

Infertility: Where's God when there's no baby?

With one in six families experiencing infertility, we will all know people who have or will struggle to have children. When life hasn't turned out like we thought it would, is there any comfort to be found from God? Through this series, we will consider infertility and some Bible passages which can be of benefit for us if we are or have experienced infertility, and also for the sake of others around us.

If this grief is live for you, I pray you'll see God meeting you in your grief through these passages and comforting you in the gospel.

Written by Anna Boxwell, Chair of Canberra Women's Christian Convention. Anna and her husband have experienced infertility.



**BIBLE
SOCIETY**
Live light

Scripture taken from The Holy Bible: (NIV)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
1	<p>'The leech has two daughters. "Give! Give!" they cry.</p> <p>'There are three things that are never satisfied, four that never say, "Enough!": the grave, the barren womb, land, which is never satisfied with water, and fire, which never says, "Enough!"</p>	Proverbs 30:15-16	<p>Many people who'd like to have children but, for whatever reason, can't, can feel like their experience is invisible. Some can even wonder if it's ok to name it as 'grief,' particularly if they have had others minimise their experience. God shows us here in Proverbs that this is a genuine kind of grief, indeed, it can seem insatiable.</p> <p>Does this picture of unsatisfied grief resonate with you? Or have you seen it in the lives of others?</p>	<p>Heavenly Father, I mourn with those who can't have children. I'm sorry for when I may have minimised someone else's sadness at not being able to have children. Please comfort and refresh my heart with your word, and be close to me in this journey. Amen.</p>
2	<p>So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.</p> <p>God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'</p>	Genesis 1:27-28	<p>Being told children won't come easily, if at all, can prompt us to second-guess ourselves in all kind of ways. Sometimes we can wonder; should we even want to have children? If God wants people to 'increase in number,' why can't we? The first image bearers of God were given work to do in the world. As a team, God charged the man and woman with caring for the world, bringing order, and growing in number. But we do ourselves and others a disservice if this is all we remember. Avoid telling others that you 'know' God will give them children – all of us are affected by the fall and none of us know when and if children will be gifted to us.</p> <p>How can you remember to both uphold both the goodness of wanting to have children alongside the knowledge that sin has marred God's good intent?</p>	<p>Heavenly Father, my sense of self and purpose have been rattled. Seeing others seemingly easily have children, when others can't, can prompt me to feel sad, angry and helpless. I grieve the way the fall has spoiled your intent for people. Please help me to not be insensitive to others. Amen.</p>

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3	<p>To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.</p> <p>Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."</p>	Genesis 3:16 (ESV)	<p>Part of the fallout from Adam and Eve's rejection of God's rule and care is this declaration from God. Evil, sadness, death, suffering, toil, pain in bringing forth children – these things all entered the world because of Adam and Eve's sin and rejection of God. Pain in bringing forth children entails more than difficult labours; this is an expansive picture of difficulties now inherent in both raising and trying to have children. We can be so used to life going well that we can be tempted to not see the effects of the fall in our world and in our lives.</p> <p>How are you tempted to minimise the effects of the fall?</p>	<p>Lord, I grieve Adam and Eve's sin and the way having and raising children is difficult now. Please grow my heart to listen well and love others who are hurting, recognising the impact the fall has on all parts of life. Thank you for Jesus' work in saving me and giving me hope of the new heavens and new earth where there will be no more sin. Amen.</p>
4	<p>In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.</p>	Luke 1:5-7	<p>In some corners of Christianity, the inability to have children is seen as punishment for a specific sin. A friend of mine recalls having someone inquire as to if there might be a curse in her history, the implication being that they should have easily been able to have a baby unless there was a particular sin that was causing infertility. Luke's story of Zechariah and Elizabeth is an example of how foolish such thinking is. Here we have a godly, righteous, priestly couple, and yet, jarringly, they struggled to have a baby.</p> <p>Have you been tempted to think that you or others are somehow to blame for not being able to have a baby?</p>	<p>Heavenly Father, I'm sorry for times when I might have judged others, thinking they're not worthy to have children. I turn away from smug thinking and turn to Christ, asking that he would help me be godly in my attitude to others. Please help me to push back at our culture's story of being deserving of gifts, instead, help me remember that everything we have is given out of your astonishing grace. Amen.</p>

