

Recovering from Life's Disappointments **Kitty Cleveland**

Hi, friends, this is Kitty Cleveland, and I'm so glad to be back with you for the fourth installment of our Healing Retreat with Pray More Novenas. Let's start with the prayer.

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Lord Jesus, we come together in your name, and Lord, we give you all the glory and praise and honor and blessing for your goodness to us. In season and out of season, you are faithful. And Lord, each one of us has had profound disappointments in our life. And if we haven't yet, Lord, that we will. But we can affirm that you are good, that you are faithful, that you have our best interest in mind. So, Lord, we ask for the grace to look for you in the disappointments and to affirm that you are good and that you are making something even better come of our difficulties. Lord, I ask for your Holy Spirit to come to give me your words, not mine, and to bless every person praying with me today. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

A Personal Story of My Greatest Disappointment

So, friends, today, my fourth topic is how to recover from life's disappointments. I know that each one of you has probably experienced some profound disappointment in life, especially during these last couple of years. And so, our call, as Christians, is to get back up, to be resilient in the Lord, and to wait upon His timing and His healing. So, I just wanted to share a very personal story about probably my greatest disappointment, which was my inability to get pregnant after my husband and I got married. So, I'm going to share my infertility story with you, some profound disappointments along the way, and then how God ultimately made it all work for the good.

So, I've been married almost 30 years now, and when my husband and I first got married, I wanted more than anything to be a mom. I'm the oldest of six girls. I figured I'd have a whole gaggle of kids. I'm from the very Catholic city of New Orleans, Louisiana, where there were lots and lots of big families and just assumed that would happen for me as well. And then it became quite evident that I would not be able to conceive without the assistance of in vitro fertilization.

Now, I want you to hear me out on this because I know this can be a really tender topic for a lot of people. Maybe you've done in vitro fertilization, and you have a child conceived in that way. And of course, children conceived, no matter the means by which they were conceived, they are all blessings. They are all beloved by God, made in His image and likeness, whether through in vitro or naturally conceived or rape. Whatever it is, every human being is precious in the eyes of God. So let's just put that to the side.

But I didn't know a whole lot about what the church taught as far as assisted reproduction. Honestly, at that point in my life, I didn't really care. And I just knew that I wanted to be a mom. And when I was told that this was the only way I would be able to conceive, I was ready to go and actually had an appointment with a fertility clinic to get that process started. Now, I didn't think I was going to have the money to do it, and I wasn't quite sure, but we were definitely in the exploratory stage when I got a phone call from a nun, I think at the Pope Paul VI Institute for Marriage and the Family. I could be wrong about that, but it was a nun who had been tipped off by my sister who knew the faith a lot better than I did. And this nun called and said she had heard that I was considering in vitro fertilization and then proceeded to tell me what the church taught about this in the document *Donum Vitae* and in other authoritative teachings from the church, from the Magisterium.

And I was very confused because, in my mind, all children are a gift. One of the purposes of marriage is to have children. So how could our attempts to conceive, any attempt in whatever way, be immoral? And so she went on to explain that both the procreative and the unitive aspects need to be present when life is brought into the world. That is the authoritative teaching of the church. And that in vitro separates those two, the unitive and the procreative, and it basically makes children products to be manufactured, even though that isn't our intent. That, essentially, is what it becomes. And that as a result of that, there are hundreds of thousands of frozen embryos treated like products in cold storage, and many dying, and it has led to a lot of unintended consequences.

What Does God Want?

Well, I was devastated by this phone call and so angry with her and so angry with God. And so after some months passed, I decided to go to confession because there was a hardness in my heart towards the teaching of the church. And so when I went to the priest at this church and told him my situation, he said, "Wait a minute, yes, you can do in vitro fertilization. Call me when you get pregnant. Be fruitful and multiply." And so then I was really confused. And so I asked another priest about it, and he said, "No, in vitro is immoral," for the reasons that I just explained, re *Donum Vitae*. And so I was very, very disappointed by this, but I was okay. You know, I read it, and then I happened to see another priest, and I decided to ask him for his opinion. And this priest said it might be immoral for me not to do in vitro fertilization.

