



The Sanctity of Life

A primer on the inherent dignity of all people, and some of the ways The Austin Stone is working to protect the unborn while loving, empowering, and ministering to those affected by abortion.

INTRODUCTION

God loves creating and giving life. He took the dark and shapeless earth He created on the first day and showered it in light. He planted seeds in the ground and gave them everything they needed to blossom and grow. He carved out oceans and filled them with creatures of all shapes, sizes, and functions. He covered the globe with animals, plants, birds, and insects. While our planetary neighbors are haunted, desolate worlds hostile to life, our world is teeming with it. God declared this abundance of life “good” and commanded His creatures to “be fruitful and multiply” for His glory (Genesis 1:22 ESV), but His creative work had yet to reach its crescendo.

God surveyed His world and decided to create man and woman—beings formed in His very own image, creatures designed to live in relationship with Him, rule over His creation, and represent Him by loving and living like Him. Adam and Eve were the pinnacle of God’s work, very signatures of the divine. God told the couple to “Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth ...” with their progeny as well, so that His glory and their flourishing would only continue to expand (Genesis 1:28 ESV).

But the perfect harmony God established in the garden of Eden did not last. When Adam and Eve disobeyed Him for the very first time, sin came crashing into our world. Its effects were both overwhelming and immediate, shattering the peace and unity we had with God, creation, others, and ourselves. Our hearts became wicked, determined to elevate the self whenever and however possible. Comfort, approval, control, and power became more precious to us than God’s glory and the prosperity of our neighbors. Fellow image-bearers became pawns to be used and commodities to be exploited. The poison of sin fundamentally altered the human experience. In fact, “all that we call human history,” writes C.S. Lewis, “money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery” has been “the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy.”¹

Another tragic element of that “long terrible story” is abortion. And while abortion is often understood to be a modern phenomenon, it has been practiced by

societies for thousands of years. Though it looks different today than in the Greco-Roman world, the enticing promises of liberation, freedom, security, and independence remain the same. Just as the enemy whispered to Eve in the garden of Eden, believers and non-believers alike are still vulnerable to his deceit today (2 Corinthians 11:3). He finds women in the midst of deep confusion, hurt, and anger and tempts them to believe they need an abortion to avoid judgment, build a career, be financially secure, obtain equality with men, or even to survive. He convinces men they have no place in the abortion discussion and that standing by as women choose abortion is a loving, respectful thing to do.

Though Satan champions abortion as an instrument of empowerment, we know it as a tool of death and oppression. Satan, the Father of Lies, desires only to kill, steal, and destroy. He relishes the spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional devastation abortion leaves in its wake. And even in this moment, Scripture tells us that Satan “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8 ESV).

Believers must be among the first to defend the unborn, to advocate for those in the womb unable to defend or speak up for themselves. At the same time, those of us who have personally experienced the grace and forgiveness of Christ must also be the first to extend it to others. God has surrounded us with neighbors to care for—vulnerable pregnant women, struggling single parents, mothers victimized by the abortion industry, and helpless children trapped in a revolving door of foster homes. The gospel is serious about justice and mercy. It demands repentance from sin and an end to abortion. It also invites the post-abortive woman, the coercive partner, the apathetic bystander, and even the unloving pro-life activist into new life—a life filled with the unmatched peace, joy, and love of Jesus. It is with this approach that Christians can show the world not just what they are against, but what they are for: a world in which everyone, from the zygote to the geriatric, can become all that God made them to be.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, [1952] 2009), 49.

ABORTION: THEN AND NOW

From the perspective of mankind, the story of humanity has been winding and unpredictable. Nations rise and fall, movements come and go, and cultures ebb and flow. Attitudes toward women and the unborn have also changed over time. Though the history of abortion is a volatile one, our God is an unchanging God, the very Author of eternal truth. Though heaven and earth will one day pass away, His Word will never pass away (Mark 13:31). He never changes. He always has reigned and always will reign over all creation from His throne (Malachi 3:6; Daniel 7:14).

As followers of the One who is the same yesterday and forever, we must stay true to His ways, no matter how society and culture change. However, this does not mean that we should neglect our study of history, as it is only by examining the past that we can truly understand abortion in our context today, an understanding that is critical to effectively minister to others. “Life is divided into three terms—that which was, which is, and which will be,” writes poet William Wordsworth. “Let us learn from the past to profit by the present, and from the present, to live better in the future.”² We undertake this exploration in an even-handed manner, eager to celebrate the ways in which the church has loved and advocated for women and their children well, and readily willing to acknowledge ways in which the church has been indifferent to (or even complicit in) the injustices women and the unborn have experienced. It is in this way we can model the best elements of the historic church, avoid historic pitfalls, and bring the entire gospel to bear on this issue.

Greco-Roman Era

Abortion is not new. The writings of philosophers and the edicts of rulers in antiquity make clear that the practice was not only commonplace but also socially

acceptable thousands of years ago. Many of Ancient Greece’s great thinkers, including Plato and his student, Aristotle, believed that while the fetus was a living being, its rights were subordinate to the needs and objectives of the state. Because older mothers were more likely to experience pregnancy-related complications (and produce “burdensome” children), Plato argued that all pregnant women over the age of forty should be required to abort. Aristotle too asserted that children should be assessed by their ability to contribute to society. “As to the exposure and rearing of children,” he wrote in his 350 BC book *Politics*, “let there be a law that no deformed child shall live.” When the state’s population reached its predetermined “limit,” he suggested, couples with “children in excess” should be required to get abortions “before sense and life have begun.”³ In the interest of the community, it was the government’s role to regulate marriage, the number and spacing of children, conditions for prenatal development, and the quality of any and all offspring.⁴

Laws against intentional abortions were strengthened during the Roman Republic, but they were designed to protect patriarchal honor, not the personhood of the fetus. When Cicero called for capital punishment for those committing deliberate abortions in 65 BC, he made no reference to mothers or their unborn children. The statute existed not to affirm the rights or dignity of the unborn, but to punish the perceived injustice committed against the father. In Roman society, male heads of household wielded ultimate power over their families. In many cases, they were given license to do whatever was necessary to safeguard their reputations. To reduce the shame and burden husbands experienced, Roman law even permitted men to “expose” their female infants and “deformed” babies by abandoning them to die from starvation and/or the elements.⁵

Early Christians rejected this line of thinking. The *Didache*, a first century treatise written by the apostolic fathers, flatly condemned the “murder [of] a child by abortion/destruction” and declared that “the Way of Death” was filled with “murderers of

² “William Wordsworth Quotes,” Quotes.net, STANDS4 LLC, 2020, accessed October 2020, <https://www.quotes.net/quote/6067>.

³ Aristotle, *Aristotle’s Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905).

⁴ Michael Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish and Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1982), 21-22.

⁵ Michael Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church*, 24-26.

children.”⁶ The Epistle of Barnabas, a prominent Greek text written between 70 AD and 132 AD, echoed The Didache’s explicit language about life and murder. However, the epistle went even further, providing greater insight into how first- and second-generation believers thought about abortion. Not only were abortion and infanticide dishonoring to God, it declared, but they demonstrated a profound failure to love one’s neighbor more than oneself (Matthew 22:39). According to New Testament scholar Michael Gorman, the world’s first Christians saw the fetus “not as a part of its mother, but as a neighbor ... [A]bortion is depicted not only as a sin like sexual immorality, but as an evil no less severe and social in scope than oppression of the poor and needy ...”⁷ Rather than ignore or condone the atrocities carried out against the unborn for the sake of honor, sex appeal, and financial security, believers laid down their lives and resources so that others could flourish more abundantly. Gorman observes that “the earliest Christian ethic, from Jesus to Constantine, can be described as a consistent pro-life ethic.” In stark contrast to the spirit of the age, this ethic “was in favor of human life, regardless of age, nationality or social standing. It pleaded for the poor, the weak, women, children and the unborn. This pro-life ethic discarded hate in favor of love, war in favor of peace, oppression in favor of justice, bloodshed in favor of life.”⁸

Modern Era

In many ways, our twenty-first century society has enshrined a greater number of civil rights than ever before. Chattel slavery has been banished to the history books, voting rights have been extended to racial minorities and women, and programs have

been established to make the lives of those living with disabilities easier. These are substantive victories, and we should celebrate them. However, the false sense of “arriving” at a just world can blind us to the covert undercurrent of discrimination, dehumanization, and oppression that still exists. Racial minorities, women, the poor, and people with disabilities continue to experience hardship and suffering because of systemic bias and inequity. However, one particular subgroup of people remains the most aggressively dehumanized of all—the unborn. The unborn have no constitutional protections, no right to life, and are recognized by few legal entities as “humans” at all. As a society, we have effectively shut our eyes, plugged our ears, and repeated lies to ourselves to convince our hearts that these tiny humans are not people at all.

The ramifications of this dehumanization have been severe. The Guttmacher Institute estimates that roughly 73 million abortions are performed worldwide every year.⁹ In 2015, more than 850,000 abortions were performed in the United States alone.¹⁰ Since the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court ruling made abortion legal in all 50 states, more than 50 million unborn U.S. babies have been killed in this way.¹¹ The unborn represent just some of the victims, as post-abortive women and their partners are also dehumanized by the procedure, whether they realize it or not. By the time they are 45 years old, approximately one-third of all American women will have had at least one abortion¹²—many of whom were attending a local church at the time it occurred. Research shows that in most cases, abortion eventually takes its toll; anxiety, depression, grief, eating disorders, and drug use are all significantly higher among women wrestling with the trauma abortion inflicts.¹³

⁶ Michael Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church*, 49.

⁷ Michael Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church*, 49-50.

⁸ Michael Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church*, 90.

⁹ “Unintended Pregnancy and Abortion Worldwide Fact Sheet,” The Guttmacher Institute, July 2020, <https://www.guttmacher.org/factsheet/induced-abortion-worldwide>.

¹⁰ Associated Press, “Number of Abortions in U.S. Drops to Lowest Since They Became Legal Nationwide, Report Finds,” *nbcnews.com*, NBC News, September 18, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/number-abortions-u-s-drops-lowest-they-became-legal-nationwide-n1055726>.

¹¹ Rachel K. Jones and Kathryn Kooistra, “Abortion Incidence and Access to Services in the United States, 2008,” The Guttmacher Institute, March 2011,

<https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/pubs/psrh/full/4304111.pdf>; Rachel K. Jones and Jenna Jerman, “Abortion Incidence and Service Availability in the United States, 2011,” The Guttmacher Institute, March 2014, <https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/journals/psrh.46e0414.pdf>.

¹² Charles Camosy, *Resisting Throwaway Culture: How a Consistent Life Ethic Can Unite a Fractured People* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2019), 131.

¹³ Priscilla K. Coleman, “Abortion and Mental Health: Quantitative Synthesis and Analysis of Research Published 1995-2009,” *The British Journal of Psychiatry: The Journal of Mental Science* 199, no.3 (2011): 180-186, doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.110.077230.