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5	<p>Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, 'The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.'</p> <p>Abram agreed to what Sarai said.</p>	Genesis 16:1-2	<p>God had made tremendous promises to Abram; in particular, that he would bless the world through his offspring. My heart sinks when I read these verses. Abram and Sarai tried to shortcut God's promises to them with human pragmatism. This is clearly not a wise way to try and overcome infertility! We might not try adultery in trying to have a baby, but we can be strongly influenced by our culture's 'whatever it takes' approach to fertility.</p> <p>Can you think of any 'whatever it takes' approaches to infertility? Can you think of anything wrong with them?</p>	<p>Lord, I'm sorry for the ways I'm influenced by our culture's pragmatism. Please help me to be wise and humble as I navigate this journey, and convict me of and protect from sin. Thank you that you have allowed incredible medical technology to assist with having children, and thank you for the many little ones who come into your world in this way under your sovereign hand. Please help me to not be so caught up in this world that I blindly go along with things that are not pleasing to you. Shape me to be insightful and godly. Amen.</p>
6	<p>In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, 'LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.'</p>	1 Samuel 1:10-11	<p>In this story, we see Hannah's intense sadness at not being able to have a child. Hannah's sadness didn't lead to resentment or fatalism but she channelled that sadness in honest prayer. Hannah poured out her grief before God, the only one who can carry it. Note Hannah isn't bribing God here, nor was this a magical prayer that twisted God's arm. Hannah's prayer reflects a personal longing for a son and her sincere desire to dedicate everything she has to the Lord.</p> <p>How does Hannah's prayer inform how you could pray through you own or other's infertility?</p>	<p>Heavenly Father, my heart is heavy and I see much of my pain in Hannah's prayer to you. Thank you that you cared for her in her sadness. May your Spirit incline my heart to you in prayer when I don't feel like praying. Help me to be diligent in prayer for myself and others. Amen.</p>

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7	<p>Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.</p>	Romans 4:18-21	<p>It's common for Christians to offer the story of Abraham and Sarah to those experiencing infertility as a kind of proof-couple in the Bible; they trusted God in impossible circumstances and God gave them a baby when they believed his promise to them. Does this mean if we trust God we'll have a baby? Abraham and Sarah lived during a particular time in salvation history. It wasn't because they trusted him that God gave them their baby, but because it was part of God's generous plan to begin his people, Israel, and we can ultimately trace this all the way to Jesus.</p> <p>What about Abraham and Sarah's experience is helpful for those experiencing infertility? What isn't?</p>	<p>Heavenly Father, thank you that I can consider Abraham and Sarah's grief and identify with them. Thank you for the way that I benefit from God's goodness to Abraham and Sarah because their baby led all the way to Jesus. Help me to have the kind of faith Paul writes about in Romans 4:24, to believe in you who raised Jesus from the dead. Amen.</p>
8	<p>As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.</p> <p>My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?</p> <p>My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'</p> <p>These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng.</p> <p>Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.</p>	Psalm 42:1-5	<p>The Psalmists didn't pretend away their feelings, but they brought them to God in authentic and honest words. The experience of hoping for a child in vain can leave us feeling distant from God, wondering if he notices or cares about our plight. Reading the Bible can seem like a futile exercise. At times like this the Psalms can be the best place of refreshment as we notice the raw honesty of the Psalmists. Sometimes those suffering infertility won't feel like they can put their hope in God or praise him. This Psalm shows us the best kind of 'self-talk' – where we encourage ourselves to hope in God and wait upon the Spirit to make it real.</p> <p>What does it mean for you to put your hope in God?</p>	<p>Heavenly father, thank you that you are my refuge and strength, and that even when I feel like my whole world has fallen from beneath my feet, I know that you are there, you are with me, and you are good. Thank you for the freedom I find in the Psalms to really feel things. Thank you that I too can be real with God and can ask him hard questions, and that because of the security of my salvation in Jesus, there's nothing I could ask or express that could shake my safety in you. Please help me to continue to hope in you, my Saviour and my God. Amen.</p>

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Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
9	Worship the LORD your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away disease from among you, and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span.	Exodus 23:25-26	<p>This is an oft-quoted passage from those trying to cheer up people struggling to have a baby. Out of context, it seems to be implying that worship will entail a disease free, long life with loads of kids. But in its context, God was establishing his covenant with Israel who he was about to welcome into the Promised Land. He was laying out the covenantal blessings on offer if only God's people would follow him truly. The good news is we still look forward to this promise being fulfilled when the risen Lord Jesus returns to make all things new, and even miscarried children themselves can be swept up in his gracious arms.</p> <p>Why should we be careful in quoting this verse to people who can't have children or who have had a miscarriage?</p>	<p>Lord, we grieve the loss of the many boys and girls who are not known to us but who are known to you. We thank you that they can be safe in Christ, and so their death will not be final. Thank you for Jesus' resurrection and the power your Spirit showed in crushing death and sin for good. We long for the new heavens and new earth where we will see those little ones lost through miscarriage and stillbirth, because of what Jesus has done. Amen.</p>
10	Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.	Colossians 3:1-4	<p>We wouldn't want to say that having children is merely an 'earthly' desire. It is good and right for Christians to want to have godly children. The corrective Paul is offering here is about where we put our identity. We're expected to answer the question, "what do you do?" with something like, "I'm a teacher," "I'm a mum," "I'm a lawyer" etc. But this kind of language can encourage us to think that those things are who we are. If we place our self-worth in an expected version of our life, we'll be shattered if it doesn't eventuate. If we fix our hearts on what Christ has achieved for us and the life he invites us in to, we can better weather the hard things of this life.</p> <p>Would it be obvious to others that you find your identity in Christ, first and foremost?</p>	<p>Heavenly Father, I ask that your Spirit would point out things in my life that I'm inclined to centre my identity around instead of Jesus, and that you would help me, daily, to find my identity in Christ. No matter if I have children or not, or what kind of job I have, or where I travel, or whatever else I do or achieve, please help me remember the reality of being raised with Jesus. Thank you that he died for me and that I am now safe with him who is raised to glory. Amen.</p>