So now, I had three priests and three different answers. Hmm, what's going on here? So, I didn't know up until this point that there was so much chaos and disobedience and freewheeling amongst some of the clergy. So, I'm sure they're well intentioned, but disobedience leads to great confusion. In fact, there's just a book I want to recommend by Father Michael Scanlan, called *What Does God Want?* Because essentially, that's what we want, right? We want whatever God wants. We pray in the Our Father, "Thy will be done," not, "My will be done." Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. So, I want to know what God wants, and then I ask for the grace to be obedient to that. So, it's a book, again, Father Michael Scanlan, *What Does God Want?* And I'll put that in the notes with this on my website, which you can find at the end of this video or when they post the video.

So, I read that book, and it really helped to clarify for me why I would want to be obedient to what the church taught, even though I didn't fully understand. My head comprehended; my heart did not. And it helped me to understand too that we have a lot of confusion in the church right now, so we have to do due diligence, really, at this point. What does the church teach and why? And what does God want?

And I remember sitting on my sofa in my living room when it really hit me that this is what the Lord was asking of me. What it felt like was that He was asking me to surrender my unborn children, which is how it felt. And so, through many tears, I just said, "Lord if this is your will, please just give me peace. And if it's not your will, let me know." Well, all I can tell you is that this heavy anointing fell, a profound peace came over me, that all would be well, even though my heart was still broken, even though I didn't have children, and that God had another way.

Adopting Embryos

So, a few months later, I happened to see an article, I think in the National Catholic Register, that had a man holding his two sons. He was testifying before Congress against embryonic stem cell research, and he was holding his two infant boys in his arms. And he said, "Which of my two sons would you have killed for your research?" And it turned out that he and his wife had adopted these little ones as embryos, and the wife... They were embryos that people had created in vitro. They no longer wanted them. So, this couple was able to adopt them. And she had, the wife, had them implanted and gave birth to these two boys, and they were raising them as her children. And I thought, "Oh my goodness, you can adopt embryos? How incredible." That had not occurred to me.

And then the next day I met a woman, for the first time who had five little children, and she was sharing her story that when she and her husband did in vitro fertilization and they had triplets from that first attempt, and when the triplets were six months old, her husband left her. And she had since remarried and got pregnant naturally with identical twins. So now she had five children, ages six and under, I believe. Five and under. Five children, five and under, and she still had three frozen embryos remaining from her first marriage. Well, now she had these five kids, and her second husband did not want her to carry those three embryos to term. And so, she was just sharing, "I don't know what I'm going to do. We still have three frozen embryos."

And I had just seen this article, so I spoke to my husband and then later to her, and I said, "Would you be open to our adopting your frozen embryos?" By the way, I consulted a priest about this, someone who told me I could not do in vitro. And at that point, he said, the church had not ruled on embryo adoption. That, in fact, the Orthodox moral theologians were split on that. And so... But he said, "Yes, you can do this." So, with my husband's blessing, I brought it to my friend and offered to adopt her three frozen embryos. And she said, "No, I just can't handle the idea of someone raising my children down the street." So, I can't imagine what that would've been like for her. My heart was broken over it, but I moved on.

Well, a few months later, she got word that she had stage four pancreatic cancer and three months to live. She was 38 years old, and she still had three frozen embryos. And so, she called, and she said, "Kitty, I want you and Mel to adopt my embryos and to raise them as your own."

Three months later, I sang for her funeral. Her name was Cecilia. And my intent was to name one of the babies Cecilia, after her and after Saint Cecilia. And then a few weeks later, when it was time for me to have the embryos implanted, all three of the embryos died in the thaw.