Although the seeds of the sexual revolution and the subsequent liberalization of American abortion laws had already been sown by the 1940s and 1950s, evangelical Protestants failed to respond to the changing tide as clearly and emphatically as their early church ancestors. “With the exception of the Anglican Communion’s 1930 declaration of its ‘abhorrence’ of abortion, no Protestant denomination passed an official resolution on abortion before the 1960s,” writes author Daniel Williams.¹⁴ While Catholics forcefully challenged the culture’s new narrative around abortion and the utilitarian social ethic of abortion-choice advocates, most evangelicals sat on the sidelines. Christianity Today, one of the most prominent evangelical publications over the last 75 years, did not publish its first article on the topic until 1966. The Southern Baptist Convention did not pass its first resolution on abortion until 1971, just one year before the *Roe v. Wade* ruling.¹⁵ Despite decades of national dialogue and debate around legalized abortion, theologically conservative churches missed the opportunity to educate, equip, and mobilize their members well.

While most evangelical church leaders have since made their opposition to abortion clear, the consistent life ethic embodied by Jesus and the early church remains underdeveloped in many congregations today. In Christ, we find a sense of belonging, forgiveness for all of our sins, and restored relationships with God, creation, others, and ourselves. Yet, evangelical sanctuaries are not often a refuge for vulnerable and post-abortive women.

According to a 2015 survey from LifeWay Research, only two in five post-abortive women (38 percent) “consider church a safe place to discuss pregnancy options, including parenting, abortion, and adoption.” In fact, the same study found that more than half of post-abortive women “would not recommend a friend or family member discuss an unplanned pregnancy with someone at church.”¹⁶ As Christians, we must be known not only for our opposition to abortion but our deep, unwavering love

for life—rich, meaningful flourishing for men, women, and the children they bear.

THE AUSTIN STONE & ABORTION

At *The Austin Stone*, we believe that every single person who has ever lived bears the image of God Almighty. Without exception, this image gives all people dignity that cannot be stripped away. In God’s economy, no one’s value is determined based upon their power, mental acuity, physical prowess, or financial resources. It is only because we have been created in God’s likeness that we have human dignity. Author and pastor Tim Keller says, “Every human being reflects God and therefore, there is rock-solid, objective, irreducible, glory and significance, and worth about every human being.”¹⁷

In Scripture, God says, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you ...” (Jeremiah 1:5). King David praised God for these earliest moments of existence: “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:13-14). And David rejoiced that God had a plan for him from the very beginning, even as he awaited birth in his mother’s womb (Psalm 139:16). From the point of conception, the unborn are distinct, living, and whole human beings. From the moment of conception, the image of God is then reflected in this newly formed human, and despite the smallness of this image-bearing person, this is the precise moment in time that an eternal life has begun (Genesis 1:27). Pastor John Piper says, “The beginning of human life is a magnificent thing—it is the only newly originating life in the universe that is in the image of God. It is the only newly originating life in the universe that lasts forever. O what amazed and happy reverence we should feel for the beginning of every human life!”¹⁸

¹⁴ Daniel K. Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 28.

¹⁵ Daniel K. Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn*, 45.

¹⁶ Lisa Cannon Green, “Abortion, women’s views of church focus of study,” Baptist Press, The Southern Baptist Convention, November 23,

2015, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/abortion-womens-views-of-church-focus-of-study/>.

¹⁷ Tim Keller, “In the Image of God.” *YouTube* video, 38:10, January 22, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5H_4UJfOigA.

¹⁸ John Piper, “The Baby in My Womb Leaped for Joy,” *Desiring God*, January 25, 2009, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-baby-in-my-womb-leaped-for-joy>.

God not only creates our physical bodies, but as Jeremiah 38:16 reveals, He also forms our *nephesh* (souls), the “inner being of the man, the man himself, living being (with life in the blood), and the seat of the appetites, emotions, and passions.”¹⁹ While our earthly bodies will pass away, our souls will not (Matthew 10:28). Despite what many people claim today, we are not just physical bodies that return to dust. We are neither food for worms nor clumps of cells.

As Christians, we celebrate, defend, and advocate for life for at least two reasons: we share God’s love for people, and we share God’s love for His glory. The Lord made Adam and Eve not only so they could have children and flourish, but also that they would multiply His glory by carrying His image to the ends of the earth. Author and theologian Dr. Jim Hamilton writes, “The Lord made human beings so that in their subduing the earth and exercising dominion of the world they would make His invisible character visible in all creation. God wants the world to be filled with people because from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting, God wants His character to be seen.”²⁰

Abortion

We can trace every instance of brokenness and evil back to sin. The fallen condition of man breeds chaos and darkness. Just like Eve, we choose to believe that our greatest freedom will be found in absolute autonomy. We separate ourselves from God and His righteous rule, choosing to worship what He has created rather than worshipping Him. We become fools by standing on the lesser and limited wisdom of the world, chasing after the lusts of our flesh instead of resting in His sufficiency. We are created to understand who we are in God, but sin deceives us into believing we will feel more authentically ourselves if we are free of Him. When we divorce our dignity, identity, and purpose from God, we naturally seek to find them in things like our sexuality, intellect, abilities, or influence.

Sin has also distorted God’s clear call of stewardship. While we were commissioned to rule over the land, sea, and creatures, sin has made us hungry to rule over people. Consequently, we have abandoned stewardship for exploitation. Stewardship comes from an understanding of human dignity, identity, and purpose. When a person knows they are a representative of God and has a relationship with God, the focus of the steward is on the Master. Exploitation, on the other hand, comes from sin and an identity that is cut off from God. The one who exploits is not thinking of the Master but operating from a place of scarcity and fear. In contrast to the life-giving nature of stewardship, exploitation is derivative and diminishing—a prescription for destruction.

History is rife with exploitation, because we have developed the ability to dehumanize other people to justify our self-interested actions and ease our consciences. We can numb ourselves to feelings of empathy when we see the other person, whether they be an expectant mother or the child she carries, as nothing more than an obstacle to our wellbeing. This is the kind of dehumanization that makes most abortions possible. As Mother Teresa once wrote, “Any country that accepts abortion, is not teaching its people to love, but to use any violence to get what it wants.”²¹ As a church passionate about human flourishing, The Austin Stone believes that a truly just society requires ending access to, as well as the desire for, abortion procedures and abortifacients.

We also understand that abortion is not just a woman doing what she wants to her body; any abortion affects at least two embodied, eternal souls. Abortion is not just removing a clump of cells from the uterus, but the willful ending of another person’s life. For this reason, we believe that abortion is nothing less than murder. This is understandably a hard truth to process, but in Genesis 9:6, God shows us that murder cannot be overlooked. God prohibits it, precisely because He made humans in His own image, and there are no loopholes or exemptions to His decree,

¹⁹ “Nephesh - Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon - New American Standard,” Bible Study Tools, December 18, 2019, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/nas/nephesh.html>.

²⁰ Jim Hamilton, “What Are We For?” in *The Gospel and Abortion*, ed. Russell Moore and Andrew T. Walker (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2001), 21.

²¹ Mother Teresa. *The Joy in Loving: a Guide to Daily Living*. (New York: Penguin Compass, 2000).

for taking the life of another human being is a direct assault against God and an affront against the glorious image of God in people.

Life and Redemption

While God grieves for the aborted child, He sees post-abortive women, loves them, and offers them new life through His Son, Jesus. Murder is not beyond the grace of God. His love overcomes it. The apostle Paul's life bears evidence of this (Acts 9:1; 1 Timothy 1:15). While our enemy seeks to destroy life, Jesus is the life-giving source of all love, forgiveness, and peace. No sin—not even murder—can separate us from Jesus' own love for us. His heart overflows with mercy, and He invites each and every one of us, no matter our past, to pick up our cross and follow Him. God, already aware of all the sin we would commit against Him, chose to rescue us by sending Jesus to die in our place (Romans 8:3-4). He did not come for those who thought they were righteous on their own, but for those who knew they stood no chance of redemption without Him (Luke 5:31-32). We do not have to clean ourselves up before coming to Him, because He welcomes the prodigal home with open arms, forgiving the sins we are scared to admit even to ourselves. Once we have been saved by His radical, overwhelming grace, we are called to repent of our evil ways and join Him in His kingdom work (Romans 6:1-2).

Because God loves life, we fight to affirm it whenever and wherever we can. This is not a recommendation or suggestion for the people of God, but an explicit biblical commandment. Scripture demands that followers of Jesus “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves” and “defend the weak and the fatherless” (Proverbs 31:8-9; Psalm 82:3 NIV). This means that we must become defenders of the unborn in our personal and public lives. However, rejecting dehumanization means rejecting it for any and every person or group—including abortionists, pro-choice advocates, and post-abortive women. We cannot respond by characterizing these individuals as villains or monsters in our hearts or through our speech, because they are fellow image-bearers, equal in dignity, and sinners in need of saving, just like the rest of us. The Austin Stone is committed to serving as a hospital for sinners, a safe harbor for the hurting,

and an incubator of kingdom ambassadors. We pray that through our church, Christ would make the broken whole, set the oppressed free, bring the distant near, end the evil of abortion, and multiply His glory forever.

DIMENSIONS OF ABORTION

Abortion is not a “simple medical procedure” but a destructive event that affects every aspect of our lives and communities. Even though abortion-choice advocates argue that the decision “should be between women and their doctors,” the outcome reverberates far beyond the clinic's four walls. Here are some of the important cultural dimensions that shape the abortion landscape, what the Bible says about them, and how partners at The Austin Stone can constructively enter difficult spaces to advocate for life and promote flourishing.

Marriage, Sex, and the Family

What God Says

God created Adam and Eve in physical bodies, as male and female, and He called His work “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Our bodies reflect the visible reality of an invisible God to the world. He made men and women alike in His likeness, but distinct in their bodies so that they could fulfill the commission to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28 ESV). From the very beginning, before sin entered the world, sex was a vital part of God's plan for the world to flourish. Through sexual intercourse, men and women could come together to create more human beings, more image-bearers to fill this world. In His kindness, the Lord designed sex for far more than the simple act of procreation. He gave sex as a gift to husbands and wives, a way for spouses to fully, sacrificially, and joyfully give themselves to one another in love and experience pleasure in the process. Our sexuality is not just a personal trait, but something that “points to our deepest-held convictions about who we are, who

God is, the meaning of love, the ordering of society, and even the ordering of the universe.”²²

While the world treats sex as just another recreational activity, God describes the “one-flesh” union between a husband and wife as a representation of the ultimate marriage of Christ to His bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:31-32). It is through loving, tender, selfless sex that spouses are able to better love one another as Christ first loved them (John 15:12). God gave us physical bodies so that we could bless others, including our spouses, through our work and acts of service. Jesus, in His matchless obedience, perfectly modeled sacrificial love for us. Catholic scholar Christopher West describes this well:

First, Christ gives his body freely (‘No one takes my life from me, I lay it down of my own accord,’ John 10:18). Second, he gives his body totally—without reservation, condition, or selfish calculation (‘He loved them to the last,’ John 13:1). Third, he gives his body faithfully (‘I am with you always,’ Matthew 28:20). And fourth, he gives his body fruitfully (‘I came that they may have life,’ John 10:10). If men and women are to avoid the pitfalls of counterfeit love, and live their vocation to its full, their union must express the same free, total, faithful, fruitful love that Christ’s body expresses. Another name for this kind of love is marriage.²³

The hookup culture asserts that we should be able to do whatever we want with our bodies, but the apostle Paul declares that we belong to someone else. “You are not your own,” he writes, “for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19b-20 ESV). God cares so much for our bodies that He paid the ultimate price—the blood of His Son—so that we would become vessels for His glory through our bodies. We do this by “presenting [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” in all that we do, both inside and outside the bedroom (Romans 12:1 ESV). Sex is not something bad for us to avoid, nor is it something we should have whenever we want with whomever we want. The

greatest joys and pleasures available through sex are found in God’s good design for marriage, a covenant within which trust, security, belonging, relationship, and intimacy can be experienced. West writes that “The Christian sexual ethic—far from being the prudish list of prohibitions it is often assumed to be—corresponds perfectly with the deepest yearnings of our hearts for love and union.”²⁴ Generous, loving, sacrificial sex is the greatest way married couples can point to the most beautiful, wonderful marriage of all—the ultimate union of Christ with His people on the day He returns for us.

