FIELD GUIDE

THE MENTORING PROJECT

ABORTION: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY



GARRETT KELL

ABORTION



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INTRODUCTION

Imagine a woman holding a pregnancy test. The emotion of the moment is nearly overwhelming for her. Her hand trembles slightly as she waits for the result to appear. She knows what she sees will change her life forever.

What you don't know about this woman, however, is whether she hopes the test will be positive or negative. She may have prayed, waited, and tried to have a child. This moment will reveal if her dreams are coming true. Another woman might experience the same moment very differently. For her, pregnancy is undesired. The thought of having a child is overwhelming and terrifying. All of her hopes and dreams are vanishing before her very eyes.

While the future for the woman is uncertain, a positive test reveals one certainty: there is a life in her womb. What will happen to that life is the subject of this booklet.

I know a bit about moments like the one I've described. While I'm not a woman, I have been on both sides of caring what a pregnancy test reveals. My wife and I have enjoyed moments of celebration over ten positive tests during our marriage. Those pregnancies have resulted in three miscarriages and the seven children we have together.

But before I was a Christian, I was in a very different situation. I was in a relationship that didn't honor the Lord, and my girlfriend told me that she was pregnant. After agreeing that we were not going to get married, we decided to have an abortion. We were young, full of hopes, dreams, and plans. We had our whole lives in front of us; we weren't ready to be married or to raise a child. But I'm not sure I would've thought about it exactly like that in those days. I didn't know how to process all we were facing. I only felt the pressures of the moment.

A friend gave her the $400 we needed to have "the procedure," as they called it. I was there when she took the pill. I was there when she bled, and we flushed our child down the toilet. I was there when we cried, even though we didn't know why.

I share this part of the story to assure you that I do not write these words from a place of distant judgment. Rather, I am a debtor to God's grace who understands experientially the joys and sorrows that surround the conversation about abortion. My hope is to convince you to think more carefully about this issue in light of **what the Bible says about life**. If you are facing the choice of whether to keep a child, my prayer is to help you think soberly and hopefully about your decision. If you are trying to help a friend navigate the waters of an unplanned pregnancy, I want to supply practical wisdom to aid your ministry to them. And if you are a ministry leader, I want to equip you with tools to help those under your care to love well those who have either had abortions or are considering them.

1

WHAT IS ABORTION AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

"Daddy, what's abortion?" The question seemed to come out of nowhere. The news was on in our home when my young daughter heard an unfamiliar word, so she asked about it. I'm a believer in age-appropriate answers but felt inadequate about this one. So, I tried: "It's when someone makes a baby stop being in their mommy's belly." Her curiosity was only stirred.

"Where does the baby go?" she asked. "I think the baby goes to heaven." "Is the baby dead?" "Yes, honey." After a brief silence, she asked the inevitable question, "Do they kill the baby?"

My daughter had no theological degrees, no political agendas, no personal experiences. She simply followed the logic of the conversation and arrived at a clear and uncomfortable conclusion. Children are not the only people who need to wrestle with basic questions about life, such as "**What does the Bible say about abortion**?" All people have a responsibility to consider where life comes from and whether we should be able to end that life through abortion.

Who Gives Life?

The miracle of life is complex and captivating. Fertilization of an egg by a sperm, cell division, and DNA replication are mind-boggling. But how does it happen? Scripture testifies that God knows all people and that their existence is because of Him. Of the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord said, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you" (Jer. 1:5). Each human life originates with God's work. It is God who "opens the womb" (Gen. 29:31; 1 Sam. 1:5–6, 20) and knits each person together in the womb:

> "You formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in Your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." Psalm 139:13–16 (cf. Isa. 44:24).

From the beginning, "God created man in his own image; He created him in the image of God; He created them male and female" (Gen. 1:27). God is the source of all life, for "All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made" (Jn. 1:3; cf. Acts 17:28). This means that the life found in a woman's womb, from the moment of conception, is life that God has given.

Who are the Unborn?

What is growing within a mother's womb is not a tumor or clump of cells that has the potential to be a baby. It *is* a baby—with distinct human DNA, a unique blood type, and a detectable heartbeat after six weeks. What lives in the mother, from the moment of conception, is a unique human being. If we found on Mars what we find in a mother's womb, we'd certainly say we found life. And 100 percent of the time, nothing other than a human comes out during birth.

Any doubts that we have regarding the identity of the unborn—"**Is the unborn a person according to Scripture**?"—must be submitted to God's Word. Scripture testifies that when egg and sperm unite, God grants life and begins to develop the baby's body: "Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? You clothed me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews. You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit." (Job 10:10-12). It is God who mysteriously oversees "the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child" (Eccles. 11:5). God knows people in the womb and has plans for them even before they are born (Ps. 51:5; Isa. 49:1; Gal. 1:15).

