

A 4Life View of IVF

Desiring the gift of children is certainly God-pleasing and life-affirming. However, the methods employed and assumptions inherent in the practice of in-vitro fertilization (IVF) introduce ethical problems for the Christian. Here are some of the practices intrinsic to IVF and why they can be problematic.

fertility medications

To increase the chances of success of conceiving through IVF, a woman is usually given medications to cause her body to ovulate many eggs at once (rather than just one per cycle), so that all of those eggs can be harvested and used to create embryos. Introducing synthetic hormones can be potentially dangerous to a woman.

In fact, over 10% of women undergoing this treatment develop **ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome**, a condition which, in serious cases, can lead to a variety of problematic health issues including:



blood clots



respiratory
distress



kidney failure



fluid collection in
the abdomen



hemorrhaging
from ruptured
ovarian cyst



electrolyte
imbalances



twisting of the ovary



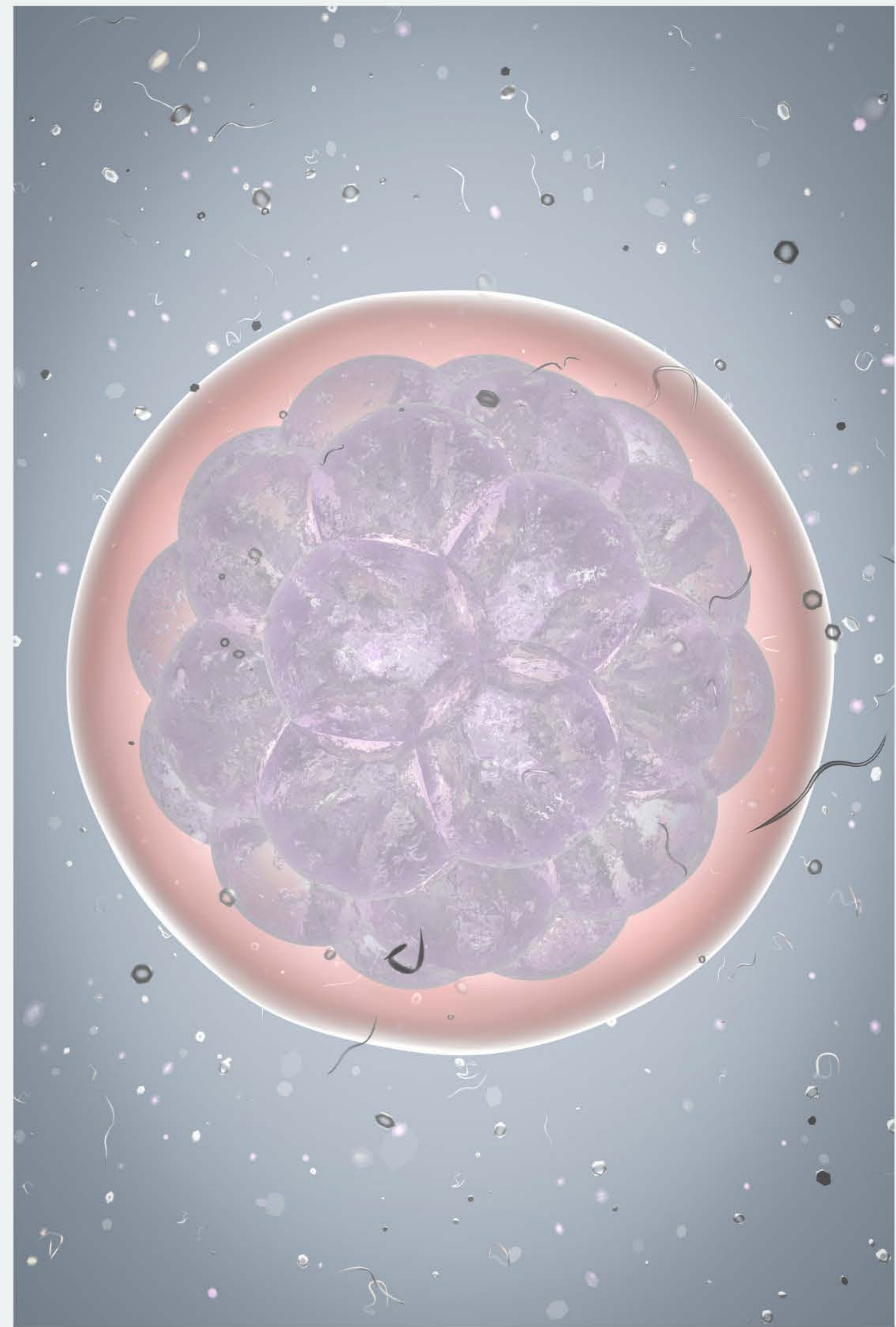
subsequent
miscarriage

and even death.