What Sin Has Done

God made our bodies for a purpose; He made us with embodied souls to experience ultimate freedom. Our bodies were made to experience creativity, work, self-expression, and sexuality—all within the realm of freedom determined by God. When we disobey God’s high regard and purposes for our bodies, we not only miss experiencing the blessing of a human body but also walk deeper into oppression. There are many ways humanity experiences bodily oppression, but the most prevalent misuse and misunderstanding of our bodies is revealed in our sexual ethic. Sin blinds us to believe that if we just fight for more bodily autonomy and more sexual liberties, eventually we will obtain the freedom we desire. Uninhibited sexual freedom has become the mirage in the desert. We are willing to pay any cost to pursue the promise that freedom is found in uninhibited sexual liberty, and we are willing to go to any length to persuade ourselves that it is truly the greener pasture.

Though this view of sex is appealing to our flesh, the underlying beliefs that make “casual” sex permissible are incredibly dangerous. “If the modern humanistic view of man is correct and man is only a product of chance in the universe that has no ultimate values,” observe Everett Koop and Dr. Francis Schaeffer, “why should an individual refrain from being cruel to another person, if that person seems to be standing in his or her way?”²⁵ Though this may sound sensational to some, the worst consequences of society’s misguided sexual mores are already beginning to

²² Christopher West, *Theology of the Body for Beginners* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2009), 2.

²³ Christopher West, *Theology of the Body for Beginners*, 93.

²⁴ Christopher West, *Theology of the Body for Beginners*, 15.

²⁵ C. Everett Koop and Francis August Schaeffer, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* (Crossway Books, 1983), 7.

surface. In the hookup culture, men and women use one another as sexual objects with no regard for the dignity or humanity of their partners.

The same worldview makes abortion not only possible but desirable. When we choose to seize and possess instead of serve and love, death itself becomes the solution to our problems, the answer to the obstacles that stand in the way of our comfort and pleasure. “Make no mistake: in the final analysis, the abortion debate is not about when life begins,” says West. “It is about the meaning of sex. What most men and women who fight for abortion want is not so much the ‘right’ to kill their offspring, but the ‘right’ to have unrestricted sex without consequences.”²⁶ Mother Teresa describes the implications of our self-serving sexual ethic in her 1994 address to the Supreme Court on abortion:

The so-called right to abortion has pitted mothers against their children and women against men. It has sown violence and discord at the heart of the most intimate human relationships. It has aggravated the derogation of the father’s role in an increasingly fatherless society. It has portrayed the greatest of gifts—a child—as a competitor, an intrusion, and an inconvenience. It has nominally accorded mothers unfettered domination over the independent lives of their physically dependent sons and daughters. And, in granting this unconscionable power, it has exposed many women to unjust and selfish demands from their husbands or other sexual partners.²⁷

In many ways, sex has become our god. We spent the majority of the twentieth century ridding ourselves of any sort of Christian sexual ethic, hoping to find greater autonomy and pleasure as a result. However, our attempt at absolute freedom has done nothing but drive us deeper into oppression and darkness. The way to freedom is not through total bodily autonomy, seeing children as punishments, or having

uninhibited sex. The only way to freedom is through submitting both body and soul to God.

What We Should Do

The world says that freedom is only freedom when it is unrestrained, unchecked, or uninhibited. But freedom is God’s idea. It was designed to be a comprehensive liberation of body and soul that is most fully experienced within the boundaries of a covenant to Him and a commitment to others. God cares about our bodies, so He gives us boundaries and limitations on them so that we will experience life, joy, and freedom to the fullest. In Wanda Deifelt’s commentary on theologian Martin Luther’s concept of the body and sexuality, she implores others to reclaim the human body “as part of God’s good creation, a concrete expression of God’s care and grace. The body and sexuality are no longer placed under the realm of perdition. Rather, the human body is the place of and for neighborly love, fleshing out a Christian ethics concerned with the well-being of self and others.”²⁸

The Me Too movement (or #MeToo) began to expose the failures of the sexual revolution and the insufficiency, grief, loneliness, and exploitative nature of cheap, transactional sex. The world is looking for hope and help. The church must offer the better sexual narrative that the Bible teaches—one that is honest about the dangers of sexual immorality and is equipped to care deeply for the souls affected by sexual brokenness. An epidemic as widespread as our current state of sexual brokenness cannot be healed overnight, but the church can be a place to both teach a biblical sexual ethic and to experience healing from sexual pain. When we use our bodies not to exploit others but to promote their welfare, we foster a culture of abundant life and human flourishing.

To learn more about how you, your family, and your Missional Community group can better engage on this topic, refer to the Next Steps section at the end of this document.

²⁶ Christopher West, *Theology of the Body for Beginners*, 13.

²⁷ St. Teresa of Calcutta, “Mother Teresa’s 1994 Message to the Supreme Court on Abortion,” *Public Discourse*, September 5, 2016, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2016/09/17771/>.

²⁸ Wanda Deifelt, “For God is also the God of Bodies: Embodiment and Sexuality in Martin Luther’s Theology,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, February 1, 2007, <https://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/529>.

The Unborn

What God Says

The Lord fearfully and wonderfully knit each one of us together in our mothers' wombs, and we were known by Him from the beginning. His affections for us were present from the moment of conception—even before that, in fact. Before He even started to give shape to our unformed substance, He knew everything about us: everything we would ever do, say, think, and long for. He loves us more than we could ever love ourselves, and we are always on His mind (Psalm 139:13-18). He gives offspring to us not out of anger or wrath but love and a desire to bless us. As Christians, we believe that “children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward” (Psalm 127:3 ESV), and not as abortion-choice advocate Lawrence Lader once wrote, “the ultimate punishment of sex.”²⁹

What Sin Has Done

Sin keeps us from seeing one another as representatives of God, co-rulers in the world, and creatures capable of having a relationship with Him. When we do not believe that others inherently possess the same value and worth, their dignity is easily lost. This is how we justify abortion. It is just a clump of cells. This “it” is not a person. I am the one in charge. We convince ourselves that abortion is just a routine medical procedure, as easy and morally uncomplicated as removing a pair of tonsils. As long as abortion-choice is about “women’s rights” and the impersonal “fetus,” we can justify the act in pursuit of our own happiness and comfort. In a 1977 article, black civil rights activist Jesse Jackson described how just how important language and rhetoric are to creating and sustaining the dehumanization that makes abortion acceptable. Though Jackson is a controversial historical figure (and later become a pro-choice advocate), the excerpt below remains a poignant illustration of the power of words:

Another area that concerns me greatly, namely because I know how it has been used with regard to

race, is the psycholinguistics involved in this whole issue of abortion. If something can be dehumanized through the rhetoric used to describe it, then the major battle has been won ... That is why the Constitution called us three-fifths human and then whites further dehumanized us by calling us “niggers.” It was part of the dehumanizing process. The first step was to distort the image of us as human beings in order to justify that which they wanted to do and not even feel like they had done anything wrong. Those advocates of taking life prior to birth do not call it killing or murder; they call it abortion. They further never talk about aborting a baby because that would imply something human. Rather they talk about aborting the fetus. Fetus sounds less than human and therefore can be justified.³⁰

This same line of reasoning was used by Hitler to exterminate the Jews, southern plantation owners to support and maintain the institution of slavery, and white South Africans to oppress black South Africans during apartheid. Dehumanization always delivers deep suffering and pain, and as long as we dehumanize the unborn, we deface the image of God in both the unborn and their mothers. “In every society until Jesus returns, there will be an attempt to devalue certain persons because they lack utility, or because they’re an inconvenience, or they are seen as a threat,” says Pastor Halim Suh. “But Jesus makes it clear that the baseline assumption in His kingdom is that every person—from conception to their final breath—has intrinsic value, dignity, and worth.”³¹ Believing Christians must never forget that every human life, no matter how small or weak, is precious in God’s eyes, bears His image, is perfectly formed by His mighty hands, and just like each one of us, will keep on living forever.

What We Should Do

Secular society approaches the fight for human dignity and human rights from a place of fear and lack. We often see and understand rights and liberties through a self-centered lens. When our flourishing is threatened, we clamor to secure our own security and

²⁹ Lawrence Lader, *Abortion II: Making the Revolution* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1973), viii.

³⁰ Jesse Jackson, “How we respect life is the over-riding moral issue,” No Violence Period: New Perspectives on Abortion posting article from Right to Life News, January 1977,

<http://groups.csail.mit.edu/mac/users/rauch/nvp/consistent/jackson.html>.

³¹ Halim Suh, “Changing Our Anger, Matthew 5:21-22,” January 27, 2019, The Austin Stone Community Church, Austin, TX, sermon, <https://austinstone.org/sermons>.

freedoms first, even when they come at the expense of those around us. But God is generous with His dignity, love, and care for all of humanity, so we should be, too. The good of our neighbor must always be more important than our own good (2 Corinthians 10:24). Christians must stand up for the unborn's right to life, and Christians must love women and care for their plight. Christians must pray for social change, and Christians must catalyze social change. Christians must be a part of the progress toward restoration by considering the human rights of the unborn, and we must support legislative efforts that embody a holistic, pro-life ethic.

The pro-life position has been criticized for only caring about the baby before they are born; after they are born, they are on their own. While this is not always a founded accusation, it is one we must listen to. We must evaluate blind spots on the church's part, repent where there is sin, and change. The pro-life view cannot be limited to caring only for the unborn, because abortion never happens in isolation. Myriad factors including financial instability, poverty, systemic injustice, lack of familial support, and abuse contribute to the decision to end the life of a baby. As image-bearers called to represent and rule like God, we must be a part of the fight to end these injustices. It is critical that we "seek the welfare of the city where I [God] have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jeremiah 29:7 ESV). Our God is the God of flourishing. He "secures justice for the poor" and "upholds the cause of the needy" (Deuteronomy 10:18, Psalm 140:12 NIV). Similarly, we are to speak up for the voiceless and the needy—to advocate on behalf of the unborn when death descends upon them (Proverbs 31:8-9). Just as our Savior humbled Himself and surrendered His life for us, so too are we to lay down our lives in service to others (Philippians 2:5-8; John 13:12-17). We can do this by taking steps of engagement individually, within community, as local churches, and politically in the public square.

You can identify more potential ways to engage by referring to the Next Steps section at the end of this document.