Before John the Baptist was born, the angel Gabriel declared that he "will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Lk. 1:15).

When Mary greeted Elizabeth, it is said that, "the baby [John] leaped in her womb" (Lk. 1:41). One could argue that the first person to worship the incarnate Christ was an unborn child.

Jesus Himself was the eternal Son of God who did not merely appear as a man. He entered the world the same way every one of us did. He was conceived in His mother's womb,[1] born, grew through infancy and childhood, and matured into adulthood (Lk. 1:31-35, 2:7, 40, 52; Gal. 4:4). By taking on humanity from conception into eternity, Jesus affirms the dignity of human life in every stage.

The value of unborn children has been a long-attested truth. In the Mosaic Law, one of the clearest passages on **abortion in the Bible**, God provides legal protection for in utero children:

> "When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." (Ex. 21:22-25).

This text presumes at least three important realities about life in the womb. *First*, the unborn are children, not potential children. They are not merely embryos, but image bearers of God Almighty. *Second,* because the unborn bear the image of God, they have inherent value worth defending. This aligns with God's instruction regarding image bearers outside the womb (Gen. 9:5-6; Num. 35:31-33; Rom. 13:4). *Third,* the unborn children have rights, though they are unable to speak for themselves. Rather, they are placed in a community that has laws that raise everyone's awareness of their own need to protect those who cannot protect themselves (Ps. 82:3-4; Prov. 24:11-12, 31:8-9; Isa. 1:17; Luke 10:25-37; Jms. 1:27).[2]

Because Scripture teaches that the unborn are living humans made in God's image, intentionally ending their lives violates God's command not to murder (Ex. 20:13; Gen. 9:6). Not every man or woman who has taken part in an abortion acted with malicious intent. Some may have acted out of fear, confusion, or unwanted pressure. While we may feel compassion

for people in those circumstances, we cannot redefine what God says about taking innocent human life. Difficult circumstances never justify intentionally ending the life of an innocent child.

You may have heard the phrase "sanctity of life" in political debates or church conversations about abortion. The term, however, and the place of the **sanctity of life in Christianity**, long predate our modern discussions about abortion. The word sanctity comes from the Latin *sanctus,* which means holy, set apart, sacred. Human life is holy because it bears His image and therefore must not be violated (Gen. 9:5-6). The sanctity of human life is not dependent on what a person can do or contribute to society; rather, it is sacred because God made it. Being an image bearer grants each person "inalienable rights" that must be guarded vigilantly. Scripture declares that children are not a burden but a blessing, "Children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward" (Psalm 127:3). If what is in the womb is a gift from God, bearing His image, then what is abortion?

What is Abortion?

Definitions of abortion vary depending on the source. The National Library of Medicine says, "Abortion is a medical procedure used to terminate a pregnancy and is a critical component of reproductive healthcare."[3] Planned Parenthood, an organization that provides over 430,000 abortions per year in the United States, proposes that "Abortion is a normal, safe, and routine medical procedure to end a pregnancy. Abortion is health care."[4] The ACOG, a leading voice of clinical practice and medical accuracy in reproductive health, defines abortion as "a medical intervention that ends a pregnancy such that it does not result in a live birth."[5] According to these groups, abortion ends a pregnancy in a way that intends the death of the "fetus or embryo."[6]

Abortions are executed in two ways: medicinal and surgical. *Medicinal abortions* typically target first-trimester pregnancies with a two-drug regimen. The first blocks progesterone, which deprives the developing child of essential nutrients and oxygen for survival. The second drug causes the uterus to contract and expel the dead child. *Surgical abortions* are typically used for later-term abortions and are carried out with various implements, including suction and forceps to sever and remove fetal

parts. While methods may vary depending on the development of the child, the purpose of the procedure is always clear: to end the life of the unborn child.

Discussions about abortion often center on the clinical aspect of the procedure, but it is essential that we consider the entire picture. If it is true that a human life resides in the womb after conception, then what happens to him or her has great consequences. Even apart from Scripture, modern science affirms that a distinct, yet vulnerable, living human organism exists from the moment of fertilization. Throughout human history, societies that have cared for the weakest and most vulnerable have thrived. If this is the case, then why would someone have an abortion?

Why do people have abortions?

