

Consider Others: How to love and support those who are experiencing infertility or miscarriage.

10 Key Biblical Principles for Caring for Others

1. Seek to understand. Empathize.

Proverbs 20:5, Psalm 139:23, Psalm 119:24, Proverbs 24:6

We're all different, and what we want and need can vary day to day.

Pray: Ask God for insight, compassion, sensitivity, patience, and discernment.

Read: Learn about infertility and/or miscarriage, and about your friend's situation. (Chapters 4 and 5 in When Empty Arms Become A Heavy Burden, by Glahn and Cutrer), and about the differences between men and women in how they handle this issue. (Chapter 1, WEA). (WEA=When Empty Arms Become a Heavy Burden)

Listen as a couple to recordings from Shiloh Panel Nights. Discuss with your friend.

Listen, validate their feelings. "This must be so painful for you." "I'm sorry you are going through this."

-Avoid saying, "At least..."*

2. Love and consider others as more important than yourself.

Galatians 6:2, Romans 12:15, 1 Peter 3:8, Proverbs 25:20, Philippians 2:1-4, 1 Corinthians 8:8-12, 1 Cor 13:1, 4-8a, 1 Cor 12:26, Ecc 3:1-7

-Ask the person how best you can love them. (But just do something to show you care, rather than merely saying, "Let me know if you need anything.")

-Know triggers** for hard days. (Maybe no specific trigger. Ask, "Tell me about it." Or "Do you want to talk about it?")

-Know about reminder dates** and put on your calendar/phone.

-Ask how they can be served, loved or encouraged

-Ask if this is an okay time/place to discuss something.

-Be sensitive in sharing/celebrating pregnancies, milestones, and birthdays.

-Be proactive to anticipate hard things when possible (music in car...)

Important Dates/Trigger Situations **

- Due date and Miscarriage Date
- Their own birthdays (time passing without a child or missing a child)
- Holidays in general; Christmas/Thanksgiving/Easter
- Mother's Day/Father's Day, baby showers, birthday parties for friend's children
- Pregnancy announcements

Pregnancy announcements:

-Email or Text Privately First - no immediate reaction required, gives time, gives privacy. (Or have husbands text or email each other first so that he can share the news with his wife.)

-Tell your friend you know this news can be hard because they've been wanting to grow their family, too. A public/group surprise announcement doesn't foster this sensitivity.

Principle One:

Prov 20:5 The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out.

Psalm 139:23 Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

Psalm 119:24 Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.

Prov 24:6 Surely you need guidance to wage war, and victory is won through many advisers.

*Things to avoid saying/doing:

- "At least you miscarried early."
- "At least you know you can get pregnant."
- "You can start trying again in a couple of months."
- "You're still young."
- "It's all in God's time."
- Don't compare the pain to something you're going through.

Principle Two:

Gal 6:2 Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Rom 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

1 Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.

Prov 25:20 Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on a wound, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

Phil 2:1-4 ...Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

1 Cor 13:1,4-8a If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal...Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

1 Cor 12:26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with

Duration of pregnancy/gender reveal/showers/delivery/new mom stage:

- Ask how you can be sensitive and follow through.
- Sensitivity can change day to day
- Ask if they want to be a part of gender reveals and/or baby showers.
- Include a note with an invitation that you know this is hard and that you don't expect them to attend if they don't want to.

3. Infertility is a real battle and a real loss.

1 Samuel 1:6-10, 15-16, Proverbs 30:15b,16

-Many Biblical references to infertility. God understands, and many women in the Bible can relate: Sara, Rebekah, Hannah, Ruth, Elizabeth

"Some people observe a childless woman and say to themselves, 'She needs to stop baby craving.' Yet would we expect a fueled fire to stop itself? Expect people to stop dying? Rainfall to sit on the surface of the earth? In general, God instilled in women a need to bear and nurture children. So the tears an infertile woman sheds simply validate the truth of what God said in Proverbs. Grieving over infertility and longing for the genetic link is normal." WEA, p 64

-Verses validate the struggle and highlight God's tenderness, understanding, and power.

-Validate your friend's loss or desire, and be patient with and prepared for the potential extended duration of the struggle of infertility as expressed in Scripture.

-Create the time and space for her to talk about it

4. Miscarriage is the loss of a life, a baby.

Psalms 139:13, Luke 1:39-4

-Life begins the moment of fertilization – when sperm meets egg, in the womb or out.

-Each baby has a purpose and is eternal.

-Honor this child's life much like you would another person; for example, send flowers, sympathy cards, or charity donations in their honor.

-Have a strong biblical view of when life begins; research and consult the resources* on the Watermark Shiloh page.

For infertility and miscarriage: Tangible ways to care, love and serve (See WM Shiloh page for more.)

