

Study Guide  
*and*  
Group Discussion Questions

*for the book*  
Infertility:  
A Survival Guide for Couples  
and Those Who Love Them

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**Chapter 2**  
**A Woman's Perspective on Infertility**

**CONSIDER THIS: Where is your self-worth coming from?**

**1. What most influences your self-worth?** Since self-worth can be derived from more than one source, give each item below a grade from 0-10, (0—It doesn't influence my self-worth all; 10—It significantly influences my self-worth).

- \_\_\_ My relationship with my spouse
- \_\_\_ My desire to be a parent
- \_\_\_ The fact that I am loved unconditionally by God
- \_\_\_ My relationships with friends/family
- \_\_\_ My job, ministry, or another activity
- \_\_\_ My material status (where we live, what we own)
- \_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Except for God's love, everything in life is subject to change.** A spouse could die, a job could end, financial status could be swept away. What would happen to your self-worth if these things occurred?

**3. Read again the verses that describe God's love for you** (pp. 38-39). First John 4:18 says, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." What fears have weighed you down in your infertility struggles?

Do these fears gnaw away at your self-worth? How?

One by one, bring each fear and lay it down before God's throne. Ask Him to fill up your heart and soul with assurances of His loving acceptance and provision for you.

**4. How can you increase your awareness of God's love for you?** Do you take time to daily realize how much He values you every single day?

**Chapter 3**  
***A Man's Perspective on Infertility***

**CONSIDER THIS...Naming and identifying your emotions**

When I was a chaplain at a large hospital in Alabama, my supervisor taught me and my fellow chaplains a great skill at being able to name our feelings. She would ask us during some of our interpersonal relationship seminars to express how a situation made us feel. We would launch into a discussion, rambling around the feeling and not really naming it. Finally, she would halt our dialogue and hold up her hand with her fingers spread apart. "These are your options," she'd say as she pointed to each finger to emphasize each choice, "Mad, Sad, Glad, Scared, or Hurt. You have to use one of these to define your feelings. No other words are acceptable."



We were forced to use only those five words to label what we had been rambling about. The other words we used to dance around the topic weren't tolerated. And when one of us would venture back into talking around our feelings without really pinpointing them, she would just hold up her hand again and point. It was an action she repeated so often that she didn't even need to speak. Just the action of her pointing toward her outstretched palm was enough for us to rethink what we were saying and give it a name.

This was a powerful exercise because it pushed us to start to learn to identify our emotions within specific categories, rather than verbose descriptions that sometimes revealed nothing. It helped us to name our emotions and led us to talk about them aloud with someone who understood what we were saying. We all had common ground in understanding what the terms meant.

**1. Begin to use** the Mad, Sad, Glad, Scared, Hurt concept in daily life, just to get used to it. As you become more familiar with tagging your emotions on the spot, you'll find it easier to translate this concept into the deeper, more difficult experiences of life.

**2. Do you journal?** Give yourself a chance to explore it during your battle with infertility. You don't need to write every day, but just keep a notebook handy for jotting down feelings and thoughts about once a week. Sprinkled throughout these chapters are ideas for journaling at specific times and for specific reasons. You may want to give a try during the holiday season (see chapter 8: Surviving holidays and social events).

**Chapter 4**  
**Marriage: Will Yours Survive or Thrive?**

**CONSIDER THIS...**

**1. Open up the pressure cooker!**

Letting your emotions out a little at a time is like letting steam off a pressure cooker. Why let your feelings build up until they explode? Open the vent frequently and give your emotions some air.