Again, I was so confused. I was devastated. I felt tricked by God, betrayed somehow. Had I misunderstood? And the church later declared that embryo adoption was not listed, that essentially these embryos would need to be martyrs, unless they were carried to term by their biological parents. Essentially, because my husband has exclusive right, as my spouse, to my body, to my womb, and that somehow this embryo adoption would violate that. Again, I didn't quite... Neither my heart nor my head really understood that, but I was willing to submit to it. And understanding, by the way, often follows obedience.

The Lord Doesn't Trick Us

So, I was very sad about that. And I just kept going back to the Lord in prayer, asking him how this could happen and what did I miss? And then one day, I was in adoration, and a woman that I didn't know asked to speak to me outside. And she said, "Kitty, I've sent your CDs to my niece who's 16 years old. She's pregnant; she's living in Alabama. And I just wanted to know if you would pray for her?" So, I said, "Well, does she have an adoptive family for this baby?" And she said, "No, she doesn't actually." And so, I said, "Well, my husband and I are actually considering adopting a child right now." And she said, "Oh my goodness. I'm so sorry, I haven't introduced myself. My name is Cecilia." I said, "You're kidding." I said, "That's the name of my friend who just died, and I was going to adopt her embryos, and then they died, and I was going to name one of them Cecilia." And she said, "Well, you won't believe it, but my niece has already named our baby Cecilia."

Well, we both just started crying. And I said, "This is my baby." So, my mom and I drove up to Alabama to meet with this new girl and her mom. It went beautifully. We had lunch together. And a couple of weeks later, the mom called my mom and said, "My daughter's chosen another family." Again... I went to the adoration chapel, and I was like, "Jesus, I don't understand you. I don't understand your ways." Again, I felt tricked, but I know that the Lord doesn't trick us. He doesn't betray us. He doesn't use us. And that there was something I just wasn't seeing or understanding.

Adopting From China

So, a few months later... I grieved all of that. My heart was open again. And a friend called me who had adopted, from China, a little girl. And she said, "Kitty, would you ever consider adopting a little girl from China? Because they actually prefer older parents." And at this point, I was in my late thirties. It was very unlikely that anyone would choose me for a mom, and my husband is 16 years older than I am. So, I spoke to my husband, and he said, "Okay, I'm in if you're in." God bless my dear husband. And so, we began the process to adopt from China. Well, it was time for me to send in my first really big check, and we did not have enough money to pay for the whole thing.

So, I was just totally going on faith and trusting that the Lord would provide what we needed as we went. But I had the money to send in this first big check. And all I can tell you is that I became paralyzed with fear, all of the what ifs in my head and having been so disappointed right up until this point. And I just couldn't do it. So, I went to the adoration chapel, this little six seat adoration chapel at our Lady of the Lake in Mandeville, Louisiana. And I got on my knees, and I said, "Lord Jesus, you have to give me a sign or I'm not mailing this check. I can't do it. You have to gimme a very clear sign that this is your will."

So, there was only one other woman in the chapel, and when I walked out, she followed me, and she said... And I don't know... I knew her face; I didn't know her name. And she said, "Kitty, forgive me if I'm being too forward. But would you ever consider adopting a little girl from China?" And I said, "Yes, I've got the check right here," pulled it out of my purse, and I went and put it in the mailbox. I mean, how good is God?

And then it was time to send in our next big check, and, oh my goodness, I got paralyzed with fear again. And I'm like, "Lord, I don't mean to mistrust you, but you got to gimme another sign." And so that day I went to mass, and a friend of mine, my friend Cecilia's next door neighbor, Lisa, was outside in front, and she said, "Kitty, you won't believe it, but I ran into Chrissy." Chrissy was the nurse, by the way, who had shot me up with progesterone and all the hormones as I prepared for the embryo adoption. So, I didn't really know her outside of that context, and I hadn't seen her in a long while. She said, "Kitty, I ran into Chrissy, and she said, 'Do you think Kitty would ever consider adopting a little girl from China?'" She said, "Can you believe it?" And I said, "Yep, got the check right here," and so I mailed off the check.

