

The Spiritual Wound of Infertility

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While dealing with infertility have you ever found yourself vulnerable to such thoughts as:

“God is punishing me.”

“How can God let this happen?”

“So many people who don’t even want kids get pregnant so easily!”

“My whole family has been praying so hard...and our prayers are unanswered.”

Our faith and spirituality can become very fragile when tested by birth and pregnancy announcements at work, home, or church. Many people feel the need to protect themselves from friends and relatives, especially during the holidays. Platitudes and opinions, or innocent spontaneous questions about when you plan to have children, can ruin the happiest of family functions for someone dealing with infertility and miscarriage.

The mental and emotional stresses of infertility and miscarriage can affect all of our relationships: with self, with others, and with God. In previous articles we have covered coping tips for self well-being and for our relationships with spouse, family and friends. Today, let’s broach the subject of your faith, spirituality, and your relationship with the creator of your belief. Please feel free to substitute your words in place of God, as the focus of this article is not theological. Rather, this article explores suggestions for productive introspection that will strengthen your inner being. Feel free to use such concepts as “All That Is” or “Source energy” if that feels better to you. This subject is important, as research has indicated that people who maintain a sense of faith in their God handle the stresses of infertility treatments with less wear and tear. Our spirituality is one of our greatest resources in times of loss, uncertainty and bereavement.

One self-concept that unravels us from within is the “damaged goods” syndrome. The diagnosis of infertility, while a medical condition, may not provide any explanation as to “why” this is happening to you. It is only human to take this out of medical context and internalize it as a psychological and spiritual issue. While the intensity of internalizing this deep personal sense of inadequacy differs from individual to individual and across genders, it usually rears its ugly head at some point during treatment. As many of you already know, the psychological strain of infertility is likened, in intensity, to living with cancer. Many people facing their mortality undergo some kind of spiritual overhaul. It is possible that the same is true for people struggling to accept an infertility diagnosis – many feel lost, alone, isolated, and ashamed. It is all part of the process, however, and to connect with those who truly understand and care about you is a constructive response to these feelings.

I have chosen the term spiritual wound for a reason. Many feel that they have been taken unaware, and attacked at the very core of their being when told they are infertile or experiencing a miscarriage.

While we can often accept physical wounds, many people underestimate the depth of the wound to their psyche. Below is a 4-step process to serve as a guideline for healing the spiritual wound. Initially you may not notice it working. It is human to be blind to such gradual developments; however, those who are close to you will feel your shift into healing. Similar to a physical injury, spiritual healing takes time and often leaves a scar. Your spiritual scar tissue will actually be stronger than before your injury.

1. Admit The Wound.

Take pen in hand and express all of your so-called “negative” feelings. Do not do these on the run; give yourself the gift of time and space to identify how you feel victimized by this situation. Expletives are not deleted—they are encouraged! Once you have vented on the page, compose an angry letter to God. If you do not know where to begin, recall the old adage, “God never gives us more than we can handle”. There may be times when you strongly disagree with this statement. Write about those times. God can handle your feelings, you need not hide them.

2. Consider that your misfortune did not come from God and was not part of a “Plan”. Many theologians and philosophers put forth that we are beings with a free will, living in a world containing natural laws, which connect with every aspect of our lives. Factor in the existence of chaos, and witness the actual complexity of what we call misfortune and tragedy. Popularized notions of “karma” sting with implications that you have somehow created this tragic situation for yourself. What is more empowering at this moment is to open up, even briefly, to the thought that benign forces converged in such a way as to create this medical situation in your life. Further consider that the creator of your belief is present, mourning with you, and offering you solace and support at all times. In short, God is not the creator of the problem, but is part of the solution.

3. Clean the Wound

Just as an antiseptic hurts when you spray it on your open cut, this part of your healing process will hurt when applied. The sting may be strong, but it will subside quickly. This will not make the matter worse. On paper, make 4 columns from the top of the page. Column 1: indicate “Fears, Complaints, and Concerns”, Column 2: “I am statements”, Column 3: “Distinguish as Fact, Interpretation, or Judgment”, and lastly, Column 4 “Is this Empowering, Yes or No?”.

Under the first column list two items in each category. In Column 2 fill in 6 “I am statements” that relate to what you have indicated in the first Column. For example, you may indicate that you fear that you will never get pregnant and correspondingly in the next column you write, “I am such a loser”. Once you have filled in your 6 statements, move to the next column and reflect on whether this “I am” statement is fact, interpretation, or judgment. And finally, indicate if any of these items are empowering to you at the moment.

Fears, Complaints and Concerns	I am	Fact, Interpretation or Judgment?	Empowering? Yes or No
I'm afraid that I will never get pregnant	Such a loser	Judgment	No
I'm afraid this will affect our marriage negatively	A burden to my marriage	Interpretation and Judgment	No
I feel like I've done something wrong to bring this on	Damaged Goods	Interpretation and Judgment	No

Most of us end up with a column of “no’s” in the last category. Reflect on how your negative self-concept shapes your perception of yourself as victimized and powerless. It is useful to see that God has not created this state of being-it is the result of how we react to our wounded ness.

Now, turn the paper over and ask, “What will I bring into my life today?” and make a list of at least 6 items that light you up. Circle the one that makes you feel best right now and put it on a post-it. That reminder of your essence is useful as a band-aid, shielding you from unwanted, self-inflicted “germs”.

4. Step Back and Leave it Alone

Engaging in uplifting activities and connecting with trusted loved ones will help you get out of the way of the natural powers of healing that you have tapped into. Time frames for healing differ for everyone; however, you may begin to feel more energy available for your relationships, work, and spirituality.

I hope that you find these reflections and exercises helpful. There is no substitute for connecting with others who are going through, or have gone through, this experience. Many couples find compassion and solace in The Circle of Hope Support Group, and/or with a counselor or member of the clergy. There are times to honor your need for solitude and there are times for connection. I hope this article helps you to distinguish these needs and move on in strength.