



Watermark Community Church

In Vitro Fertilization, Cryopreservation, and Genetic Testing FAQ

The desire of married couples to have children is God-given, because “Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him.” (Psalm 127:3) For couples struggling with infertility, the emotional pain that comes when the desire for children remains unfulfilled is immense. Many couples walking through the journey of infertility are presented the option of in vitro fertilization (IVF). While creating life outside the womb is not expressly prohibited in Scripture, there are tests and procedures that often follow IVF that run counter to the high value God places on human life.

Life begins at the moment of conception – in or outside the womb. As Christ-followers, we must faithfully steward every life entrusted to us by God from the moment life begins. The information below is a tool from the Watermark Elders to help believers answer questions regarding IVF and to navigate infertility treatment plans in obedience to the Word of God. This document also outlines why the Watermark Elders advise specifically against both genetic testing and cryopreservation, which are potentially part of the IVF process.

We encourage all Christ-followers walking through the painful journey of infertility to process each decision in community with other believers, using Scripture as your guide. If you or someone you care about is dealing with infertility or issues surrounding IVF, please contact Shiloh (shiloh@watermark.org), Watermark’s infertility ministry.

When does life begin?

Science confirms life begins at conception, the moment an egg is fertilized by a sperm. A fertilized egg, also called a zygote, is a human’s first complete cell, and it contains a blueprint for how the person will develop within the womb. Once this single cell divides into a larger group of cells, it is called an embryo. An embryo is a living person in his or her earliest stages of growth – a life distinct from his or her mother. The only difference between an embryo, an infant, a teenager, and an adult is time.

“If people are fighting and hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life...”
(Exodus 21:22-25, NIV)

“As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.”
(Luke 1:44, NIV)

Please see the RTRQ episode “What is an Easy Way to Defend the Pro-Life Position?” (realtruthrealquick.com/pro-life-defense/) for more on the dignity and value of the earliest stages of human life.

What is in vitro fertilization (IVF)?

The words “in vitro” actually mean “in glass.” In vitro fertilization (IVF) is a medical procedure where eggs are removed from a woman’s ovaries and fertilized in a culture dish in a laboratory setting using sperm collected from a man. When fertilization occurs, the egg and sperm join together to create the first cell of a new, unique person. Once the egg is fertilized, it develops into an embryo which can be placed into a woman’s body where it can attach to the uterus and continue to develop.

There are necessary limitations on the number of embryos that can be safely transferred into a woman’s body. That number varies for women based on several medical factors. Also, it is common for some

embryos to stop developing at very early stages, outside or inside a woman's body after fertilization. It is standard for doctors to produce more embryos than can be safely transferred into a woman's body – a practice that must be avoided by believers acknowledging the dignity and value God places on all lives.

Before an embryo is implanted into a woman's body, each embryo is subjectively given a letter grade based on its quality by the clinic. Embryos with grades of A or B are considered high quality enough for transfer. Embryos that appear to be less hearty may receive a grade of C or D and may not be transferred at all, even though these lives are viable and could develop normally and just as successfully as other higher graded embryos. Sometimes these lower quality embryos may also be seen as too low of a quality to survive the freezing process by advising “experts.” In these cases, the embryos are often discarded instead of placed in cryopreservation by some clinics or advising professionals. Because all lives are precious and valuable to our Creator, couples must understand why cryopreservation, subjective grading, and genetic testing are contrary to God's plan; and couples must ‘choose life’ for every embryo created with their egg and sperm.

What is cryopreservation, and is it biblical?

As mentioned previously, often more embryos are produced through IVF than can be safely carried to term by a woman. In fact, most doctors will not transfer more than two or three embryos, although many more might have been created. So, what happens to the remaining embryos? In some cases, the remaining human lives are frozen through the process of cryopreservation.

Creating human life without the intention to care for it and allow it to flourish violates the exhortation of Scripture. (Genesis 1:28) All humans should be allowed to develop at their natural pace, living out all the days God has ordained for them. Therefore, while the Bible does not forbid the fertilization of an egg outside the womb, the suspension of human life through cryopreservation is directly opposed to the truth of God's Word. Therefore, great care must be given to ensure all embryos created through the IVF process can be immediately transferred into a woman's body.

Many couples who consider cryopreservation intend to implant the frozen embryos at a future date. But, James 4:13-14 makes it clear none of us can predict the future or know if circumstances might arise preventing these lives from being carried by a mother to maturity. Again, believers should carefully plan so that only the number of embryos that can be safely implanted into a mother's womb are generated through IVF.

“Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” (James 4:13-14, NIV)

What if medical issues require a couple to consider cryopreservation?