And then a few months later, my husband and I were emailed the picture of the most adorable little girl, yeah. And it had a line for our signature. Do you accept? So of course, we said yes. And then, finally, on July 20, 2005, my daughter was put in our arms for the first time. I'll share my little video of that moment with you, and the link, I'll put that there.

And how incredibly blessed we have been by this child. In fact, would you like to meet her? Cecilia! Come meet my friends. There she is. This is my Ceci, my Cecilia. Now headed off to college. I can't believe it. In a few weeks? Like three weeks? Oh my gosh. So, there'll be a lot more tears and new chapters. Thank you, honey. In our life together and in her life.

The Lord is Close to the Brokenhearted

But the topic of my talk again was how to recover from life's disappointments. And so, we are resilient people. Will we have suffering? Will we have disappointment? Will we have discouragement? Yeah. But Psalm 34:18 says, "The Lord is close to the broken-hearted. And those who are crushed in spirit, He saves." So, He wants to console you, to draw near to you. The Lord is close to the broken-hearted. And one of the things I came to understand, and those moments, especially, when I felt tricked by God and so confused, that sometimes our suffering is reparation for the sins of other people. I came to understand that very clearly, and that gave me peace and helped me understand what didn't make any sense.

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My friend Johnnette Benkovic says that when our prayers are not answered the way we hope they would be, that there are a few reasons. One: to keep a greater evil from happening, this evil has taken place. I would say, two, reparation for the sins of other people. And number three, because God intends to bring about a greater good that could not be brought about any way other than by the means of the cross.

So, friends, you are so loved by God. You are so precious to Him. He is not indifferent to your suffering. He wants to console you and draw near to you and give you peace. So I'll post some links to some songs that might go with all of our different subjects over these last few weeks.

Ave Maria

And I'd like to just close with an Ave Maria and ask our Lady to wrap her mantle around you and to comfort you and console you as she did Jesus when He walked this Earth, to give you comfort and to obtain for you all the grace that you need for the day, day by day, until that great homecoming when we see our Lord face to face, when we see those whom we have loved and lost. What a great day that will be, friends. And trust all to Our Lady. So I invite you just to close your eyes and let her wrap her mantle around you and feel her presence and her love.

Ave Maria
Gratia plena
Dominus tecum
Benedicta tu in mulieribus
Et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus
Sancta Maria
Mater Dei
Ora pro nobis peccatoribus
Nunc et in hora
Mortis nostrae
Amen, Amen.

One last final invitation I have for you is to join my daughter Cecilia and me for the rosary. I've had so much healing from the rosary, so much peace, so many insights into the ways of God through the hands of Our Lady. So every weekday morning at 6:00 AM central time, we pray the rosary live on Instagram and on YouTube. So I'll put those links down below. You can just look for my name, Kitty Cleveland, on Instagram and youtube.com/slash-Instagram. You can find us there. We have music; we read the scripture for the day. We talk about the saint of the day. And we receive all that grace through the hands of our Lady for the day. We'd love to have you join us.

Closing Prayer

And finally, let's close with a prayer. *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Lord Jesus, we love you. Your ways are not our ways. Lord, we pray for the humility to bow down and to kneel before your perfect will, even when it is costly to us to trust that you are making it work for the good in a way that we don't even comprehend yet. But definitely, one day, we'll understand. We'll have no more questions. You'll wipe all tears from our eyes, and we will spend all eternity with you. Lord, thank you for the gift of the saints, of our guardian angel, of the friends you've given us to accompany us on the journey, for the salvation of our souls, the forgiveness of our sins, and for the gift of such a good, sweet mama. And St. Joseph too. I'm looking at my little painting of St. Joseph and Our Lady, the Holy Family. That's you. Nuzzled right there in the middle. Let them love you.*

Until we meet again, friends, I'm Kitty Cleveland. God bless you.