Women

What God Says

We serve a God who not only created women but desires their flourishing more than anyone on earth. He is unequivocally, unashamedly, wholeheartedly pro-woman. He never stops thinking about women (Psalm 139:17), understands their deepest hopes and fears (Psalm 144:3), died for them (John 3:16), and adopts them as His own daughters (2 Corinthians 6:18). He loves every single woman: the elderly widow, the young mother, and the unborn baby girl. In God's eyes, women are so much more than "supplemental" to men. They were designed as equal, complementary companions meant to co-labor for God's glory together. After creating man, God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18 ESV). To better understand God's heart for women, we will examine this verse further.

"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will
make him a helper fit for him."

It Is Not Good—This is the first time in the creation narrative that God said something was not good. He drew attention to a deficiency that Adam himself had not felt, because this happened before the fall. God defined what was good and what was not good, and God said that it was not good for Adam to be alone. This is not only a verse about marriage. After all, Jesus and Paul were single, and Paul said being single is a good thing. Rather, this verse teaches that God created the world to need both men and women to display who He is. God saw that for His creation to go from "good" to "very good," Adam needed help.

Helper—Before God created Eve, He said, "I will make a helper fit for him." Helper is the Hebrew word *ezer*, meaning "one who supplies strength in the area that is lacking in 'the helped.'"³² In other words, the helper fills up what is lacking. Helper is not a derogatory word, and women—the world's helpers—are not second-class citizens. In fact, the word *ezer* is even used in Scripture to describe God Himself.³³ God sees a people lacking in salvation, protection, provision,

³² T. Desmond Alexander, PhD, study note on Genesis 2:18, in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 54.

³³ Psalm 33:20: "Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and our shield."

and the ability to do good, and He helps.³⁴ When we choose to ignore the help we need, we miss out on God's full blessing. God created men to need women's help and for that relationship to show the world who He is.

Fit For—The word fit means “according to the opposite of him.”³⁵ God formed a creature who is like the man, and also not like the man. The male and female differences are intended to complement one another, to “combin[e] in such a way as to enhance or emphasize the qualities of each other or another.”³⁶ Believers understand that women are not just nice helpers, but that women are, by design, absolutely necessary for our world to flourish.

The Bible is profoundly countercultural in its view of women, particularly in the ministry of Jesus and in the early church. Consider how Jesus treated women. He healed them. He spoke with them. He let them touch Him (which would have been unthinkable for a Rabbi in that time). The Gospels are filled with stories of Jesus' interactions with women, many of whom had been marginalized by society (Matthew 9:18-20, Luke 7:36-50). Luke tells us that women not only followed Jesus, but they also helped support His ministry (Luke 8:1-3). Additionally, women were the first ones to discover the empty tomb (Mark 16:1-8). It should come as no surprise then to see women as full participants in the church from the beginning of its existence. In Acts, women were often among the first converts as the gospel spread throughout the Greco-Roman world. Luke identifies women in certain key stages of his narrative as he shows the gospel moving from Jerusalem into Samaria, Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, and Corinth (Acts 5:14; 8:12; 16:13-15; 17:4, 34; 18:2). Paul too emphasized women in his writings and ministry, praising the women who labored alongside him in ministry (Philippians 4:2-3). He and the early Christians understood that the gospel offers a radically different view of the world, which included a radically different view of women who were made in God's image, loved and honored by Jesus, and now

equally indwelt by the Holy Spirit to carry out the work of the gospel in the world.³⁷

What Sin Has Done

Women, particularly minority women and poor women, have been pushed to America's margins for centuries. It is a difficult truth but a sobering one. For most of our history, men have controlled access to wealth creation (via education), wealth growth (via real estate ownership), and the levers of the political system (via voting rights). With these powerful tools in hand, men built a society designed to cater to their needs, wants, and desires. Abortion is yet another mechanism through which women have been harmed and marginalized. It was two men—Lawrence Lader and Bernard Nathanson—who co-founded the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL) in 1969 and forced abortion onto the center stage of the feminist movement in the mid-twentieth century. Through deceit and manipulation, they sought to convince leaders of the movement that abortion was the only way women could ever realize their goals, including equality in the workplace and at home. “[I]f we're going to move abortion out of the books and into the streets,” Lader once told Nathanson, “we're going to have to recruit the feminists.”³⁸ Sadly, many prominent female activists, including National Organization for Women (NOW) founder Betty Friedan, adopted Lader's views. At the first NOW conference in 1967, Friedan and others rewrote the organization's Bill of Rights to include “reproductive rights,” including abortion.³⁹ Today, both men and women are found among the ranks of the pro-choice movement, taken captive by the false assurances abortion offers.

Every single abortion leaves victims in its wake. Each takes the life of an unborn child and leaves emotional, mental, and spiritual scars on the woman involved. A 2017 study of women who had contacted crisis pregnancy centers after having abortions found that more than two-thirds of post-abortive women felt that the abortion decision “was one of the hardest decisions of their lives,” and a third reported feeling

³⁴ Deuteronomy 33:26-29; Psalm 33:20-22; Psalm 121:1-8

³⁵ “How was the woman a helper suitable for the man (Genesis 2:18)?” Got Questions, accessed December 23, 2019, <https://www.gotquestions.org/woman-helper-suitable.html>.

³⁶ “Complementary,” Lexico, accessed December 23, 2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/complementary>.

³⁷ This paragraph is an excerpt from The Austin Stone's Complementarianism Paper, which is linked above.

³⁸ Bernard Nathanson, *Aborting America*, (Toronto, Ontario: Life Cycle Books, 1979), 32.

³⁹ Browder, Sue Ellen. *Subverted: How I Helped the Sexual Revolution Hijack the Women's Movement* (San Francisco: Ignatious Press, 2015).

“emotionally connected to the fetus before the abortion.” Post-abortive women were also five times more likely to have visited a mental health professional or counselor and nearly eight times more likely to use prescription drugs for psychological health than they had prior to their first abortion.⁴⁰ A 2011 study in *The British Journal of Psychiatry* discovered that post-abortive women also had significantly increased risks of anxiety disorders, depression, alcohol use/abuse, marijuana use/abuse, and suicidal behaviors.⁴¹

The pro-choice argument tells the woman that she has more right to her life and freedom than the child she is carrying in her womb. It promises her freedom from guilt and shame, and liberation from men and oppressive social structures. Abortion-choice advocates may believe they are serving women well, but the opposite is true. Abortion allows men to satisfy their sexual desires without making any kind of commitment to the women involved. It absolves them of the responsibilities associated with marriage and fatherhood and reduces the female body to an exploitable commodity for the purpose of male pleasure. Rather than freeing women, it places a crushing burden upon those who desire to keep their unborn children. As long as abortion is made freely available, society will encourage women to take the “easy” way out—the path that frees the community from any obligation to provide or care for her. As attorney Erika Bachiochi observes,

Abortion expects nothing more of men, nothing more of medicine, and nothing more of society at large ... [I]f we are poor, overwhelmed or abandoned by the child’s father, or if medical expenses would be too great for us or for our child, social “responsibility” requires us to rid ourselves of our own offspring ... Men can have sex and walk away, and with the right Roe gave them, they increasingly do.⁴²

⁴⁰ Kaitlyn Boswell, Priscilla K. Coleman, Katrina Etzkorn, Rachel Turnwald, “Women Who Suffered Emotionally from Abortion: A Qualitative Synthesis of Their Experiences,” *Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons* 22, no. 4 (2017), <https://www.jpands.org/vol22no4/coleman.pdf>.

⁴¹ Priscilla K. Coleman, “Abortion and mental health: quantitative synthesis and analysis of research published 1995-2009,” *British Journal of Psychiatry* 199, no. 3 (2011), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.110.077230>.

The sad reality is that abortion-choice disproportionately benefits men at the expense of women. According to author Sue Ellen Browder, terminating unwanted pregnancies allows men to “escape paternity suits, years of child support, social embarrassment, and the wrath of betrayed wives.”⁴³ It is bondage masked as liberation, oppression disguised as freedom.

What We Should Do

We should be honest about how most women (even Christian women) are entering this conversation. Many are confused, hurt, angry, or tempted to take the world’s path to securing perceived equality. Abortion promises to solve complicated problems with a simple solution, but abortion will never fix the root problems that bring women to the place of making this decision. Abortion cannot redeem the abusive relationship, the broken sexual ethic, or the complex injustices in the workplace. Abortion cannot provide the financial and material assistance women need to carry and raise their children well. Despite its guarantees, abortion is wholly incapable of addressing the fear, loneliness, and desperation faced by women willing to take the lives of their children. “[W]omen are being lied to, and their consciences are under assault under the accusations of the Deceiver both leading up to and following an abortion,” writes author Russell Moore. “No one is more pro-choice than Satan during the drive to the abortion clinic, and nobody is more pro-life than Satan during the drive home.”⁴⁴

Our pro-life, pro-woman God offers infinitely more to His daughters. He provides light in the midst of darkness, forgiveness in the deepest depths of sin, and hope in seas of despair. Though He made both men and women in His likeness, He intentionally made them distinct in design. When He knit girls together inside their mothers, He gave them different reproductive organs along with brains unique in

⁴² Erika Bachiochi, “I’m a feminist and I’m against abortion,” CNN, January 22, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/01/22/opinion/bachiochi-abortion-roe-v-wade/index.html>.

⁴³ Sue Ellen Browder, *Subverted*, 93.

⁴⁴ Russell Moore, “Does the Pro-Life Movement Want to Punish Women?” *RussellMoore.com*, March 31, 2016, <https://www.russellmoore.com/2016/03/31/does-the-pro-life-movement-want-to-punish-women/>.

structure, chemistry, processing, and activity. He created them to complement the functions of the male body, to work with them to populate His world, bring order to it, and increase flourishing for all. Women are not second-class citizens in the kingdom of God. Women are equally honored, celebrated, and loved in Christ (Galatians 3:28). This is what it looks like to be pro-woman. To be pro-life is to be pro-woman, seeing women as equal to men in God's likeness and aligning our definitions of their dignity, identity, and purpose with His. God's high view of women is why the pro-life dialogue must include a conversation about unborn babies and the women who are carrying them. As the church, we must invite pregnant women into our communities and lavishly show them the love and support they need to thrive as mothers. We must remind them that when we submit our lives to Christ, He provides us with a peace that surpasses understanding, comfort beyond compare, and the deepest rest we can imagine, even in the midst of incredible challenges (Philippians 4:7, 2 Corinthians 1:3, Matthew 11:28).

While the world tells us that we must decide whether we are for women or against women in the abortion debate, Christians can confidently say that our God is devoted to the flourishing of both women and their unborn children. God is a passionate defender of the vulnerable wherever they are found. He is for the poor, pregnant woman who does not know how she will possibly feed another child. He is for the teenage girl holding a positive pregnancy test, crushed by anxiety about the future. He is for the post-abortive woman overwhelmed with shame and grief because of her decision. He is for the defenseless unborn child He is knitting together inside her mother's womb. This is the kind of heart we must beg God for. These are the people for whom we must lay down our lives for God's glory and their flourishing.

If you are looking to grow in sacrificial living, refer to the Next Steps section at the end of this document.