As a result of the IVF process, medical issues may affect the health of a mother and endanger the embryos at the time of the transfer. In those cases, medical professionals may recommend temporarily freezing all embryos for very short periods of time to increase their chance of surviving. Couples are encouraged to process through these decisions within biblical community. To protect the lives of their children, couples should have thorough plans for ensuring their embryos are allowed to grow and develop, in the event a sudden change of circumstances prevents implantation during this short period of freezing.

Please see the RTRQ episode “Is it Okay to do In Vitro Fertilization” (realtruthrealquick.com/IVF/) to learn more about IVF and cryopreservation.

Is genetic testing biblical?

When human life is created at conception, we, as believers must cultivate, steward, cherish, honor, and shepherd it, regardless of the value the world places on that life. Therefore, genetic testing, which



assesses whether an embryo will be recommended for implantation in the womb or termination, is in opposition to the high value God's Word places on human life. Watermark's Elders do not condone the termination of embryos for any reason, including evidence there may be a genetic abnormality. The information below provides detail on the genetic testing process, and why it is inconsistent with God's Word.

The two types of genetic testing performed on embryos are preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) and preimplantation genetic screening (PGS). PGD tests cells for specific genes related to diseases like cystic fibrosis or hemophilia. PGS examines cells for abnormalities such as missing or extra chromosomes.

There are many reasons why both PGD and PGS pose a risk to human life:

- Neither test is 100% accurate; inconclusive results and false positives or negatives are always a possibility.
- Embryos may contain some cells with chromosomal abnormalities and other cells that are normal. There is evidence these embryos are capable of correcting themselves and developing into healthy infants.
- Both PGD and PGS require cells to be removed from embryos, and this can actually damage the embryos.

How does a couple biblically evaluate and navigate the IVF process?

Whether or not to pursue IVF is a decision many couples facing infertility must make. For many couples, IVF may be the only option for conceiving a biological child. IVF is also a costly medical procedure requiring women to subject themselves to large amounts of medication, and women react to these medications differently. As with any decision of this magnitude, Watermark encourages couples to process through this issue with trusted members of their community.

It's important to note the only way to ensure all embryos created through IVF are implanted is to limit the number of eggs exposed to sperm. For example, if a doctor recommends transferring only two embryos, then only two eggs should be fertilized. By performing IVF in this way, couples can be sure all lives created through IVF have a chance to develop. Couples also avoid the risk of having any embryos labeled as "low quality" and, therefore, discarded. (See Watermark's position on genetic testing and cryopreservation above.)

It is important couples share their beliefs and desires with their doctor at their initial consultation. Some doctors are unwilling to adjust their protocols to honor the biblical direction provided here; therefore it is crucial to find a clinic and doctor who values each life created. Couples should prepare to hear from the advising professionals that this careful stewardship of creating life will greatly reduce the probability any of the embryos will develop to the point they can be transferred. When a couple requests fewer embryos be created, often the clinic will tailor the dosage of ovarian stimulation medications, focusing on increasing the number of quality eggs instead of the quantity of eggs. This reduction of stimulation medication has the added benefit of lowering a woman's risk of developing Ovarian Hyper Stimulation Syndrome (OHSS).

"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." (Proverbs 15:22 NIV)

What other issues should believers think through when evaluating infertility treatments?

Purity: The Bible exhorts all to purity, thus, when collecting/giving semen for the purposes of testing or treatment, God's standards must be maintained. The use of pornography or immoral thoughts does not honor God's intention for His people. Couples should talk to their doctor about producing a sample at home or at the clinic in a way that honors God's intention for intimacy in marriage.

"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." (Hebrews 13:4, NIV)

Financial Stewardship: Scripture testifies all we have belongs to God. It also discourages believers from going into debt. While some insurance companies cover the cost of IVF, many do not. When funds are



not readily available for IVF, couples should show caution and seek the counsel of other believers before undertaking the expense of infertility treatment.

“Do not be one who shakes hands in pledge or puts up security for debts; if you lack the means to pay, your very bed will be snatched from under you.” (Proverbs 22:26-27, NIV)

“The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender.” (Proverbs 22:7, NIV)

Marital Health: Couples should consider the health of their marriage before entering into fertility treatment. Husbands and wives should thoroughly discuss and be unified on IVF and any related treatments.

“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— or we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” (Ephesians 5:22-33, NIV)

What if we already have frozen embryos?

Many couples already have embryos frozen through cryopreservation. The Watermark Elders exhort those who have frozen embryos to fight for those lives as they would for children of any age. Parents with frozen embryos are urged to either implant those embryos themselves or have the embryos placed with a loving family that will adopt and faithfully shepherd these young lives.