- Initiate a meal or meal train (if that blesses them)
- Bring flowers, a gift card, a favorite drink/coffee, journal, candle
- Write a sincere note
- Spend quality time with that person
- Consider Laurelbox.com
- Provide childcare for appointments, date night, a solo day to physically rest
- Make a scripture card book
- Send them encouraging songs or podcasts. Listen to podcasts on how to support someone and to better understand how they may be feeling ("The Joyful Mourning" is a great resource for this, or the Shiloh Panel Night recording.)
- Give an engraved keepsake gift on a special day. (necklace, engraved garden stone, birthstone, etc.)
- Give them a book**
- Give a Christmas ornament in memory, perhaps with baby's name or year engraved
- Plant a tree or give a tree or flowering bush
- Sponsor an orphan as a group in memory of the baby
- Buy gifts for an angel tree child in memory
- Make a playlist or give a CD of truth-filled, hopeful music
- Purchase items they may need (pads, pain medication, chocolate, a magazine, new dollar toy for a child if they have other children)

it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Ecc 3: 1-7 There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:
...a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance....
a time to be silent and a time to speak,

Principle Three:

1 Sam 1:6-10 Because the Lord has closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?" Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord's house. In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly.

Prov 30:15b,16

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!'

Principle Four:

Psalm 139:12,13 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

Luke 1:39-45 "The baby in my womb leaped for joy..."

***For infertility AND miscarriage: provide Biblical counsel and support that honors life from fertilization**

- [Should I? Part 1 and Should I? Part 2 \(sermons\)](#)
- [Watermark Elder Statement on In Vitro Fertilization, Cryopreservation, and Genetic Testing \(document\)](#)
- [In Vitro Fertilization, Cryopreservation, and Genetic Testing FAQ \(document\)](#)
- [Spring 2018 Shiloh Couples Panel Night Recording \(specifically 39:30 – 1:01:30\) \(audio\)](#)
- [Real Truth Real Quick: Is it OK to Do In Vitro Fertilization? \(video\)](#)
- [Hope for the Unchosen \(article\)](#)

****Book Ideas:**

[Grieving the Child I Never Knew](#) by Kathe Wunnenberg
[When Empty Arms Become a Heavy Burden](#) by Glahn and Cutrer
[Shattered Dreams](#) by Larry Crabb
[I Will Carry You](#) by Angie Smith
[Longing for Motherhood](#) by Chelsea Patterson Sobolik
[Holding onto Hope](#) by Nancy Guthrie
[When God Weeps](#) by Tada and Estes

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5. When a person grieves and struggles, it doesn't mean she/he doesn't have faith.

John 11:4, 35, John 11:21, Job 19:25-27, Job 26:13-27:6, Ecc 3:1-7 Proverbs 25:20,

Truths about the Lord and grief can co-exist. Don't be afraid to enter into and validate your friend's feelings in the midst of the valley of grief, anger, or despair.

6. Consider the Psalms as an Example for helping your friend express grief, anger, sadness, loneliness, doubt, confusion.

Proverbs 25:20

- Psalms record expressions of feeling forgotten, rejected, or afflicted.
- Often followed by a statement recalling or declaring God's faithfulness and character.

*I feel _____ or I'm struggling with _____,
but I know that _____ (true about God) or but I'm thankful for/that _____.*

-Encourage your friend to complete those statements when possible, journal and share this way. Express feelings then write/say what is true.

-Pray those statements for you friends. ("God, this is what we feel and see, but we know _____. Thank you for _____.")

-Psalm 88, where the Psalmist cannot yet praise. It's just all lament.

- Share Memory Verses, Read Scripture together if your friend is stuck
- Direct honest emotion to God through journaling and prayer

"*Lament* is a cry of belief in a good God, a God who has His ear to our hearts, a God who transfigures the ugly into beauty. *Complaint* is the bitter howl of unbelief in any benevolent God in this moment a distrust in the love-beat of the Father's heart...The more I learn *eucharisteo* [thanksgiving], the more I learn His love, the less likely I am to Israelite complain and the more I genuinely lament, complaint that trusts His heart." - Ann Voskamp

7. Stages/Cycle/Seasons of Grief May Look Different – Spiral and overlapping rather than linear and chronological. Don't grow weary or give up on loving.

1 Corinthians 13:7, Job 23:10-12

Grief Cycle Stages: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Mourning, Acceptance

"Rather than viewing these steps to be accomplished once and for all, it may be more realistic to view these emotions as part of a spiral which diminishes in size over time. One emotion may be more intense at times than others... Unique to infertility, the injection of hope at mid-cycle complicates the entire process." WEA

It's easy to expect your friend to have moved on from a loss or from a failed treatment or extended time of infertility after a certain amount of time has passed.

More realistically, they are remembering and missing the child they miscarried and are still grieving/processing/battling unmet dreams or expectations with each new season of life or as different situations arise.

"Couples cannot speed up their mourning so they can feel better again. As we've seen due to its cyclical nature, infertility fails to fit exactly into the grief-process model. Thus, some therapists have suggested that we view it more as a chronic illness or as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder than as a clear-cut loss. Resolution becomes less of a goal than adaptation and coping." WEA, p78

-Be thoughtful of and patient with the ongoing journey of loss or waiting.