Review the Mad, Sad, Glad, Scared, Hurt concept (p. 51) and learn how to use it to name your emotions succinctly. It can be the first significant step in opening up barricaded communication between you and your spouse. Looking at this list of situations, each of you can use one or more emotional labels to describe how each event makes you feel:

*“(Situation) makes me feel (mad, sad, glad, scared, or hurt).”*

- \*Sitting in the waiting room surrounded by pregnant women
- \*Obtaining a sperm specimen
- \*Having sex according to the doctor’s schedule
- \*Thinking about what our child might look like
- \*Giving injections to my spouse
- \*Remembering our first date
- \*Thinking about the word *infertility*
- \*Starting another monthly cycle
- \*Praying with you
- \*Knowing other couples who conceive easily
- \*Lying on the insemination table
- \*Having eggs harvested
- \*Listening to you talk about infertility
- \*Seeing other people’s children at the park, at church, etc.
- \*Taking a walk and holding your hand

To take this exchange one step further, pick one of the situations and let each spouse give a one-word emotion/response. Then, having heard both initial responses, ask your spouse, “Tell me how or why (this situation) makes you feel (this emotion)?” This gives each person a chance to flesh out the feelings behind the one-word answer.

Let this be a spur-of-the-moment device to help you open up communication more readily, more frequently. When you walk past the baby clothes aisle in the department store, don’t you both just clam up and pretend it didn’t make you feel something. Hold up your open palm and ask for one of the five emotions. When you’ve survived a group event involving families, like a church picnic, find a moment alone and exchange answers.

## 2. Continuum of consideration

Infertile couples come face to face with their expectations and the need to revamp some of them. A continuum can represent just how flexible or inflexible you are in your ability to revise your expectations. Here are some questions and continuums which can provide some serious food for thought with your spouse. Where do each of you place yourselves in light of these questions?

*When we married, how easy did I think it would be for us to have children?*

\*-----\*

Left: Not a problem

Middle: Had a few concerns

Right: Knew we'd have some challenges

*What do I want most: to be a parent or to be a parent of our biological child?*

\*-----\*

Left: Just want to be a parent

Middle: Still struggling with the idea of not birthing a child

Right: Refuse to settle for less than our birth child

*When I think about fertility treatments, do I have any pre-set limitations?*

\*-----\*

Left: Can't imagine us going to a lot of trouble/expense

Middle: Willing to try a moderate level of treatment

Right: No holds barred! Whatever it takes!

*When I think of adoption, I feel like I could...*

\*-----\*

Left: Love practically any child

Middle: Consider it after we've exhausted all biological possibilities

Right: Never really be open to it

*The possibility of living our lives childfree (without biological or adopted children) makes me feel...*

\*-----\*

Left: I would be okay

Middle: I could probably go either way

Right: I'd feel extremely sad and robbed

As you think through these questions, some may need to be revisited in the months to come, after certain levels of fertility treatments have been unsuccessful, when money starts to wane, or when emotions wear paper thin. Add questions of your own as you go along, using a continuum to map your positions and opinions so you can keep communication and love flowing both directions.

**Chapter 5**  
**Why Do They Have Children, and We Don't?**

**CONSIDER THIS...**

**1. Think about a recent day** when you seemed to be especially sensitive to the fact that “everyone else has children but us.” List some of the encounters you had, the places you were when those feelings occurred, and how you reacted.

This exercise can be painful for you to reflect on. If so, take a few moments and lift each of those moments to God in prayer. Realize how He hurts with you and for you.

As you go forward with your week, begin to train yourself to cast your pain and sorrow on the Lord at the moment of experiencing encounters like those listed above. Let God walk *with you* through these moments.

**2. Reality Check.** It often does seem like everyone has children but you. But sometimes it helps to do a little reality check. List people you know who have never had children. List those who are waiting and hoping like you. List those who worked long and hard to get their children through infertility methods or adoption.

The key point is you are not alone. Other people have struggled, are struggling, and will keep on struggling. You can survive it. You can come out on the other side stronger, more mature, and more thankful for the blessings that will eventually come your way.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Grief: Walking through the Maze**

#### **CONSIDER THIS: Just for you and your journal**

Most of us try to shove grief under a rug. But it's time to turn back the rug and take a look at what you've swept into hiding.