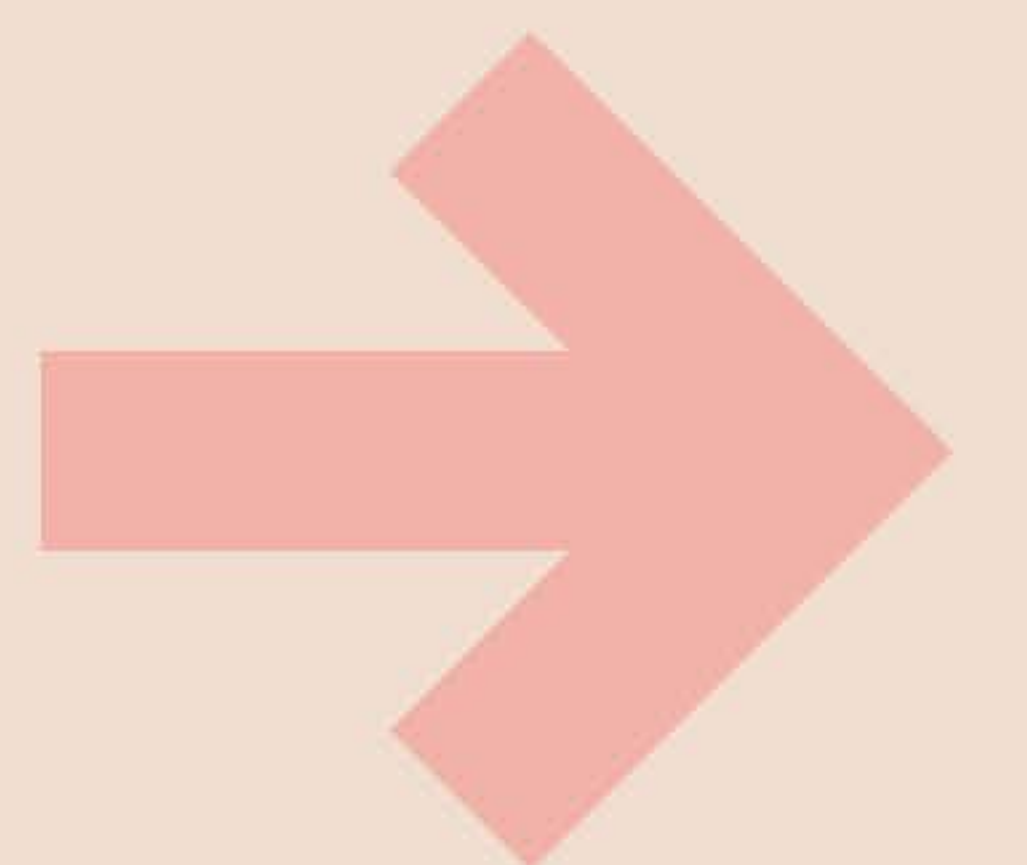
As people of life, we recognize that engaging in behaviors that risk our own health and life is not preferable/ideal. Just as importantly, IVF circumnavigates the one-flesh union God intended for pro-creation and creates other serious ethical dilemmas.

embryo grading

Once the embryos are made in the Petri dish, an embryologist grades each of them from A-D, based on how “normal” they look. Those that make the grade (literally!) will be selected for transfer. Other healthy looking embryos may be cryopreserved (see next point), and those with low grades may simply be discarded. Genesis Fertility describes the grading this way: “To determine whether an embryo has good potential or not, all of the components of the embryo must be taken into account. While an A grade is better than a D grade, embryos continue to develop. Because of this, their grading can change, eventually making lower graded embryos candidates for embryo transfer or freezing.”



what is wrong with this practice?



FIRST,

the grading is not an exact science; an embryo that wouldn't be an IVF candidate initially may turn out to be a strong candidate days later. Just as children are aborted based on faulty prenatal genetic screenings, embryos may be discarded as nonviable when they would have actually continued to grow and live.

ableism

Even more importantly, we know these embryos are already tiny living humans; to allow some to live and others to die based on whether they have “good potential” is ableist and devalues life. God has assigned value to all human life by creating and redeeming it, not by how much “potential” we may see in it.

cryopreservation

The survival, or implantation, rate is relatively low through IVF. To increase the chances that the procedure results in a pregnancy, many eggs are harvested; many embryos are created. Those babies not scheduled for immediate implantation are cryopreserved.

