

Supporting couples through infertility

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I never expected this. Those words swam in my head every single month that we were waiting for a baby. So I should not be surprised that infertility continues to shape my life in unexpected ways, such as in the overwhelming number of stories people shared in response to a [recent post I wrote](#). I've been floored by how many people are yearning to hear that they are seen.

[So many couples](#) are suffering the invisibility of infertility. And so many of them wish their churches would speak a word of peace to them in their pain.

What can each of us do, whether we've struggled with infertility or not, to support the couples suffering around us?

Watch your assumptions.

That young couple you see? Don't assume they're wrapped up in their careers and are choosing to delay parenthood. That older couple you see? Don't assume they never wanted kids. Those neighbors with an only child? Don't assume they didn't want more. Those co-workers with one boy and one girl? Don't assume they stopped simply because they got their "matched set."

Plenty of people have complicated situations when it comes to the question of conceiving and raising children. The less we jump to conclusions about someone based on what we know, the more we open our hearts to the more-likely truth that we do not know their deepest struggles. We offer people such refreshing freedom when we refrain from slapping on labels or squeezing them into boxes by the judgments we pass from a distance.

Watch your words.

Sitting with people in pain is uncomfortable. Our natural tendency is to try and fix the situation. But the words we use to show our concern can wound when we want to skip over someone's suffering and start to offer advice.

My one pastoral suggestion in almost every situation of suffering is to avoid "at least" statements. *At least you're still young. At least there's always adoption. At least you have other children.* The grief and anger surrounding infertility, whether primary or [secondary](#) or after miscarriage, are complex emotions. They cannot be easily smoothed over by statements suggesting that the situation is not as awful as it could be.

Honoring the particularity of someone's pain by simply sitting with them, listening, and letting them know you care for them is a rare gift. You cannot fix their circumstances, so you do not have to try.

You have so much to offer instead: your prayers, your presence, your patience in letting someone give voice to their own story.

Watch yourself change.

Don't make the mistake of holding back from reaching out, simply because you have not experienced their same sorrow. One of the gifts of believing in the Body of Christ is the reminder that we are not confined by the contours of our own life. We are deeply united with each other. We can share our joys and wounds on a deeper level than mere sympathy because our lives are caught up together.

Let your heart be stretched and your prayer life be widened by the experience of allowing others to expand your understanding of the suffering around you.

And once your eyes are opened to a new kind of struggle such as infertility—keep going. Start to see some other silent suffering sitting next to you: on the bus, in the pew, at the coffee shop. Reach out with one kind word.

See what happens.

When we open our eyes, the invisible becomes visible. Pain is no longer ours to bear alone.

And isn't that what our communities of faith hope to be? Places where we care for each other. Places where we are pulled out of the worries and wants of our own worlds. Places where we remember that we belong to each other. And to God.

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