1. Take a moment to identify how grief makes you feel. Don't know where to start? Try this: Use the letters of the alphabet and write down a word or phrase that starts with each letter to describe the feelings that rumble around in your soul. For example: "A—*anger over my miscarriage*; B—*bitterness, broken heart...*"

Now that you've opened your heart and mind to acknowledge these feelings, imagine that Christ is sitting right next to you, feeling all your pain, even weeping with you. Let Him lift the burden of each of those feelings. Confess whatever needs to be said. Feel the cleansing He gives. Sit back and rest in the healing He wants to offer you.

2. Write a letter to the child or children you've lost. Express your love for them. Tell them what you've always wanted to say to them.

3. If you've never knowingly been pregnant, write a letter to the child you long to conceive.

#### **Consider these additional RESOURCES**

1. Mommies Enduring Neonatal Death ([www.mend.org](http://www.mend.org)) M.E.N.D. is a Christian, not-for-profit corporation whose purpose is to reach out to those who have lost a child due to miscarriage, stillbirth or early infant death and offer a way to share experiences and information through support groups, the bi-monthly newsletter, and a web site.

2. *How We Grieve: Relearning the World* by Thomas Attig, Oxford University Press, New York, 1996. Particularly chapter 4 (Relearning the World); chapter 5 (Relearning Our Selves: Grief and Personal Integrity).

3. *Surviving Pregnancy Loss* by Rochelle Friedman, M.D., and Bonnie Gradstein, Little, Brown, and Company, Boston, 1982. This book does a good job of thorough explaining what to expect with miscarriage, stillbirth, ectopic pregnancy, and multiple losses—before, during, and after the loss. Other chapters address how loss impacts your husband, marriage, other family members, and how to plan for the future.

**Chapter 7**  
**Setting Boundaries in the Valley of Infertility**

**CONSIDER THIS: Mark your boundaries!**

This chapter is loaded with questions for you and your spouse to think about and discuss. What boundaries have you and your spouse set for **YOUR EMOTIONAL INVESTMENT, YOUR TIME INVESTMENT, YOUR FINANCIAL INVESTMENT.**

It's vital to set some of these boundaries **before** you are deep into the Valley of Infertility. Your perspective gets distorted after months of IUIs, IVFs, and other medical procedures.

How much money can you invest in your quest to birth your own child?

One couple cashed in their savings for the home they were waiting to build.

Another couple cashed in her retirement earnings.

On the more frugal end of the continuum, we looked at our savings account and determined we had enough money for one IVF or an adoption. Since an adoption was a more sure thing, we opted to forego any more medical investments, and more on to adoption. About 14 months later, we were holding Ryan in our arms.

What about your time investment?

**CONSIDER THIS...Time to draw a line in the sand**

**1. Talk with your spouse about the three boundary areas: Emotional, Time, Financial.**

Begin to set some specific boundaries for the various aspects of your infertility struggle. Write them in your journal.

**2. Unless your infertility journey takes a sudden turn toward success,** you'll need to reevaluate your boundaries periodically. You may find one spouse has more of a "whatever it takes" attitude than the other. You'll need to come to compromise on these areas where you find yourself at opposite ends of the spectrum. The health of your marriage is vital. Your partnership must be nurtured and preserved throughout the journey.

Don't be afraid to seek out a counselor to be that impartial third party to listen to you both air your thoughts. Or look to your infertility support group for an outlet to bounce your concerns off people who know what the journey is like.

**Consider these Additional RESOURCES**

1. Go to National Adoption Information Clearinghouse ([www.calib.com/naic/](http://www.calib.com/naic/)) and look for the "Cost of Adopting" document.