A Christian couple was early in their engagement when they fell into sexual sin. They knew it was wrong and desired to honor God but didn't know what to do. Soon after, they discovered she was pregnant. A myriad of emotions swirled around them. Shame over their sin. Fear over how people would respond. Confusion about what to do. Though their church had a culture of grace, confessing felt too overwhelming, too terrifying. So, they secretly researched their options and found an option for an abortion. They got married and tried to put it behind them. But abortions don't just go away.

The reasons someone might choose to abort their child abound. For some, the shame of facing friends or family members with an untimely pregnancy is too much to bear. For others, the fear of how they will care for a child with limited support and resources makes abortion feel like the only option. Some are like I was; they see a child as a disruption to their lives and don't want to be inconvenienced with responsibility. And, in all honesty, most people are a mix of all that and more. But if someone is considering an abortion, they need people who will listen and help them process what's going on in their hearts and minds. The fears and pressures that drive people to have an abortion are real. This is why God calls the church to stand in the gap and meet them with the assurance that God will provide all they need to love their child and give them a chance at life.

2

WHO SHOULD CARE ABOUT ABORTION?

Though abortion is a private and personal issue, it impacts every person on the planet. According to the World Health Organization, roughly 73 million abortions take place worldwide each year. Six out of 10 (61%) of all unintended pregnancies, and 3 out of 10 (29%) of all pregnancies, end in induced abortion.[7] Abortion numbers in the United States continue to increase, rising to more than 1.1 million each year.[8] The rise of online clinics and telehealth has expanded access to abortion-inducing pharmaceuticals, which make abortion more convenient than ever. These staggering numbers, which show **how many abortions happen each year**, should cause us to pause and consider the ramifications of abortion on each of us. Abortion ends the lives of image-bearers, challenges our understanding of the **value of human life**, and impacts almost every family in some way. This means abortion is not merely a private decision; it affects all of us.

Abortion is a Human Issue

Imagine for a moment a world in which abortion did not exist. This hypothetical world would have around 2.5 billion more people than there are today. Who would those people be? What might they have contributed to our lives? While we can't know, one modern artist composed a song that helps us to imagine. He chronicles the lives of people born in different places and times and the ways they impacted the world. Consider this man who developed a cure for cancer:

> My conception, June 5, 1975; Raised an orphan, my mother I never did find
> When it came to school, I was getting degrees; Eight years of college, plus residency

Became a Med veteran at Penn Medicine; Against cellular disease, felt we would never win
If you're asking for me, I'm in the laboratory; Mad experiments, now listen as I rap my story
Cancer causes suffering and deep hurt; So I devoted my life to studies and research
I found a cure that is changing the future; And stopping the spread of mutations and tumors
Once deep affliction, now complete remission; Lives being saved and they ain't even Christian
Had I been seen as a gift, not a bother; Cancer wouldn't have killed my biological father
What could have been? The possibilities are limitless;

For our crimes against the unborn, we're infamous
For far too long, we've seen cradles silenced; Through prenatal violence
What could have been?
Only God knows what all was lost; So many lives taken, modern-day Holocaust
I know we like our freedoms and our choices; But who's gonna speak for the voiceless?
What could have been?[9]

While this story is hypothetical, it is not unrealistic. Abortion has robbed humanity of far too many would-be contemporaries. I feel this in a pointedly personal way. I was in college when I learned that my parents chose to have an abortion before I was born. They were newly married but didn't feel ready for children. I wonder what it would have been like to have had an older brother or sister. To learn from them, laugh with them, and share sibling life together. Sadly, my own children will have to wonder the same thing. My choice robbed them of an older brother or sister. While we cannot undo the past, we must learn from it.

Every aborted child bears the potential to do good. They might have become teachers, doctors, mothers, fathers, or missionaries. Each one bore the image of God and could have reflected His glory in a unique way. Whether they would have cured cancer or been more common like most of us, their lives matter. Abortion does more than end a pregnancy;

it extinguishes a life meant to shine in the world. It is not merely a private matter with private consequences. It affects us all.

Abortion is a Women's Issue

While abortion impacts everyone, it uniquely impacts women. Women have rights over their bodies. A woman's body is a gift from God and should never be touched in ways she doesn't permit. No man has the right to force a woman to use her body against her will. Her body is hers and must be respected. When it comes to sex, no one has the right to take from a woman what she has not freely given. Her body is hers to steward according to God's word (Heb. 13:4). Similarly, the decision about abortion uniquely affects a woman.

Women uniquely bear the blessing and burden of pregnancy (Gen. 3:16; Ps. 127:3, 128:3). Her body houses the baby conceived in her womb. Her body shares nutrients and keeps the child warm. Her body will potentially suffer nausea and exhaustion that come with the baby's demands on her system. Women uniquely experience the joys of pregnancy or the fears of an unexpected one. There is also a unique sorrow women know when a pregnancy ends through miscarriage or the choice of abortion. As the old proverb says, "Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy" (Prov. 14:10, NIV).