Those with Disabilities

What God Says

God tells us that we matter. It is not dependent on meeting certain qualifications. We matter because He has written dignity into our very personhood. He

created us to matter. He does not require us to achieve dignity; rather, He gifts humanity to us. Sin changed human hearts and ushered in evil, sickness, and disease, but it did not change the fact that humans are made in the image of God. We know this, because even after the fall when God tells the Israelites that murder is wrong, He says that it is wrong because "God made man in his own image" (Genesis 9:6 ESV). All men and women were created in God's image before sin entered the world, and all men and women remain image-bearers today.

Although the disciples were likely familiar with the concept of the *imago Dei*, they too had questions about sin, righteousness, and people with disabilities. In John 9, they ask Jesus if one man's blindness from birth was a direct result of someone's sin, and Jesus provides a pointed response: "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3 ESV). Though this answer may not seem satisfactory at first, Jesus is calling His disciples to see the world through a new gospel lens. God's agency, power, and kindness work together to use all things—sin, suffering, disease, and disability included—to display His glory to a broken world. Through this story, Jesus teaches His disciples two important truths:

1. Not all difficult experiences are a product of personal sin.
2. God makes meaning and purpose out of those things by working them together for good and displaying His glory through them for all the world to see.

At times, God does display His glory through healing disability. In fact, Jesus cures the blindness of the man in John 9 by making mud with His own spit, rubbing it on the blind man's eyes, and having him wash them clean (John 9:4-7). Throughout Jesus' ministry, He healed sickness and disease, woke people up from death, and performed miracles of provision. At other times, however, God displays His glory through not healing disability. The apostle Paul, a man believed to have suffered from poor eyesight, recorded his thoughts on suffering in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18: "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen

but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (ESV). Paul begged God to take it away, but God would not. As a result, Paul relied even more on the Lord for his strength (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Though from our perspective God may seem to love some people with disabilities more than others, we know that “for those who love God all things work together for good” (Romans 8:28 ESV). We worship a God who promises never to leave us or forsake us, a powerful King with love so strong that nothing—not even disability—will come between Him and His children (Hebrews 13:5; Romans 8:37-39).

Our physical bodies matter here on earth and forever in eternity. We will still have our hands, our feet, and our eyes in heaven, but they will all be renewed and transformed into their glorified states. Once we are there, we will no longer be riddled by pain, weakness, or sin. Jesus gave us a glimpse of this redemptive reality when He was resurrected in the same body that once hung on the cross. His glorified body was not a ghostly mirage but a solid, human frame. After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples, who thought they were seeing a spirit. He held out His hands and said to them, “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39 ESV). The Christian’s prayer for physical and mental healing will always be answered with “yes” or “not yet.” God promises this kind of healing for every believer; some will experience it on this side of heaven, while others will experience it when they meet our Savior face-to-face. For now, God has asked us to put our faith in the work of the suffering servant, Jesus Christ, and to trust that He infuses meaning into suffering, making it a pathway to life, freedom, and joy.

What Sin Has Done

American secular society has made the material world supreme. Our present happiness, freedom, and comfort is the standard for the “good life.” Because of this view, Tim Keller notes:

⁴⁵ Timothy Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2016), 16-17.

⁴⁶ Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *The Gift of Pain* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 12.

... the meaning of life is to have the freedom to choose the life that makes you happiest. However, in that view of things, suffering can have no meaningful part. It is a complete interruption of your life story—it cannot be a meaningful part of the story. In this approach to life, suffering should be avoided at almost any cost, or minimized to the greatest degree possible.⁴⁵

Western culture has made individual happiness and comfort the ultimate purpose in life. Dr. Paul Brand writes in his book *The Gift of Pain*, “... it is because the meaning of life in the United States is the pursuit of pleasure and personal freedom that suffering is so traumatic for Americans.”⁴⁶ We have no good category for suffering, and because suffering infringes on our pursuit of happiness and personal freedom, our only real answer is to avoid suffering at all costs. In our paradigm, the suffering life does not matter.

One of the costs our society has been willing to pay to maintain this position is the life of the person with disabilities. The pro-choice agenda proposes that a woman should have absolute rights, not only over when she chooses to have a family, but over what her family will look like. If she does not want a child with disabilities, she has every right to abort. Selective abortion is discriminatory in nature, but the argument is shrouded in bodily autonomy, rights to privacy, and a claim to love someone too much to bring them into this world to suffer.

Marsha Saxton, the Director of Research and Training at World Institute on Disability (WID) and a lecturer in Disability Studies at The University of California Berkeley,⁴⁷ writes that many people view those with disabilities as “frightening or inhuman” due to a “lack of meaningful interaction” with them.⁴⁸ She argues that reality “reveals how isolated from the broader society and even progressive feminists are from people with disabilities,” leading to the “belief that

⁴⁷ “Disability Studies,” The Other and Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley, The University of California Berkeley, accessed October 2020, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/marsha-saxton>.

⁴⁸ Marsha Saxton, “Disability Rights and Selective Abortion,” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard Davis (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2013), 90.

the quality and enjoyment of life for disabled people is necessarily inferior, that raising a child with a disability is a wholly undesirable experience, that selective abortion will save mothers from the burdens of raising disabled children, and that ultimately we as a society have the means and the right to decide who is better off not being born.”⁴⁹ Ruth Hubbard, the first woman to ever be awarded tenure in Harvard University’s biology department,⁵⁰ astutely captured the spirit of the age in an article about prenatal screenings for disabilities: “No one these days openly suggests that certain kinds of people be killed, they just should not be born.”⁵¹

The list of “undesirable” traits is growing longer as parents, doctors, and psychologists decide what life is worth living. Uninhibited bodily autonomy rights paired with permissible selective breeding is creating a modernized version of eugenics where one person has all the power to decide if another person’s life is worth living. When we as a society say that it is morally correct to end the life of another person based on their disability, we are communicating that a person who lives with that disability is somehow less than. Even Saxton, a staunch pro-choice activist, struggles to reconcile her position on abortion with her desire to see those with disabilities flourish:

In the context of screening tests, those of us with screenable conditions represent living adult fetuses that didn’t get aborted. We are the constituency of the potentially aborted. Our resistance to the systematic abortion of ‘our young’ is a challenge to the ‘nonhumanness,’ the nonstatus of the fetus. This issue of the humanness of the fetus is a tricky one for those of us who identify as both pro-choice feminists and as disability rights activists.⁵²

⁴⁹ Marsha Saxton, “Disability Rights and Selective Abortion,” 88.

⁵⁰ Marcy Darnovsky, “Remembering Ruth Hubbard,” *The Center for Genetics and Society*, September 8, 2016, <https://www.geneticsandsociety.org/biopolitical-times/remembering-ruth-hubbard>.

⁵¹ Ruth Hubbard, “Abortion and Disability: Who Should and should Not Inhabit the World?” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard Davis (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2013), 84.

What We Should Do

The pro-choice agenda argues that it is more loving to prevent a person with a disability from a life of suffering. However, this love is counterfeit to its core. This love is no love at all, for true love is “patient and kind,” “does not insist on its own way,” and “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7 ESV).

It is true that people who live with disability face personal limitations. But more than that, they face enormous barriers of discrimination and societal disenfranchisement. The best way to show a person with disability love is not to end their life, but to fight to end the discrimination and disenfranchisement that they face. Love—real, enduring, unshakeable love—puts the interests of others above its own. Jesus demonstrated love by laying down His own life for others. John 15:13 says, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” Demonstrating true love demands self-sacrifice. In their article arguing against abortions based on fetal abnormalities, Pasquale Toscano and Alexis Doyle write:

Legalized abortion is not the problem to be solved ... [W]hat needs to be challenged is the notion that a physical or developmental disability is a tragedy. To reassure parents that they can, in fact, raise children with significant impairments, American society must do more to emphasize that disability is a normal part of human diversity—and must provide more cultural, social, and emotional support for the families that experience it.⁵³

Disability is a normal part of diversity. As Christians, we must remember that God’s design for diversity is not just about ethnicity. He says every human has the ability to reflect His image in a unique way—including those with disabilities. Animated by a gospel of sacrificial love and led by the power of the

⁵² Marsha Saxton, “Disability Rights and Selective Abortion,” 94.

⁵³ Alexis Doyle and Pasquale Toscano, “Legal Abortion Isn’t the Problem to Be Solved,” *The Atlantic*, June 19, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/06/selective-abortion-bans-treat-disability-tragedy/592000/>.

Holy Spirit, Christians are uniquely situated to offer programs for people with disabilities and to recognize, empower, and honor the lives of those who live with debilitating conditions. Though there are a million ways to go about affirming the image of God in these brothers and sisters, we can begin by reevaluating the language we use, educating ourselves on the diseases and challenges they face, making seats for them at our tables of influence, and building the support systems they deserve to flourish on the peaks as well as in life's darkest valleys. It is only when we are in relationships with these people that we can start to see how God is radically working within them. In the parable of the great feast in Luke 14, Jesus tells His disciples that when they throw a party or host a dinner, they should not invite those who could show them gratitude or pay them back or benefit them in some way. Rather, Jesus says, "When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:13-14 ESV). God has shown us, through the life and death of His Son, what a culture of love looks like. It is up to His children to bring that culture of love to life, for the flourishing of us all.

To learn more or get more involved, refer to the Next Steps section at the end of this document.

The Poor and the Marginalized

What God Says

God's holy passion for justice and restoration saturates the pages of the Bible. In the Old Testament, He called His people to pursue shalom—a holistic peace characterized by right relationships with God, creation, others, and ourselves—and fight oppression with vigor equal to His own. In Psalm 35, David declares that God is a God who rescues the poor and marginalized from their oppressors, those who rob them of their possessions (35:10). The Lord identifies with the poor and the marginalized personally, going so far as to say that those who dishonor the poor dishonor Him, while those who are kind to them bring Him glory (Proverbs 14:31). In fact,

He says that pursuing justice on behalf of marginalized people is what it means to know Him (Jeremiah 22:16). Charity, mercy, and justice are so important to Him that He says those who see the poor and marginalized and choose to do nothing will receive the same silence when they call out to Him for help (Proverbs 21:13). This mandate to serve the poor and persecuted was perfectly met by Jesus, the God-man who "did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:26-28 NIV). In the book of Matthew, He tells His followers to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them (Matthew 5:43 ESV). Jesus boldly declares that He came not only to serve but to intimately identify with society's forgotten, hurting, and hopeless, going so far as to say that "... whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40 NIV).

What Sin Has Done

Unconditionally loving those who are different than us is fundamentally at odds with the natural disposition of our hearts. Humans are prone to retaliate against those who wish them harm and disregard those who have nothing beneficial to provide. While encouraging vulnerable mothers to abort may seem like a loving thing to do, few things could be more harmful to her or her child. While most pro-choice advocates use "compassionate" language today, America's earliest champions of abortion promoted the procedure in low-income communities to the detriment of their residents. In her 1922 book, *The Pivot of Civilization*, Margaret Sanger, the founder of the American Birth Control League (ABCL), Planned Parenthood's predecessor, wrote that aid to poor pregnant women encouraged them to "increase and multiply" and forced the "healthier and more normal sections of the world to shoulder the burden of unthinking and indiscriminate fecundity of others." In fact, providing financial support to poor women desiring more children would just result in "a dead weight of human waste ... Instead of decreasing and aiming to eliminate the stocks that are most detrimental to the future of the race and the world," she professed, "it tends to render them to a menacing degree dominant."⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Margaret Sanger, *The Pivot of Civilization*, 1922, accessed via Project Gutenberg, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1689/1689-h/1689-h.htm>.

