

TEN THINGS I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT IVF UNTIL IT WAS TOO LATE

by Angela Mackey BSN, RN

1 Artificial hormones are harder on my body than my regular ones. More nausea, more pregnancy-like symptoms do not necessarily mean you are pregnant. So I had to learn to hope in God not my body: "but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." Isaiah 40:31

2 Getting pregnant did not bring joy. Getting pregnant brought more anxiety about whether I would miscarry and how much longer I had to take shots. I had to find my joy in God alone. "Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." Nehemiah 8:10b

3 Artificially stimulated ovaries HURT. My physical pain echoed my emotional and spiritual pain. I struggled that getting pregnant should be natural, but for me it was not. I learned to trust God, even though His "...thoughts are not [my] thoughts, neither are [my] ways [His] ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are [His] ways higher than [my] ways and [His] thoughts than [my] thoughts." Isaiah 55:8-9

4 Loss, loss, and more loss. W amount of eggs did not equal W amount of fertilized eggs. X amount of fertilized eggs did not equal X amount of embryos. Y amount of embryos did not equal Y amount of mature embryos able to be transferred. Z amount of embryos mature enough to transfer did not equal Z amount of pregnancies or babies to hold in your arms. Loss is inevitable, and it is difficult. I had to learn to give our (my husband and mine) embryos to God and trust Him to keep His promise for all of us. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11

5 Artificial hormones take being hormonal to new lows. I had never experienced true mood swings until IVF. Tears one moment, laughter the next. I had to remind myself that my heart and emotions often try to tell my brain lies. "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it" Jeremiah 17:9. So I had to learn the lesson of 2 Corinthians 10:5, "...we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." I had to tell my emotions the truth from God's word.

6 Part of my heart was in the freezer for four years. God is clear in His word that He loves the unborn. Psalm 139 tells us how He knits babies together. Since life occurs at conception, I had babies in a freezer two and a half hours away from my home for four years. The day I brought home our final embryos I was giddy. A weight was lifted. I mourned the babies I never held in my arms, but at least I got to hold them all in my womb. Jeremiah 1:5 helped me rest in God during those difficult times. It says, "Before I formed you in the womb [or petri dish] I knew you, before you were born I set you apart..." God had a plan for those precious babies. I was able to be a part of that. I do not understand it all, but I learned to trust in His plan.

7 Telling others was a double-edged sword. IVF is a mystery to most people. When you mention it there are many details people want to know and understand. In order to explain, you must share difficult stories. Then if the cycle is unsuccessful, you have to tell everyone you are not pregnant. However there is also a group of people praying you through each step of the way. They encourage you, sometimes while placing their feet in their mouths, but being held up in prayer is worth the pain. James 5:16 says, "...pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."

8 There was grief in the excitement and possibility. I was excited about the possibilities that IVF offered. I may get pregnant! However I grieved the loss of getting pregnant the easy way. I learned that often grief and joy go hand-in-hand. That isn't a new concept. Hebrews 12:2-3 says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." Jesus for the joy before Him endured the cross and He did it so that I won't grow weary! Jesus knew the grief and pain but willingly went to the cross for the joy. If Jesus did it for me, then I can do it for the possibility of having children.

9 Loneliness is a lie. The stark statistics are that 1 in 6 couples experience infertility. The most recent statistics from the CDC say that 7.3 million women in the US alone went to their health care providers about infertility issues. Not all of them used IVF, but we are NOT ALONE. It is possible that the woman with three children in your church used IVF. Maybe that sweet couple is longing for kids and has failed multiple IVF attempts. Satan will try to make you feel isolated, alone. We have to remember "The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." Deuteronomy 31:8

10 IVF changed me forever. I always thought IVF would be a tool to get me more children and then be discarded. I would leave it in my past and continue life as if IVF had never entered it. Instead, I have discovered that I am forever changed. I am not the same woman I was before IVF, I am better, I am different, I am more compassionate. God used this experience to teach me to say no to myself, my desires, my plans, and say yes to Him, His desires, His plans. Much like Jesus in the garden prayed, "...not my will, but yours be done." I learned to say no to myself and yes to Him regardless of the price.