This is also true of the hardships that follow an abortion. While no two women experience **abortion trauma** exactly the same, the reality of lingering effects is certain. Physically, some women experience complications associated with other procedures (risk of infection, bleeding, etc). Though studies are inconclusive, women who have abortions may face an increased risk of impact on reproductive ability in the future.[10]

More certain, however, are the emotional, psychological, and spiritual effects of abortion on a woman. Some may experience initial relief from the stressful prospect of having a child, but the wake of deep wounds often remains. Many women silently suffer grief, guilt, shame, regret, and anxiety over their decision to abort their baby. Some fear that they have done something so horrible that God would never forgive them, and they wonder, "**Can you be forgiven for abortion**?" This can make prayer feel shameful and Scripture reading impossible. The secrecy

Because abortion is a woman's issue, she needs to be loved and welcomed by the church in a way that helps her to process an unplanned pregnancy or flee to the throne of grace if she chooses to have an abortion. The grace of Christ reaches far deeper than we can imagine, and women need to know that God offers help, **forgiveness after abortion**, and healing.

Abortion is a Baby's Issue

Though pregnancy and abortion are a woman's issue, it doesn't capture the whole truth. When a woman becomes pregnant, her body ceases to be only hers; it also belongs to her child. The child is within her, yet distinct from her. The child is in her body, but the child is not her body. A child is different from an unwanted tumor or cyst that grows like a leech. As we learned, a child is a gift from God, conceived because of the union of a sperm with the mother's egg. This means the child in the womb is a person, and abortion matters greatly to him or her.

God's wonderful design is for unborn children to be united to their mothers, receiving protective housing as they grow and nourishment as they develop. This sacrificial love is part of what it means to be a mom. Anyone reading these words has known this divinely designed care, regardless of your birth circumstances. Your mother's body was her body, but it wasn't just hers. Her body became a temporary home for you. Before you learned to walk, speak, or read, you lived in your mother's womb.

Abortion is a targeted attack on a child inside its mother's womb. There is no gentle way to end a child's life. Every abortion method is painful and torturous. We often overlook the child's suffering because the effects of abortion are largely hidden from our sight. We assume that because the child is small or not fully developed, they do not suffer. But advances in medical research reveal that even the youngest developing babies can feel pain.[11]

It is easy to speak about "the unborn" as an abstract group, but the unborn are simply people at an earlier stage of development. The child in the womb establishes a real relationship with its mother. The relationship may be unexpected, overwhelming, or frightening, but it's still real. Will the mother love and protect her child? Or will she decide

that it's just too much and choose to end the relationship? Abortion is very much a baby's issue.

Abortion is a Man's Issue

While the woman's body is her body, it's not only her baby within. It's *their* baby—mother *and* father. Whether they planned to have a child together or not, the baby is theirs. Whether the father desires to be responsible for his choices or not, the baby is theirs. This is true of every pregnancy. When my girlfriend and I had our abortion, it wasn't my body, but it was my baby.

Men are too often excused or pushed out of the abortion conversation. Men are created by God to protect and provide for those under their care. Men are designed to lead courageously and sacrificially. Dismissing men from the abortion conversation too easily excuses them from the God-given responsibility they have to love their children. Men should not be allowed to pressure women into having abortions or assumed to be "off the hook" if they just walk away from a woman they conceived a child with. Abusive men must be called to account, and apathetic men must be called to repentance.

Perpetuating the lie that men need to stay out of the abortion debate isn't just untrue—it's catastrophic for the generations to come. Research proves that the father of the child is the greatest influence on a woman's decision about abortion. When men show courage and declare their support, women are far more likely to choose to have their baby. When men are silent or absent, abortion becomes far more likely. We need a generation of young men who honor women by protecting the precious gift of their sexuality, as it was intended to be. We need a generation of young men who will not treat women like objects but honor them with decency and respect. We need a generation of young men who will not walk away when they get women pregnant, nor pressure them to end their children's lives. We need a generation of men who will take responsibility for—*and love*—their unborn children. They must be willing either to help raise the children or to make plans for their adoption. We also need a generation of women who will encourage men to take responsibility rather than push them out of the abortion conversation.

Though abortion uniquely affects women, it's not only about women. Because in the end it's her body, but it's *their* baby.