2. Crown Financial Ministries offers financial planning resources from a Christian perspective ([www.crown.org](http://www.crown.org)). A few examples of available resources are: *The Complete Financial Guide for Young Couples*, *Discovering God's Way of Handling Money* Course Workbook, *Money in*

*Marriage* (software that includes CD-ROMs, workbooks, cassette tapes, and a personality assessment tool for each spouse)

**Chapter 8**  
***Surviving holidays and social events***

**CONSIDER THIS...** This chapter is full of suggestions for coping with a calendar full of holidays. Use the group discussion time to allow participants to talk about the following areas:

1. Briefly discuss each of the holidays highlighted in the chapter.
  
2. Which holiday is hardest for you to face each year without children?
  
3. What “survival tips” will you implement this year to make the holiday more bearable for you and your spouse and/or more blessed for someone outside your home?

**Chapter 9**  
**Infertility Treatments, Meds, and Tips**

**CONSIDER THIS...Evaluating readiness**

If you're on the front end of infertility procedures, you still have time to gather more information before you jump in.

1. Is there a couple you can talk with about their experiences in a fertility program? Ideally, talk with two couples to get both sides of the story, one who came through it and became pregnant and another couple who didn't.
2. Ponder the "Questions to ask yourself" listed under "Choosing a clinic."

If you're already knee deep in procedures, look around your circle of friends and acquaintances. Maybe you can identify a couple who is at the beginning of their infertility journey and just starting to explore medical intervention. Offer to meet with them over lunch or dinner to just listen or answer any questions they may have. You may not feel like you're an expert, but you're further along in the process than they are.

**Chapter 10**  
**Adoption: God's Miraculous Tapestry**

**CONSIDER THIS...*Survival Notes and Quotes:***

*Even the disappointments of infertility have their place in the miracle of adoption.*

*A survey of 192 adoptive families and 169 birth mothers, all of whom participated in open adoptions, found that:*

*\*Openness does not interfere with the adoptive parents' sense of parenthood.*

*\*Although an open adoption didn't guarantee complete grief resolution for the birth parents, adoptive parents were not afraid that birth parents would attempt to reclaim their children or otherwise intrude on the adoptive families' lives. (Source: National Adoption Information Clearinghouse)*

*Very few adoptions are actually contested—less than one-tenth of one percent (.1) each year. Eighty (80) percent of adoptions stay intact until legalization, and after legalization, over 98 percent are not terminated. (Source: Groza and Rosenberg, 1998, National Adoption Information Clearinghouse)*

**1. What's your opinion of adoption?**

Good idea!

Good idea for someone else

Ask me tomorrow

Don't ask

**2. Ask yourself this: Is it more important that you pass on your genetic code to the succeeding generation or that you pass along your love, faith, and values?**

**3. Look back on your life and list some of the risks you've taken.**

**RESOURCES**

1. National Adoption Information Clearinghouse ([www.calib.com/naic](http://www.calib.com/naic)).

Go to NAIC for the most complete adoption info on the web. Search by categories or to see a full list of what's available, click Publications. For more on topics specifically related to this chapter, read any of the items under "Factsheets." If not online, order by phone (888) 251-0075 or fax (703) 385-3206.

2. Holt International ([www.holtintl.org](http://www.holtintl.org)).

An adoption agency that lists many of the companies who offer Adoption Benefits Plans. Go to their web site and search "benefits." (Holt International, Inc., P.O. Box 2880, Eugene, Oregon 97402, phone: (541) 687-2202, fax: (541) 683-6175.

## **Chapter 11**

### ***Sitting on the Fence: Choosing between Parenthood and Child-free Living***

#### **CONSIDER THIS: Questions for you and your spouse**

1. “Our ultimate worth doesn’t come from how many children we have; that comes from God alone” (Roy). As a couple, what are major contributors to your sense of self-worth?

(Additional study on self-worth is included in the chapter 2: “A Woman’s Perspective.”)