As is evident in Sanger's language, the poor were not the only marginalized group targeted by America's early abortion proponents, and historically, those who sought to attack either the poor or racial minorities through the expansion of abortion often chose to attack both groups simultaneously or with similar tactics. Dr. Lothrop Stoddard, one of the first co-directors of the ABCL, was a proud white supremacist and advisor to the Ku Klux Klan. In his 1920 book *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy*, he railed against the "inferior races" and the threat they posed to the American way of life.⁵⁵ He made it evident that he would bring the resources of the ABCL to bear against such "invaders," the most dangerous of which, he believed, were black and brown people. Because of their "animal vitality" and "intense emotionalism," they were "the quickest of breeders."⁵⁶ He implored white people across the country to appreciate "the supreme importance of race-values" and create social programs and policies that protected the power of the white race.⁵⁷ Alan Guttmacher, the second president of Planned Parenthood, echoed Stoddard's sentiment at a Harvard Law School Forum in December 1967. "It [abortion on demand] would further reduce the U.S. birth rate," he asserted. "... [T]his, some of us would think, would be a significant advantage in a population that is already growing too fast."⁵⁸

Racial minorities are among some of the most marginalized people in our society, as racist attitudes continue to pervade even the highest levels of governments, religious organizations, and social institutions. For many who continue to harbor these beliefs, birth control and abortion remain the answer to reducing or eliminating "unfit" or "dependent" populations. In a 1980 piece published by the *San Diego Union*, Edward Allred, one of the most prominent abortionists in California at the time, declared he committed abortions to reduce the burden of poor minorities on society:

I would do free abortions in Mexico to stem the new influx of Hispanic immigrants. Their lack of respect for democracy and social order is frightening... When a sullen black woman of 17 or 18 can decide to have a baby and get welfare and food stamps and become a burden to all of us, it's time to stop. In parts of South Los Angeles, having babies for welfare is the only industry these people have.⁵⁹

While few openly suggest the extermination of racial minorities, these destructive stereotypes can still infect our hearts and shape our thoughts and attitudes toward others. Though calls for "reducing inner city problems" like poverty and teenage pregnancy can come from a place of true affection for the poor and marginalized, they often originate from the implicit belief that racial minorities and those in poverty are responsible for our society's greatest ills. If we come to believe our communities or country are "better off" without certain kinds of people, the horrifying act of abortion becomes a "necessary evil" or form of "problem mitigation."

Over the last several decades, politicians and community leaders have used "compassionate abortion" rhetoric to hide their true motives: to lower crime, reduce government dependency, and "perfect" the human race. However, millions of pro-choice Americans really do believe abortion spares human beings from life's greatest difficulties and suffering. Though well-intentioned, their position allows abortionists to snuff the light of life out before it ever has a chance to brighten the world outside the womb. It robs communities of future scientists, poets, theologians, athletes, engineers, and activists. We convince ourselves that we cannot only see into the future, but that we can determine whether others are worthy of experiencing it. When we argue that babies born into poverty are better off dead, we are discounting the gifts the Lord has given them and the propensity for systems and circumstances to

⁵⁵ Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), 303-304.

⁵⁶ Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color*, 90.

⁵⁷ Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color*, 306-307.

⁵⁸ Alan Guttmacher, "Abortion: The Issues," December 4, 1967, Harvard Law School Forum, panel discussion, <https://orgs.law.harvard.edu/hlsforum/multimedia/>.

⁵⁹ "Doctor's Abortion Business is Lucrative," *San Diego Union*, October 12, 1980, reprinted via Speak Up for Those Who Have No Voice blog, September 2015, <http://speakupforthosewhohavenovoice.blogspot.com/2015/09/dr-allreds-article-in-october-12-1980.html>.

improve. When poor people are reduced to nothing more than their economic value, they are profoundly dehumanized, and determining whether to provide them with the assistance they need becomes not a matter of human flourishing but “cost-benefit analysis.” Once a certain population—whether a racial or ethnic minority group, poor people, those with disabilities, or the unborn—are stripped of their humanity, atrocities such as mass sterilization, segregation, and genocide become “rational.”

For many low-income women, the “choice” to abort is often anything but a “choice.” Without robust social networks, regular employment, or sufficient savings, news of a pregnancy is not a moment of delight but of horror. In households already struggling to make ends meet, new babies may result in severed relationships and even financial ruin. While some would-be parents do pursue abortion out of selfishness, countless low-income women do so out of sheer desperation. Susan B. Anthony, one of the most prominent figures of the first-wave feminist movement, describes this sobering reality:

To my certain knowledge this crime [abortion] is not confined to those whose love of ease, amusement and fashionable life leads them to desire immunity from the cares of children: but is practiced by those whose inmost souls revolt from the dreadful deed, and in whose hearts the maternal feeling is pure and undying.⁶⁰

Frederica Mathewes-Green, author of a 1996 article in *The Washington Post* titled “Seeking Abortion’s Middle Ground,” elaborated on Anthony’s position. “There is a tremendous sadness and loneliness in the cry ‘A woman’s right to choose,’” she wrote. “No one wants an abortion as she wants an ice-cream cone or a Porsche. She wants an abortion as an animal, caught in a trap, wants to gnaw off its own leg.”⁶¹

Abortion does not serve poor or marginalized women. It robs them of their social, economic, and

political power, and it continues to fund abortion providers. Instead of eliminating poverty and marginalization, abortion simply eliminates the poor and the marginalized themselves. Abortion is the easy “solution.” It destroys the vulnerable person so that the harder tasks of pursuing true equality and relationships with the poor and marginalized in our society become unnecessary.

What We Should Do

Aborting the unborn poor is a “fundamental confusion between the concept of ‘finding a solution’ and the concept of ‘eliminating a problem,’” writes author Francis Beckwith.⁶² We would never suggest killing poor people to rid the world of poverty. Instead, we work harder to solve the problems that make their lives more difficult. While financial hardship, abuse, and violence are all affronts to dignity, they cannot strip their victims of their worth or value. Abortion is neither compassionate nor loving. It robs those born into poverty of their personhood and perpetuates the idea that we have the right to determine whose lives are worth living.

Scripture implores Christians to meet the marginalized where they are. Mercy ministry and charity are not optional for the believer; God expects these rhythms will become a foundational part of the Christian’s life. He does not just love the poor and marginalized—He died for them, advocates on their behalf, and comes against anyone who exploits (or is even indifferent towards) them. If our lives truly belong to Christ, we are to ask Him for hearts that look like His and practice these disciplines in our daily lives. Christians must continue to lead the way by defending every unborn baby’s right to life while building a world that welcomes and supports them well. When poverty and hardship are particularly acute, believers must live out their Christ-centered identity by self-sacrificing to provide financial, emotional, social, and spiritual support to hurting families and their children. We can do this in three distinct ways:

⁶⁰ Susan B. Anthony, article in *The Revolution*, July 8, 1869, accessed via National Susan B. Anthony Museum and House, <https://susanbanthonyhouse.org/blog/the-revolution-july-8-1869/>.

⁶¹ Frederica Mathewes-Green, “Seeking Abortion’s Middle Ground,” *The Washington Post*, July 28, 1996, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1996/07/28/seeking->

[abortions-middle-ground/fo4dd815-967d-4d8e-a28f-6e1b73ea6d1f/?utm_term=.ocaf39b2ba6c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1996/07/28/seeking-abortions-middle-ground/fo4dd815-967d-4d8e-a28f-6e1b73ea6d1f/?utm_term=.ocaf39b2ba6c).

⁶² Francis J. Beckwith, *Defending Life: a Moral and Legal Case against Abortion Choice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 97.

1. We can show compassion toward and seek the flourishing of the poor, marginalized, and broken among us through individual and community relationships.
2. We can advocate for laws that uproot the systems that lead families to believe ending a child's life in the womb is more loving than what awaits the child outside of it.
3. We can remember that our sovereign God often uses suffering and hardship to draw people to Himself. Though God may not completely alleviate a family's hardship, we can tangibly show them He has a purpose in trials and has not left them alone.

Obedience begins by taking just one step toward Jesus and those He made in His image. To learn more, refer to the Next Steps section at the end of this document.

CONCLUSION

In his commentary on Psalm 139, pastor and theologian Charles Spurgeon reflected on what it means to be made in God's image. "We too seldom remember our creation, and all the skill and kindness bestowed upon our frame ..." he writes. "We cannot begin too soon to bless our Maker, who began so soon to bless us: even in the act of creation he created reasons for our praising his name ... That God should think upon him is the believer's treasure and pleasure."⁶³ God did not create us out of boredom or in a spirit of indifference. He formed us with incredible care, thoughtfully placing every hair on our heads and every freckle on our skin. His love for us is greater than we could ever imagine, infinitely stronger than any earthly parent could ever have for their son or daughter. Every man, woman, and child is precious in His sight—so precious, in fact, that He sent His one and only Son to die for them so that they could spend eternity with Him. By placing His own image upon us, He allows us to share in His dignity, His personhood, and His immeasurable value.

Satan loathes the imago Dei with every fiber of his being. Every person is a portrait of the God he hates, a

reminder that his reign is limited and his defeat is inevitable. He is wholly devoted to ensuring that anything capable of bringing God glory—healthy families, flourishing marriages, men, women, and children—is torn down and destroyed. Abortion is one of his favorite tools to this end. It strips people of their humanity, incentivizes exploitation, and enables oppressors. It is a direct assault on God and the people He made. As followers of Jesus, we are invited to participate in the Lord's redemptive plan. He gives us the opportunity to labor alongside Him as He pushes back darkness, executes justice, and brings life to the lost and healing to the wounded and weary. As Christ's earthly ambassadors, believers must serve and defend the voiceless and marginalized in such a way that the unbelieving world cannot help but see God's heart for women and the unborn.

This is no small task. The culture of death that abortion perpetuates is pervasive and deeply entrenched. As Christians, we must remember that our ultimate fight is not against pro-choice advocates or abortionists but "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12 ESV). Our enemy is a powerful master of manipulation and expert in deception. Though we are unable to take him on alone, the same Holy Spirit that hovered over the waters in Genesis 1 and indwelt the apostles empowers each and every believer today. He alone restores seared consciences, gives healing to wounded hearts, and brings gospel life to dry, weary bones (John 8:12; 10:28). It is only with His help that we are able to push back darkness, end abortion, and repair the damage that has already been done.