Cryopreservation is a special freezing process that halts the embryo's development and, hopefully, keeps it alive. If the first IVF attempt does not result in a pregnancy, the couple can thaw more embryos and try again. So what are the moral issues associated with this process?

01

There is a chance the freezing process will kill an embryo; this becomes apparent only after the embryo is thawed.

02

Embryos are graded when they are first fertilized. Grades are based on how healthy and viable the babies seem to be. Embryos that do not make the grade will be discarded. Death follows.

03

Parents must pay a storage fee for their embryos. If they decide they no longer want to pay to store the embryos, the embryos are thawed and die.

None of these options affirms and upholds life.

gamete donation



Sometimes, the sperm or egg of another person is used if the couple is not able to provide their own. Unfortunately, this breaks the fidelity of the marital union by introducing another party.

As Rev. Dr. Richard Eyer
explains,

“It has been argued that since no physical contact is made between the woman and the sperm donor (other than the sperm itself), there is therefore nothing immoral about achieving pregnancy in this way. But God did not intend procreation to take place in a vacuum, that is, outside of marriage.

The fact that it often does cannot make it acceptable. Rather, God intends procreation to be the giving of a child...through the love-making of a husband and wife. In the Christian’s worldview, children are begotten, not made. They are the summation of their parents’ substance, and not another’s, as part of the mystery of conception.”



surrogacy

Similarly, surrogacy creates an ethical dilemma for Christians. Like gamete donation, surrogacy fractures the bond between husband and wife, and parents from child.

As the surrogate carries the child throughout pregnancy, she not only forms a bond with the child, but also, in very real ways, provides the food, shelter, and protection a parent is called to provide. As her blood carries nutrients to the baby and her body supports the child's life, she becomes a mother to the child, forming an attachment that may be difficult to end. Her body also prepares for the child's coming, producing the hormones necessary for milk production and the continuation of the newborn life.



Motherhood is not meant to last nine months; rather, it is designed to last a lifetime. Though a child is always a blessing, the means through which a child comes to be can be contrary to God's desire and design. As God's people, we acknowledge that His ways are always the best ways, and surrogacy has never been God's way of gifting children to His people.

preimplantation genetic diagnosis (pgd)

PGD is used to test for a specific genetic abnormality that a couple's children are known to be at risk for.

