

Karen Pence's Struggles With Infertility—And How God Kept Her Strong

Over the past three years, second lady Karen Pence has been attacked and criticized relentlessly. Whether she's standing by her husband's side at the annual March for Life, deciding to teach at a Christian school or defending the vice president's faith and that of other Americans, none of the criticism fazes her, according to those who know her best. Her secret, they say, is hard-won through years of wrestling with God and learning to surrender to His will.

Mike and Karen had been married six long years, but a secret they kept hidden between them—that they'd promised each another not to burden anyone else with—made it feel as though they'd lived a lifetime in such a short span. Countless medical procedures had been done, and thousands of dollars had been spent. They'd done everything they were told to do by the book, and there was nothing to show for it. "Our doctor just kept saying, 'I really don't know why you're not having kids,'" says Karen. "'I don't know why you're not.'"

According to the National Survey of Family Growth, 1 in 8 couples (or 12% of married women) have trouble getting pregnant or sustaining a pregnancy. For Mike and Karen Pence, this reality was particularly heart-wrenching because, as Christians, they believed Psalm 37:4, "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of their heart" (Ps. 37:4, NIV). This is their story, as an excerpt from my book, *The Faith of Mike Pence* (Whitaker House, August 6):

"An awful lot of [couples] struggle [with infertility] and don't talk about it very much," Mike says. "We were one of them, month after month, hoping against hope that we'd have a

family, only to be disappointed again and again.”

In her early 30s, Karen was distraught.

“We were ready to start our family, and it just didn’t happen,” she says. While all of her friends and relatives were getting pregnant, “I remember my little niece looked up at me one day and said, ‘Auntie Karen, why don’t you have any babies?’ It can be a very heartbreaking experience. We didn’t want to tell anybody, because we didn’t want them to feel like they couldn’t share their joy with us when they got pregnant. We didn’t want any of our friends or family to say, “Oh, how are we going to tell Mike and Karen?” So, we said, ‘Let’s keep it to ourselves.’”

Even Mike’s father had mentioned it, Karen says, telling them, “‘You know, there’s never a good time to have kids.’... So, we finally told him ...’You know what, we’ve gone through several procedures, we don’t know what’s going on, but we can’t seem to get pregnant.”

Mike and Karen took the matter to prayer, asking God to give them a child. They also wondered why He hadn’t answered their request yet.

“All I ever wanted ... was to be was a mom,” recalls Karen. “I didn’t care about fame or fortune, big house, fancy career, nice car—none of that has ever been important to me. I just wanted to be a mom. And so my main thing was, how could God put this desire in my heart and not bring me kids?... It made me question Him a lot. I kept thinking, *We’d be these great parents; we’re ready; we want kids; why don’t You bring us kids?* ... It hurts ... it’s very frustrating. It can really be difficult to deal with.”

Trying to find ways to conceive, they sought out medical advice and fertility treatments.

“We tried not to let it consume us,” says Karen. “But you

know, when you go through a procedure, and you spend \$10,000 and it doesn't work, it's really frustrating. It's really, really frustrating."

In the end, it became too much, and the Pences had to surrender it and leave the matter in God's hands. "We just had to wait until He was ready," Karen says.

She has told friends who have struggled with their own fertility issues to "just hang in there" and trust in God. "You know, if it's going to happen, it's going to happen, and it's going to happen in God's time. You know, we were ready as well to just be a really great aunt and uncle and that would've been okay, too, if that was what God was calling us to," she recalls.

One day while on the road working, Mike stopped at a pay phone to call Karen. "Happy Father's Day!" she told him. They were finally going to become parents.

Soon afterward, they received a call from an adoption agency they had registered with, letting them know that they could adopt a boy who was due in July. Karen was due to deliver their first child, Michael Joseph Pence, in November.

"We just felt like it wasn't right for us to still be on that list of parents who wanted to be considered by the birth parents, and so we withdrew our name," Karen says. "Of course, our son has never forgiven us. He goes, 'Really Mom, I could've had a brother! Really? What were you thinking?!' But we just felt like God had shown us He was going to bring us a family, and we needed to pull our name off."

Anyone struggling with infertility should consider adoption because it's "a real, viable alternative," Karen says. "Start looking into it, because it was something you know, once we prayed through it ... we were 100% in. And however God was going to bring us a family, it was going to be fine with us."

After Michael was born, Karen gave birth in quick concession to two girls: Audrey and Charlotte. Karen's heart, however, is never far from those grappling with infertility. Perhaps the most powerful advice she's given us through all of this is her example of fortitude, perseverance and dependence on Christ.

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Leslie Montgomery *has given birth to two children through invitro fertilization and is the author and ghostwriter of over a dozen books. Her latest book, The Faith of Mike Pence, is available now for pre-order.*

This article is an edited excerpt from The Faith of Mike Pence.

For more on infertility, listen to the podcasts included with this article!