The challenges ahead of us can often feel overwhelming. It is easy to find ourselves in a state of inaction, frozen by fear or a crushing burden to solve these issues on our own. But this is not the spirit we have been given, "for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7 ESV). Knowing that He alone has beaten death once and for all, we are freed to join Him in the fight through small acts of obedience, one step at a time (John 16:33). "[W]e labor in light of a kingdom that we have

⁶³ Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2004), 263.

not established and that we cannot build with permanence,” writes author Tyler Wigg-Stevenson. “At best we can steward the time and space that God has allotted us. By grounding our compassion and action within Christ’s invincible church, against which the armies of hell will someday fall, we ensure that we are working in the right direction and for the right reasons.”⁶⁴

To do this, we will need every person, every gift, every ability, every insight of the body of Christ (Romans 12:4-8). For our neighbors to know the love of God, the church must operate as a unified body that is held together by the love of God (John 13:34-35). If we, as the church, ache to live in a world where human dignity is highly regarded, both our bodies and souls matter, the unborn are free from violence, women are celebrated and supported, and discrimination of any sort is crushed, then we must start with our own hearts and minds. We must consider how mercy is a defining feature of our story, and we must seek justice from a posture of mercy. We must love like the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, willing to go out of our way to sacrificially serve those from whom we expect nothing in return (Luke 10:29-37). As Christians, we enter into this delicate space with truth seasoned with love, sharing the same invitation of forgiveness and grace that we ourselves have received in Christ. It is only with this disposition that people of God, bearing gospel truth, gospel hope, and gospel life, can become, as Spurgeon once declared, “... salt in the midst of putrefaction—light in the midst of darkness—life in the midst of death.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Tyler Wigg-Stevenson, *The World Is Not Ours to Save: Finding the Freedom to Do Good*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 203.

⁶⁵ Charles Spurgeon, “The Church—The World’s Hope,” Sermon No. 2952, *The Charles Spurgeon Sermon Collective on The Kingdom*

Collective,
<https://www.thekingdomcollective.com/spurgeon/sermon/2952/>.

NEXT STEPS

1. Learn More

Pursue wisdom and understanding on the topic of abortion in order to engage thoughtfully, truthfully, and graciously.

Many of us are ill-prepared to enter the abortion conversation well as followers of Jesus. We take our cues from cable news or Twitter feeds, lacking the research, relationships, reflection, and biblical literacy to bear a witness characterized by compassion and conviction. Though our social media culture incentivizes short, hasty responses to difficult issues, “an intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge” (Proverbs 18:15 ESV). As Christians, we must humble ourselves and cast aside the viral soundbites to consider new perspectives and new information. When we love knowledge and truly open ourselves to correction, we are better equipped to represent Christ to the world (Proverbs 12:1). Refer to the Appendix at the end of this document for some helpful resources and more information.

2. Lament

Lament over the pain, hurt, suffering, and death that abortion has brought to unborn babies, women, and their families—both around the world and here in Austin.

Since the Roe vs. Wade ruling in 1973, more than 60 million unborn babies have been killed by some form of abortion in America. Post-abortive women are victims of this evil as well, as millions continue to anguish over the destruction of their decisions and are at dramatically higher risk for mental health issues, depression, and suicide. Abortion has been used to exploit women for thousands of years and attacks the image of God placed on every human being He has created. As Christians, we are first called to weep over what sin has done.

3. Pray

Beg God to move in the hearts of women and place people and institutions around them that can provide emotional, mental, and material support.

The church is the hope of the world. It is Christ’s bride, the vehicle through which we believe God will most profoundly change and restore people and communities. Pray that the Lord would help women and families ravaged by abortion find forgiveness and restoration in Him. Ask that He would wrap Himself around them and give them support groups to facilitate healing. Ask that He would give vulnerable pregnant women the strength and courage they need to choose life. While stricter abortion laws might reduce the number of abortions that take place, they cannot reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies. We as the church must embrace these women, love them, care for them, and remind them of their humanity, as well as that of their babies.

Ask God to move in your own heart.

Maybe you are convicted that this issue is not more important to you. Maybe your heart is hard and angry toward women considering abortion or post-abortive women. Maybe you have had an abortion yourself and cannot seem to escape feelings of guilt and shame. Maybe you are simply overwhelmed and do not know where to begin. Regardless of where you fall, pray that God would give you a spirit like that of Jesus—a spirit that loves justice and mercy, a spirit that weeps with the hurting post-abortive woman as well as fights to end the practice of abortion entirely. Ask your Father to grow you in empathy for the expectant mom who feels like she is backed into a corner as

well as passion for seeing laws passed that affirm the dignity of unborn babies. We are all broken beings who fail to see rightly, and we need God to give us the eyes we need to see like Jesus.

4. Give

Give financially to a local pregnancy resource center.

While sharing a pro-life post on social media may be a good way to raise awareness, Matthew 6:21 tells us that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (ESV). Giving to a local pregnancy resource center (PRC) enables them to buy supplies, hire additional staff members, reach more abortion-vulnerable women, and provide quality services to those who walk through their doors.

5. Get Involved

Get Involved Personally

If we are to live out the consistent life ethic fully, our condemnation of abortion must be coupled with our willingness to sacrifice our time, talent, and treasure so that vulnerable and marginalized women have the resources and relationships they need to choose life. “To say, ‘It’s murder, but good luck’ is sinful and disgusting for the church of Jesus Christ,” says pastor Matt Chandler. “No, we roll up our sleeves, we foster, we adopt, we babysit, we come alongside, and we free up capital to support. We send off to junior college, and we watch. It’s difficult, and it’s messy. It feels like it will never end. God honors it, and lives are saved.”⁶⁶ Relationships are hard work, but it is often in these contexts that God moves most radically.

Get Involved Socially

Our city is home to dozens of organizations working to end abortion and create a culture of life. Some provide abortion counseling and parenting classes, while others provide material support to vulnerable mothers and case management services to at-risk families. These nonprofits are always looking for volunteers to serve alongside them, and there is no shortage of opportunities. By becoming a client advocate, teaching a life skills class, managing an organization’s baby boutique, or simply helping with office/clerical duties, we can help create communities that are pro-life for the whole life.

⁶⁶ Matt Chandler, “The Sanctity of Human Life (Prayer 2015),” January 25, 2015, The Village Church, Flower Mound, TX, Sermon and sermon transcript, <https://www.tvcreources.net/resource-library/sermons/the-sanctity-of-human-life-prayer-2015/>.

FURTHER READING

- *Abortion: The Ultimate Exploitation of Women* by Brian Fisher (2017)
- *The Case for Life: Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture* by Scott Klusendorf (2009)
- *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case against Abortion Choice* by Francis J. Beckwith (2008)
- *Dignity Revolution: Reclaiming God's Rich Vision for Humanity* by Daniel Darling (2019)
- *The Gospel & Abortion (The Gospel for Life)* edited by Russell Moore and Andrew T. Walker (2017)
- *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments* by Randy Alcorn (1994)
- *Subverted: How I Helped the Sexual Revolution Hijack the Women's Movement* by Sue Ellen Browder (2015)
- ["Sexual Abuse and Sexual Assault" 2018 ERLC National Conference panel discussion with Gregory Love, Trillia Newbell, Lindsay Nicolet, Kimberlee Norris, and Jen Wilkin](#)
- *Theology of the Body for Beginners: A Basic Introduction to Pope John Paul II's Sexual Revolution* by Christopher West (2009)
- *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* by Timothy Keller (2016)
- ["Why Is the Bible's Teaching About the Body Good News?" article from The Gospel Coalition \(2017\)](#)
- *Women on Life: A Call to Love the Unborn, Unloved, & Neglected* edited by Trillia Newbell (2016)

RELATED TOPICS

Talking to Friends or Family Who Are Thinking About or Have Had an Abortion

Research shows that approximately one in four women will have an abortion by the time they are 45 years old,⁶⁷ meaning there is a significant chance that each of us will interact with a close friend or family member who has previously considered, will one day consider, or is currently considering abortion, or who someone who is dealing with the fallout of one. Christians should lovingly step into the breach, prepared to share with them the God of hope who fills all who trust in Him with joy and peace (Romans 15:13). To care for these vulnerable men and women well, our approach to conversations with them should be threefold:

1. Pursue understanding with grace and compassion. If a loved one is considering abortion, empathize with their fears about the pregnancy. Consider what is driving their fear. Are they concerned about finishing school or getting a job? Are they afraid that having a baby will destroy their romantic relationship or sever important ties with friends? Are they afraid that keeping the baby will tie them to an abusive partner for life? Pro-life advocates can be focused on saving the baby while failing to support the mother. We can start caring for her by seeking to understand what she is experiencing and feeling. Similarly, if the parents are dealing with the grief and sorrow that all too often follows an abortion, we should grieve and lament the loss alongside them (Matthew 5:4).
2. Speak the truth in love. These men and women need to know that God sees their struggles and sin, yet still cares deeply for them. God's mercy truly does triumph over judgment. All who have submitted their lives to Him will no longer be condemned on the final day (James 2:13, Romans 1:17). Those who have not yet chosen abortion need to know that God deeply loves both them and their unborn baby. He has fearfully and wonderfully made them both, and He is knitting the unborn child together in the mother's womb (Psalm 139:13-14). And we need to lovingly communicate truth about the ways in which abortion hurts and exploits women as well as the vulnerable baby inside them.
3. Connect them to the right resources. In many cases, there is another individual or organization better equipped to counsel and care for the person affected by abortion than you might be able to. If they are pregnant and considering abortion, provide them with the contact information of a trusted local pregnancy resource center like [The Source for Women](#). (Or better yet, go with them!) If they have had an abortion and are dealing with shame or feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and depression, introduce them to a leader or member of The Austin Stone's [Soul Care](#) ministry team. The road to healing can be long and painful, but it is so often through these environments and communities that the Lord breaks the chains of sin and offers healing and redemption.

In the midst of these conversations, we are to pray and ask God to give us the words to speak and ears to listen well. We need to beg Him to transform hearts in the way that only He can, so that those who do not know Him or who are running from Him can experience His unending and overwhelming love, forgiveness, peace, and hope for the future.

In Instances of Rape, Incest, and Life-Threatening Pregnancies

Abortion is a by-product of a culture that has a deeply broken sexual ethic. Men and women have bought into the lies that sex will liberate and empower them. But there is nothing liberating about a woman wrestling through a decision that will change her life forever, either through welcoming or ending another human's life. It is even less liberating for a woman who comes to this decision due to the evil committed against her. Rape is by far one of the most heinous attacks on an image-bearer of God. Because of this evil reality, the pro-life position often enters the territory of rape and incest for many women and men. As a church, we grieve with women who have endured sexual assault. We offer

⁶⁷ R.K. Jones and J. Jerman, "Population group abortion rates and lifetime incidence of abortion: United States, 2008–2014," *American Journal of Public Health*, 2017. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2017.304042.

all of our apologies, our tears, and our words of comfort for what they have experienced. We also know that nothing we say can erase those moments in their lives. Our God hates this sin deeply, and such horrendous events grieve His heart (Deuteronomy 22:25-27).

Ecclesiastes is a book about these very moments—the moments when words fail and tears are not enough, when the cycle of life produces nothing more than pain and suffering. It is an honest exploration into the exhaustion of evil. King Solomon wrote:

Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 4:1-3)

Those who have experienced sexual assault have experienced the power of oppression. If you have been a victim of such evil, you might feel as though there is no one who can comfort you. You might even relate to Solomon's envy of those who are not having to suffer the weight of this world. The darkness of oppression, the evils of sexual taking, and the pain of feeling utterly alone are all very real.