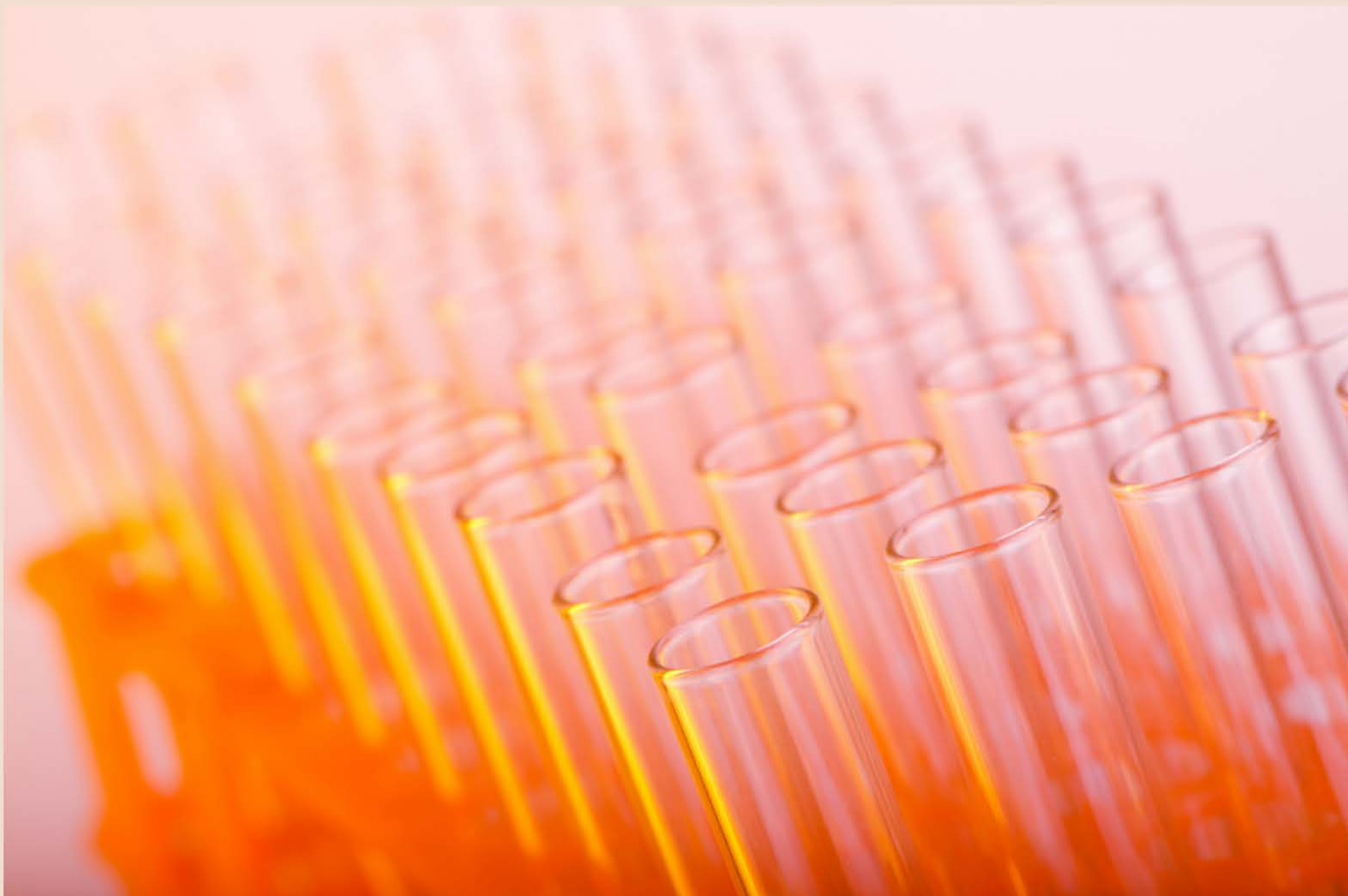
As Extend Fertility explains,

“The idea behind PGD is to prevent heritable disease by first, creating and testing multiple embryos (some of the embryos will inherit the undesired gene and some will not, just by chance.) and then transferring only embryos that don't carry the genes for disease.”

This is

blatant discrimination

against those with genetic disabilities. Embryos are already living humans. Genetically abnormal embryos and genetically healthy embryos are equally loved by God and have an equal right to life. Unfortunately, PGD within the context of IVF is used as a tool for eugenics.



what does this mean for us?

When the procedures and practices associated with IVF are clearly explained, Christians recognize that IVF, as a method for conceiving children, has inherent ethical problems. Though the desire for children within marriage is godly, IVF is not only potentially dangerous to the mother, but it also ends the lives of unborn children and intervenes in the marriage union that God intended for life. Because of these realities, IVF cannot be considered a life-affirming practice.

Sadly, God does not grant the gift of children to all married couples. The heart-breaking cross of infertility can be deeply difficult to bear. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we pray that God would bless all married couples with children, and we mourn with those who cannot conceive a child, welcome them into our families, and support them in other life-affirming pursuits like adoption and foster care.

what if I used IVF to conceive children?

Know that you are forgiven. As a baptized child of God, you have been covered in the blood of the Lamb. Christ's death paid for all sins, even those associated with conception. If learning this information has caused you a wave of guilt, find solace in the promise that your guilt has been taken away.

Christians don't use IVF out of spite for human life; instead, they are often motivated by a love for it! They have a godly desire to have children within marriage. Unfortunately, doctors and fertility clinics may not present detailed information on embryo grading and the effects of cryopreservation, nor do they discuss IVF from a Biblical perspective. It can be easy to miss the ethical and theological factors at play in IVF. This is why discussion about IVF within the church is so important!

Remember,

if you have participated in IVF, forgiveness is always found in Christ. There is no sin, with any guilt and shame that might accompany it, that Jesus cannot forgive and wipe away.

what if I was conceived through IVF?

You can be certain that you were

***& handmade by God
& redeemed by Jesus.***

God knit you together in your earliest moments; He knew you before you were born. You are fearfully and wonderfully made! (Psalm 139:13-16 says so!) The circumstances of your conception and birth do not give your life value; God does.

No matter how you were conceived, you are indispensable. Your life is no less valuable because you were conceived through IVF. You are loved. You are a gift to the world.

sources

<https://www.genesisfertility.com/blog/understanding-embryo-grading/>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/ovarian-hyperstimulation-syndrome-ohss/symptoms-causes/syc-20354697>

<https://extendfertility.com/preimplantation-genetic-diagnosis-and-screening-genetic-testing-for-embryos/>

<https://lutheransforlife.org/article/in-vitro-fertilization-moral-or-immoral/>

For more information on the details of the practices and procedures of IVF, see the "In-Vitro Fertilization: The Basics" infographic and visit y4life.org.