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11	In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps.	Proverbs 16:9	<p>Are you a planner? Have you ever had a plan that has worked 100 per cent like you wanted it to? Our culture tells us we are the sole captain of our life, able to determine what we do and when. We don't need to be stoic, as though we shouldn't have hopes and dreams. Think carefully about your expectations of your own life and of others. Be careful of asking the question, 'when are you going to have kids?' It's ok to hope to get married, to plan when you might 'try' and have children but let's not get carried away by the misapprehension that we're the masters of our own destiny.</p> <p>Is it relieving to know that your life is not all up to you? Why or why not?</p>	Father God, it's so hard to hand over my life to you. I want to be in control and decide what my future looks like. Thank you that you are kind, good and generous. Thank you that you are in control of my life and that you establish my steps, even the ones that are tricky to negotiate. Amen.
12	If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.	James 1:5	<p>One of the troubles with infertility is that it opens up an overwhelming range of decisions. <i>Should we go to the doctor? Should we pay for that expensive test? What would we do with the information? Should we use some kind of Assistive Reproductive Technology (like IVF)? How should we navigate the ethics of this? How much money should we spend? Should we stop treatment and apply to foster or adopt? How much should we tell other people?</i></p> <p><i>When should we stop?</i> In all this, we need God's help, and can come to him for wisdom, knowing that he gives it freely and generously.</p> <p>In what area of life would you like to seek wisdom from God?</p>	Lord, I come to you, seeking your wisdom, on your terms. At times I am overwhelmed at the complexity of life, and weighed down by not knowing what to do. May your Spirit guide me and cultivate discernment within me, for others' good and your glory. Help me to keep trusting you in all things. Amen.

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13	<p>Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.</p>	2 Corinthians 12:7b-10	<p>We're surrounded by the expectation that we should always be strong, no matter what. In contrast, Paul's words are refreshingly freeing. We don't know what Paul's 'thorn' was, and none of us really know why we might struggle to have a child. Infertility is not a weakness we gladly boast in. In Paul we can see an example of honestly coming to God in prayer and asking that he take away our difficulties, and that regardless of how God answers our prayer, being confident that his grace is enough for us.</p> <p>Can you think of a time in your life when you noticed God's grace towards you in your weakness?</p>	<p>Heavenly Father, thank you that I don't have to try and be strong all the time. Thank you that I can be honest with you, and that I can be confident that when I feel weak, you are with me. Thank you that Christ's power rests on me and that your grace is enough. Amen.</p>
14	<p>While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, 'Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.'</p> <p>He replied to him, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' Pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'</p>	Matthew 12:46-50	<p>These confronting words of Jesus show us the truth of what our relationships can be with fellow followers of Jesus. We can too easily miss the goodness and depth of a healthy church family as we live individualistic lives. All of us, whether we're married or single, have children or don't, are brothers and sisters in Christ, yet we can too easily miss out on the beauty of this. While living in such a counter-cultural way does not erase the pain of infertility, it can help us, together, point to the love and hope we all share in Jesus. If you're not experiencing infertility yourself, this could challenge you to not become so focused on your own biological family that you neglect or shut out your brothers and sisters in Christ in your local church. Regardless of our circumstances, all of us can seek to live out the reality of being adopted into God's family, through Jesus' death and resurrection.</p> <p>How can you better express the familyhood of believers in your local church?</p>	<p>Heavenly Father, please use me to help build a healthy local church, filled with men and women who love and support one another as siblings in Christ. I ask that your Spirit would continue to comfort those who have lost children or who can't have children. Please protect their marriages and bring comfort and healing, and please bring about new life in families who long for children. I ask that your Spirit would guide me to care and love others with the hope of Jesus. Amen.</p>