Jesus Christ is the Light for this darkness, the One who can crawl into those deep places of untold pain and help you begin the process of healing. He is not ashamed of your grief and suffering. Because Jesus has passed through the heavens, dressed in flesh, surrendered to violence Himself, and taken on the most foul and contemptible sins as a perfect sacrifice, you have access to infinite mercy and grace for your time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16). God made Jesus, who was completely sinless, to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus became the sins of the world, so that God could pour out His wrath on all sin, and end its power over our lives for good.

What this means for you is that the sin committed against you has lost all of its power over you. When Jesus defeated sin, He defeated its power over your soul. When Jesus took on all of the sin committed against you in that horrific moment of your life, He provided a path to healing for you. This does not mean healing will be quick or easy or that you will not feel the wounds of sin committed against you. But it does mean that Jesus has crawled into the deep places of pain and has power to heal them. We also recognize some of you may not experience full healing on this side of heaven. But we can take comfort, knowing that God is with us in the midst of our pain and will use it for His good purposes. No matter what your situation, God's love demonstrated through Jesus is proof that you are not alone when dealing with the most atrocious acts of sin committed against you (Romans 5:8). God loves you and sees the pain you have experienced.

And when an assault results in pregnancy, He sees and cares about every question and fear running through your mind as you wrestle with what to do. Every question and every fear is valid. God's love does not cease when circumstances are painfully complex. The world offers a solution of termination—a solution that says by ending the life of the child you will no longer have to relive that awful moment. But the reality is that however quick and final that solution might sound, that awful moment in your life will not disappear with the ending of the baby's life. The terrible truth is that you will need to deal with the trauma that has been committed against you and the trauma you have committed against yourself.

The world has offered the only solution it can fathom: abortion. Some believe it is a necessary part of healing from rape or incest, but abortion does not right the wrong or take away the trauma and pain. Instead, it is a second act of violence against both the woman and her baby. To destroy another life is yet another intrusion into the most intimate parts of a woman. One post-abortive victim grieved her decision, writing that getting the abortion “was like being raped again, only worse—because this time I had consented to the assault.”⁶⁸ The research underscores this reality. One study by the Elliot Institute found that 80% of post-abortive rape victims believed the abortion had been

⁶⁸ Amy Reid, “Nicole Cooley: Raped and Pregnant,” *Christian Broadcasting Network*, September 17, 2013, <https://www1.cbn.com/700club/nicole-cooley-raped-and-pregnant>.

“the wrong solution,” and most said it simply compounded the trauma they had already experienced.⁶⁹ Sadly, abortion in instances of rape and incest simply perpetuates the violence against traumatized women and their innocent, unborn children.

Our God offers promises so much richer than the assurances of the abortionist. To receive His offer of more requires a measure of trust that is not always easy to give. But when we decide to end a child’s life, we are trusting that termination will rescue us. When we adhere to the sexual liberation belief system or the bodily autonomy argument, we are putting our trust in theories that will never provide the freedom they promise. Rather, they will disappoint us and send us into deeper oppression. Only God—who cannot lie—offers us the healing, love, and freedom we are looking for.

Mothers threatened by their own pregnancies are also in desperate need of God’s guidance, peace, and embrace. News of some complications, such as cancerous uteruses or ectopic pregnancies, are nightmare diagnoses for expectant mothers and their families. In these situations, allowing the unborn baby to grow to term may actually result in the death of both the mothers and the children they carry. The weight of such a situation is nearly unimaginable—a reality that would bring any of us to our knees, crushed by unbelievable anguish, overwhelming sorrow, and inestimable dread over the decisions that mothers and their families must make. Though the unborn baby fully bears God’s image and carries all of the dignity and value tied to such status, the women involved are equally precious and cherished by the Lord. In these incredibly rare instances, the unborn child may need to be aborted in order to save the mother’s life.

Women who chose to abort during these life-threatening pregnancies often feel the same gut-wrenching guilt, shame, and sorrow experienced by other post-abortive women. However, this situation is profoundly different than that of elective abortion. God cares deeply about our motivations, and all that we do should be done for His glory, not our own (Proverbs 16:2; Romans 8:8; 2 Corinthians 9:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:4). When babies are dismembered, cut apart, and pulled out of the mother in an elective abortion, the killing is intentional, a dehumanizing act that rejects the dignity and personhood of the unborn. The procedure aims at the death of the baby, directly violating God’s commandment not to murder (Exodus 20:13). However, when the mother’s life is in grave danger, the death of the unborn baby is not intentional, nor desired, but the tragic result of the treatment the mother needs to survive. When we operate from a desire to save, protect, and honor human life—those of prenatal children as well as the mothers who carry them—we can point people back to Jesus, even in the most awful of circumstances.

The topics of rape, incest, and life-threatening pregnancies are incredibly heavy, complex subjects impossible to adequately address within a short, written response. This is why Christian community is so important. We are not left to ourselves to interpret the Scriptures, grow in knowledge, or work out our sanctification. It is through the power of God working in our church body that we learn more about Him, grow in Christlikeness, and cultivate hearts like His. In the context of a safe church community led by appointed elders and deacons, we can wrestle through difficult questions about topics like abortion with the Word of God, guided and illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

The Lord also uses these spaces to deliver radical healing and transformation to those in desperate need of His touch. The God we worship at The Austin Stone hears the cries of His children. He “is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18 ESV). As “the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort,” He “comforts us in all our affliction” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 ESV). He is patient and gentle with the wounded and weary (Matthew 12:20). Out of love for Jesus and our neighbor, we too must grieve with those healing from assault, dealing with trauma, and mourning their own abortions, and provide them with the spiritual and emotional support they need to heal well (Romans 12:15).

⁶⁹ “Abortion Doesn’t Help Rape Victims, Say Women Who’ve Been There • AfterAbortion.org,” *Elliot Institute*, July 21, 2015, <https://afterabortion.org/abortion-doesnt-help-rape-victims-say-women-who-ve-been-there/>.

Telling Someone What They Can/Can't Do with Their Body

Millions of Americans consider themselves “personally pro-life.” In 2018, more than one-third (34%) of Americans who say they personally believe abortion is immoral still wanted abortion to be legal in all or most cases.⁷⁰ These individuals may affirm the dignity of the unborn themselves but believe that to oppose abortion would be to trample on the rights of women. However, we must again ask ourselves: Is the pregnant woman the only person involved in the choice to have an abortion?

This question is fundamental. If an unborn child is fully human, afforded the same right to life as any other person, we are not just talking about “a woman and her body,” but two distinct people. If we believe this, we cannot simply be “personally pro-life.” What constitutes the “taking of a human life” is not left up to every person to decide. Just as we determined that all slaves were people who should be afforded the same inalienable rights as everyone else, so too should we recognize these universal human rights for the unborn. To be “personally pro-life” but pro-choice is like declaring, “I would never personally own slaves, but who am I to tell you cannot own one?” or “I would never abuse my child, but telling another parent not to abuse their children would infringe on the privacy of their household.” While the pro-choice view may seem more tolerant and open-minded, it is, in reality, oppressive and limiting. By maintaining that abortion should be accessible on demand, proponents of abortion-choice force pro-lifers to accept the definition of life and “freedom” they want to impose on the entire society. “If you believed that a class of persons were being murdered by methods that included dismemberment, suffocation, and burning, resulting in excruciating pain in many cases,” writes author Francis Beckwith, “wouldn’t you be perplexed if someone tried to ease your outrage by telling you that you didn’t have to participate in the murders if you didn’t want to?”⁷¹

“Personally pro-life” people may still feel uncomfortable restricting abortion, because they believe it would involve imposing their religious beliefs on others. However, just because a position on abortion happens to align with a religious view does not make it exclusively religious. Even non-religious individuals are animated by their own beliefs and values, and they allow them to inform the laws they support. In fact, observes Beckwith, Christian theology was the main driver for many civil rights policies that enjoy overwhelming support today, including the abolition of slavery and the enfranchisement of women and minorities.⁷² If abortion is truly an injustice, the decision to abort an unborn child cannot be one left to “individual consciences” out of respect for “privacy.” While we must do everything we can to help women in difficult places raise their children well, the stakes for unborn children are too high to sit on the sidelines.

Lacking Mercy Toward Women Who Have Had Abortions, Abortionists, or Pro-Choice Advocates

When we lack mercy, we should do three things:

1. Lament over our lack of mercy, and beg God for a transformed heart. A lack of mercy comes from a deep lack of appreciation for the mercy God has shown to us through Jesus. Without God’s unmerited gift of salvation, we are all just as deserving of hell as the most heinous person you can think of. It was through God’s great mercy that “He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3 ESV). We must weep over our lack of empathy and compassion for others, our failure to be merciful just as our heavenly Father was merciful toward us (Luke 6:36). The truth is we cannot become truly merciful people on our own. In fact, Tim Keller says that at worst, a man that does not desire to show mercy toward others “has not really encountered the saving mercy of God.”⁷³ In order to be the compassionate people the Lord has called us to become, we must pray for a broken heart—a heart that has understands its complete inability to make itself right before God, grieves over sin, and begs God for His

⁷⁰ Carolyn J. Davis, Daniel Cox, Rob Griffin, Robert P. Jones, “Young People Set to Impact the Debate on Women’s Health Issues,” April 17, 2018, PRRI, <https://www.prii.org/research/young-people-set-to-impact-the-debate-on-womens-health-issues/>.

⁷¹ Francis J. Beckwith, *Politically Correct Death: Answering the Arguments for Abortion Rights* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 87.

⁷² Francis J. Beckwith, *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case Against Abortion Choice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 116.

⁷³ Tim Keller, *Generous Justice: How God’s Grace Makes Us Just* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2010), 90.

righteousness and mercy. It is only then that we can receive true wisdom that is “first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere” (James 3:17 NIV).

2. Remember who the real enemy is. Because we understand so much of the world through our senses—what we can see, hear, and interact with—we often discount the role of spiritual warfare in our lives and the lives of those around us. While it is certainly easy for us to hate those who dehumanize marginalized groups or perpetuate violence, we must remember that “we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12 NLT). Spiritual battles must start with prayer. Ask yourself if you are praying for your enemies. If not, forget about every other strategy, and start praying.
3. Serve others, even when you do not feel like it. If we lack mercy toward women who are considering abortion or have had one in the past, our hearts will be cold toward them. However, the Bible does not permit this as an exemption from meeting the needs of others. When God tells us to advocate for those He loves, we are to do so whether our hearts have caught up or not. “Do not waste time bothering whether you ‘love’ your neighbor ...” writes author C.S. Lewis, “... act as if you did. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him.”⁷⁴ At first, this may look like donating to your local pregnancy resource center, battered women’s shelter, or nonprofit that resettles refugees. However, our prayer should be that over time God would soften our hearts and convict us to move further and further into relationship with those we used to view with indifference or animosity.

In order to show mercy, Christians must fight to keep their eyes on the greatest example of mercy—the mercy that was shown to us by God through the death of His Son on the cross. It is a mercy so beautiful and overwhelming that, if properly appreciated, cannot help but move its recipient to action.

⁷⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Enfield, N.S.W.: Royal Blind Society, 1957), 116.

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