2. To get an idea of where you both are between choosing parenthood or childfree living (well, at least for today!), place yourselves on the continuum:

\*-----\*

Left: Childfree living works for me

Middle: Completely stuck on the fence

Right: Parenthood all the way

If you’re like most couples, you both move back and forth along the continuum, bypassing each other, see-sawing one way then the next. You might consider doing a weekly gauge for a month or two to see how the fluctuations go. Stress in the other segments of your life may affect your desire for parenthood, while some moments leave you aching for a child. Consider what affects you most over a period of time.

3. How would you describe your sense of calling to parenthood?

He:

She:

4. While you’re waiting to have/acquire children (or waiting to decide), what can you be doing now that you won’t be able to do if you have children? Pray about this and ask God to open up some new adventures for you and your spouse.

**Chapter 12**  
**Learning to Trust God through Infertility**

**CONSIDER THIS...What's your spiritual temperature?**

1. Did you do the temperature charts for a while? Well, now take your spiritual temperature:

\*Is my relationship with God better, worse, or about the same as compared to our pre-infertility years?

\*What's my prayer life like? Do I primarily pray for our needs, or am I praying for other people, too?

\*What areas of spiritual growth do I already know need some beefing up?

2. Spend time in the promises of strength and comfort you can find in God's Word.  
Recommended reading: Psalms, Philippians, 1 John.

3. For several days, try communicating with God silently, as described above. Record your comments here or in your journal.

**Chapter 13**  
**Infertile Women of the Bible**

**CONSIDER THIS: What biblical women say to us today**

Which of the biblical women handled their childlessness with grace and trust?

Which women showed incredible trust in the Lord despite their circumstances?

Which women acted selfishly or impatiently?

What does Hannah's story say to you about faith in the midst of infertility?

Do you think you could have done what Hannah did by following through on her promise to give Samuel to the Lord's work at such a young age?

How can a woman consecrate her child to God in today's world?

What can you and your spouse learn from Elkanah and Hannah about how they handled infertility and then the consecration of their son to God?

What can Hannah teach us about responding to people's comments, whether or not they are as rude as Peninnah?

**Chapter 14**  
**When Someone You Know is Infertile**

**CONSIDER THIS...What does the Bible have to say about what we say?**

1. God's Word gets specific about the power of the tongue to bring good or evil. Spend some time gleaning from the following Scriptures.

***Negative effects of the tongue:***

Psalms 52:2: The tongue plots what? What is it likened to?

Isaiah 59:3: What are the lips and tongue guilty of?

James 1:26: The tongue reflects on the status of our faith in what way?

James 3:5: What kind of effects can the tongue have?

James 3:6: The tongue is described how?

1 Peter 3:10: We are encouraged to keep our tongue and lips from what?

***Positive effects of the tongue:***

Proverbs 10:19: The person who controls his tongue is what?

Proverbs 10:20: The righteous person's tongue is ascribed a high value in this verse. What is it?

Proverbs 11:12: What are the characteristics of an upright man?

Proverbs 12:18, 15:2: What good thing can the tongue do?

Proverbs 18:21: The incredible power of the tongue is what?

Proverbs 21:23: Protect yourself from what by watching your tongue?

***Good and bad comparisons:***

Proverbs 15:4: What images are provided?

Proverbs 10:31: What comparisons are made?

**Chapter 15**  
**How Infertility Changes Your Perspective**

**CONSIDER THIS...Who you were, who you are now**

Your infertility journey took you on a road that changed who you were. Have you paused to assess how your perspective is changing or has changed? Take a little time to do that now.

1. Read Psalm 88 first. Which of its words and phrases are representative of what you felt when you were battling infertility most intensely?

Now read 40:1-10. Which verses mirror your own words of praise and thanksgiving for the God Who led you through the Valley of Infertility?

2. What practical lessons has this journey taught you?

3. What was your view of parenthood before you encountered infertility? What is it now?

4. What have you learned to admire about your spouse?

5. How has your walk with God been changed, either positively or negatively? Temporarily or permanently?

6. What have you learned about your own ability to endure pain and suffering as a result of this journey?