infertility. Not getting pregnant when you really want to can cause depression, anxiety and grief. While the ride can be an emotionally difficult one, there are some ways to make it a little easier.

Acknowledge Your Emotions

The feelings of grief, despair, envy and failure are real, even if you're grieving for a baby you've never conceived. The desire to have a child can become overwhelming for any couple, including those who have had children previously. Don't ignore your emotions or avoid dealing with them because you feel like you're somehow responsible for being infertile. A healthy life — and a healthy pregnancy — start with a healthy outlook. Be realistic about what you're feeling. That's the first step to coping.

Seek a Support Network


No matter how alone you feel, you really aren't. Ten percent of reproductive age couples struggle with infertility. Through online and local support groups, you can meet others who have had the same emotional struggles you're experiencing and benefit from their wisdom gained from living through the ordeal. As an added bonus, most infertility support organizations offer resources to help you decide whether infertility treatments are right for you and, if so, what kind would suit your budget and fit your emotional and ethical boundaries.


Deal With Your Depression

Nearly all infertile couples eventually become depressed. Studies show that untreated depression and stress can cause lower fertility rates, even in women undergoing fertility treatment. So rejuvenate with a relaxing soak in the tub, listen to your favorite music or spend some time enjoying nature — whatever helps you to get the most out of life. Reducing your stress and feelings of despair can give you some hope. If you still struggle with depressive feelings, consult a professional therapist.

Make Wise Choices

The pressure to conceive can make it difficult to determine the right path in pregnancy planning. Carefully consider the decisions you can live with. While the advances of science have made it possible for more than 80 percent of infertile couples to become pregnant, many of those options lead down roads filled with ethical dilemmas. Weigh in with your religious and moral considerations before you make a decision. If possible, seek the counsel of someone whose opinion you respect as you contemplate the ethical issues. Conceiving a child — no matter how it takes place — is just the beginning of a lifetime commitment to making the best possible decisions for the welfare of your family.





I don't know what God has planned for you and your family, but I do know that He doesn't waste our pain. He has collected every tear ([Psalms 56:8](#)) we cried as another month passed into another year without a baby. He has seen the longings of our hearts. God might be preparing you to parent a child. He also might have a great purpose for us to live out without having children of our own. Whether God fills your family with blessed little ones or fills your heart with His children, know that God sees you, that He loves you, that you are not forgotten. He has a plan - a good, wonderful, gracious plan.

RESOURCES

www.sarahs-laughter.com

www.dancinguponbarrenland.com

www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/facing_crisis/infertility/coping_with_infertility.aspx

www.rethinkingmythinking.info/infertility-issues

www.createdforcare.org

www.laurencasper.com

Empty Womb, Aching Heart, Marlo Schalesky. Bethany House Publishers, 2001.

CHANGING YOUR MIND

Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the LORD. And she made this vow: "O LORD of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the LORD, his hair will never be cut." 1 Samuel 1:10-11

