

**Group Study on Stem Cell Research**

*What you will need:*

* A print out of this document
* A Bible

*Read aloud the following excerpt and use your Bible to look up the passages cited in the text*

It is an uncontroversial scientific fact that human life begins at conception i.e. when a sperm fertilizes an egg. At that point a unique genetic entity comes into existence. It may not *look* human, but it most certainly is. A human embryo cannot develop into an ape or a chicken. In fact, each of us can date our existence back to the moment of conception. At that moment, God “breathed” life into us (Genesis 2:7).

How then might Christians view research on human embryos? This practice is commonplace in Australia and is largely made possible given the “excess” embryos that result from the IVF. Not all embryos created during IVF are implanted into a woman’s uterus. If the biological parents of the embryo give consent, their embryos may be donated for research purposes.

Many people believe that research on human embryos is justified due to the scientific breakthroughs it has been able to achieve (and ones that may be yet to come). Indeed, there is great potential to find cures and treatments for diseases through embryonic research.

Yet, in the mind of Lutherans for Life, the practice is problematic because it treats the human embryo as a means to an end, and not an end in itself. This means that it is not treated with the respect it deserves by virtue of being human, but because we think we can “get something out of it”.

All human life is created by God and precious to Him. Unfortunately, embryos used for research purposes are destroyed in the process. This hardly seems respectful to the embryo which, despite its smallness and seeming insignificance, bears the image of God.

Many people believe that research on human embryos is justified due to the scientific progress it promises to bring. However, the hope of embryonic stem cells being able to cure illness or injury has proven to be false, and currently it is adult stem cells that are used in many treatments. IVF scientists continue to work on human embryos in the hope of avoiding some inheritable disorders.

*Discussion questions*

* What does it mean to be treated with respect? Do embryos deserve or need respect? Why or why not?
* Would you donate your own (adult) stem cells if you knew you could save embryos from being destroyed?
* All human life is precious to God. The world does not act as though all human life is precious. How can you as a Christian in a secular world show that life is precious?
* Knowing that adult stem cells are just as useful as embryonic stem cells, one must ask: why are embryonic stem cells still in demand for research? Even umbilical cord stem cells can be used in their place. Is the taking of life necessary for research? Do the ends justify the means?

*Close with prayer*