-Keep tuning into/Marking your calendar for significant dates, providing meals or thoughtful notes/gifts in weeks, months, or years after the loss or in triggering situations, etc.

-If they're stuck: discuss other steps toward processing grief and taking advantage of all the truth, support, and means of grace offered:

Devoting daily to studying and memorizing scripture, journaling, sharing their faith,

Principle Five:

John 11: 4, 35 "When he heard this Jesus said, 'This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's son may be glorified through it.' Jesus wept."

John 11:21 "'Lord,' Martha said to Jesus, 'if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.'"

Job 19: 25-27 I know that my redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand on the earth.
And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;
I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!

Ecc 3: 1-7 There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:
a time to be born and a time to die...
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance...
a time to be silent and a time to speak,

Principle Six:

Psalm 13

Psalm 88

Prov 25:20 Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on a wound, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

Exodus 17:12 When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset.

Principle Seven:

1 Cor 13:7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

Prov 25:20 Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on a wound, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

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adding to a thankfulness list, serving others, reaching out to friends, getting involved with Shiloh or other ministry to process this and other issues.

8. Remember yours and their identity. Having children doesn't define you. Avoid letting topics of parenting or children dominate discussions, social media posts, or the activities of your group.

Be on mission together!

Psalm 139, Ephesians 2:10, 1 Peter 2:9, Philippians 1:21,22a, Proverbs 31: 10-31 (Many different roles, not just a mother), Esther 4:14b, Gen 50:20

-Be sensitive. Don't overly-censor your life around your friends facing infertility or grieving a loss, but be aware that these topics and situations may be painful at times.

-At times, they may feel, broken, inadequate, irrelevant, left out, forgotten, empty, trying to earn or deserve or measure up.

-Identify, Affirm, Encourage Inherent Value, Individual Gifts, Purpose and Mission

-We are each: "Fearfully, wonderfully made", "God's Masterpiece", "Special Possession", "Fruitful laborer", "Strong for the Task", "Clothed with Strength and Dignity", "For such a Time as This"

Conversation:

Brainstorm topics that include everyone. Parenting/pregnancy/family planning are an aspect of our lives, but they are not our entire lives.

CG:

Having questions and/or topics on an actual agenda: asking about spiritual growth, accountability, outreach, finances, and loving your spouse can help.

Remember, we're **on mission**.

9. Widen the circle: for more support and/or more counsel.

Proverbs 15:22, Proverbs 24:6

-First, be godly, wise, biblical friends.

-Research on your own to support and to give objective, Biblical counsel

-Share about other ministries, couples, or individuals that could provide additional support and counsel **but don't default**. Attend those other meetings if possible.

-Emotions can take over and it can be difficult to process consequences of decisions that are made in the midst of a stressful and painful time.

- Pray for humility and wisdom for conversations re: treatment choices. (1 Peter 5:5)
- Listen carefully to have all the facts and offer biblical guidance. (Proverbs 18:13)
- Help them identify beliefs they have and the corresponding scriptures to see how/if their current line of thinking is contradictory to God's Word.
- Read through/watch resources on decision-making and treatment options as a group.
- Discuss the issues directly as a group rather than in "one off" conversations.
- You cannot control their decision, but can faithfully care for them and share truth.
- Use the Watermark Conflict Field Guide as a resource.
- Consider asking a Shiloh team member or couple to meet with your group.
- If the couple continues to pursue treatment/adoption in an unbiblical or unwise way, connect with your CG Director/Shepherd to meet with your group (Matthew 18:15-20).
- Know that many unbiblical practices are commonplace and/or promoted in the medical field (pornography pre-genetic testing and/or screening of embryos...) At a minimum, make sure your group has thoroughly read WM's FAQ for In Vitro Fertilization, Cryopreservation, and Genetic Testing as well as the WM Elder Statement on In Vitro Fertilization, Cryopreservation, and Genetic Testing.

10. Pray with and for your friend

1 Sam 12:23a, Exodus 17:12

-Pray Scripture, not just baby or "success

-Pray out loud over the phone or in person

-Write out prayers on text, notes, or email to your friend

-Include name in the verse to personalize it

"There is power in prayer. When men work, they work. But when men pray, God works."

-Angus Buchan

Principle Eight:

Psalm 139:12,13 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

Eph 2:10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Phil 1:21, 22a For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body this will mean fruitful labor for me.

Prov 31:17, 20, 25,26 ... (17) She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks (20) She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy...(25) She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come...(26) She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue

Esther 4:14b And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?

Gen 50:20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Principle Nine:

Prov 15:22 Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.

Prov 16:25 There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.

Prov 12:15 The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.

Prov 22:3 A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.

Matt 18:15-17 If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along...If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church...

Col 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience

Principle Ten:

1 Sam 12:23a As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you.

Exodus 17:12 When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset.