

Statement on In Vitro Fertilization, Cryopreservation, and Genetic Testing

In vitro fertilization (IVF) is a medical procedure where eggs are removed from a woman's ovaries and fertilized in a laboratory setting using sperm collected from a man. When fertilization happens, the egg and sperm join together to create the first cell of a new, unique person. Once the egg is fertilized, it begins to develop into an embryo, and this embryo is then placed into the woman's body where it can attach to the uterus and continue to grow and develop.

Science confirms life begins at fertilization (the moment an egg is fertilized by a sperm). Scripture teaches the dignity and value of life at the earliest stages (Exodus 21:22-25; Psalm 139:13-16). A fertilized egg, also called a zygote, is the first complete cell of a new human. Once this single cell begins to divide into a larger group of cells, it is called an embryo. In these developmental stages it is appropriate to use terms like zygote and embryo, but we must remember that we are talking about a unique human life created in the image of God – a life that must be treated with the dignity Christ-followers ascribe to life outside the womb.

The elders of Watermark see nothing in Scripture that would forbid fertilization of an egg outside of the woman's body. Therefore, we see no reason to discourage couples from participating in IVF in order to conceive a child. However, because life begins at fertilization, our conviction is that the best case is for the embryo(s) produced through the process of IVF to be immediately transferred into the woman's body. Should a couple decide to freeze the embryo(s), we believe that it should only be for a short period and that there should be a near term plan for the mother or someone close to the family to bring every embryo to term. As with any decision in life, we encourage you to process these decisions with other faithful members of the body of Christ.

Genetic testing and the grading of embryos by medical professionals are methods typically used to advise couples on which embryos should be transferred. Because all life is precious and should be allowed to develop (Psalm 139:13-16), it is against biblical principles to condone the termination of those lives for any reason. Therefore, our conviction is that the termination of a fertilized egg, frozen embryo, or any stage of a developing human is abortion. This includes cases where there is evidence there is a genetic abnormality or the opinion of a medical professional is that the embryo is of "low quality."

The issue of IVF is a sensitive one affecting many couples. We understand that some couples who read this position on cryopreservation will already have many embryos frozen through this process. Our intent is to provide clarity, pastoral counsel, and support to those considering IVF, not to bring guilt and shame to those who have already undergone the procedure. Considering the reality that fertilized eggs are life created by God for us to cherish, honor, and steward for His glory, couples with embryos currently in cryopreservation are urged to fight for the lives of their children, as they would a child at any age. As methods change or develop, evaluating new approaches and attitudes toward reproduction must always be measured in accordance with the biblical mandate to promote and protect human life.

Watermark has developed an IVF FAQ (available at watermark.org/Shiloh) that provides more information about all of these subjects. We also have many knowledgeable and experienced men and women who are willing to walk with you wherever you are at in your journey.

Sincerely,

Watermark Elders