Abortion is a Church Issue

Because the church exists to proclaim the gospel to men, women, children, and people of all nations, the church should care about abortion. Women who face the fear of an unplanned pregnancy need to hear that Jesus will meet them where they are to help them (Isa. 41:10). Men who are apathetic or antagonistic about their unborn child must repent and take responsibility (Ezek. 18:30-32). Because God cares about the welfare of unborn children (Ps. 139:13-16; Prov. 31:8-9), God's people must as well.

Early Christians distinguished themselves as adamant defenders of unwanted and unplanned children, and **abortion and Christianity** have been intertwined ever since. In the first-century Roman world, unwanted children were often killed or abandoned through a practice known as exposure. Parents would leave children in certain locations rather than receive them into the home. These children would often die of exposure to the elements or animals unless they were taken by slave traders, human traffickers, or people willing to take care of them—predominantly Christians.[12] The church saw opposition to abortion and infanticide was not merely a theological conviction, but a countercultural witness to the value of every human life, especially the most vulnerable among them.

This posture toward caring for unborn children, and the **Christian view of abortion** it expressed, continued after the first century. The Didache instructed believers, "You shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is born."[13] An early second-century writing echoed the same conviction, "You shall not slay the child by procuring abortion; nor, again, shall you destroy it after it is born."[14] Tertullian (155-220AD) argued that "to hinder a birth is merely a speedier man-killing,"[15] while John Chrysostom (347-407AD) condemned those who made "the chamber of procreation into a chamber for murder."[16] During the time of the Reformation, John Calvin (1509-1564AD) taught, "The fetus, though enclosed in the womb of its mother, is already a human being, and it is an almost monstrous crime to rob it of the life which it has not yet begun to enjoy"[17] while Luther (1483-1546AD) declared, "some are so cruel that

they expel the fetus by means of drugs. Surely those who have no regard for the fetus—even though it is the gift of God—are no better than murderers."[18] While Christians have disagreed on many things over the centuries, the **Christian view on abortion** has remained constant, and we have long been united in this fact: God's people must not be apathetic to the personhood of the unborn.

The church that believes these realities must know how to talk about them, whether in a **pro-life Bible study** or in everyday conversation, and take a stand for them. That's where we turn next.

3

HOW DO I DISCUSS ABORTION?

For some, supporting abortion is an emotionally charged decision fueled by personally distressing circumstances. They don't want to be pregnant and feel desperate to do whatever is necessary to change their situation. For others, the decision is a thoughtful conviction rooted in their moral and rational evaluation. God's people must be ready and able to answer questions like "**Is abortion a sin**?" and "**Is abortion biblical**?" and to engage in conversations about their convictions relating to abortion (1 Pt. 3:15).

What Does God Say?

God's Word teaches that unborn children are humans created in His image. This leads to a crucial question: *If the unborn are human, what responsibility do we have toward them?* One of Jesus's most memorable parables tells us the answer.

A religious leader posed Jesus the all-important question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Lk. 10:25). After discussing the great commandment's call to love God and love one's neighbor, the religious leader asks Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" His question was an attempt to justify himself and to limit his responsibility to loving only certain people. Jesus went on to tell the story of a man who was attacked by robbers and left to die. A priest and Levite both walked past him, unwilling to help. Why they didn't help him is unclear. Maybe they rationalized that the danger was too much or assumed someone else would step in. Why they didn't help doesn't ultimately matter. They left him to die.

Jesus then introduced an unlikely hero: "a Samaritan...came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion" (Lk. 10:33). For readers

like us, the Samaritan's response isn't as startling as for the first-century reader. This is the last person on earth we should expect to do something good. Jesus concluded by asking the religious leader, "'Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?' He replied, 'The one who showed him mercy.' And Jesus said to him, 'You go, and do likewise'" (Lk. 10:36-37).

The point of Jesus's teaching was that we should strive to "love your neighbor as yourself." This is especially true for our neighbors who are the most vulnerable, like the man in the parable. What neighbor could be closer than a child in the womb of its mother? These unborn neighbors cannot ask for help. They are overlooked. They have no voice, no vote, no advocate except those who know the truth. We must not ask "who is my neighbor?" as if we don't know that the unborn among us are helpless neighbors who need our help. Proverbs 24:11-12 compels us, "Rescue those who are being taken away to death...If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?"

Most people reading this booklet are likely not considering abortion. But have you been like the priest and Levite who looked away, kept their distance, and went on with their lives while the unborn perished? Jesus assures us, "as you did it to one of the least of these...you did it to me" (Mt. 25:40). God's Word compels us to be honest about our most vulnerable neighbors and love like the Samaritan.

What Does Reason Say? (S.L.E.D.)

Throughout history, societies have often justified mistreating vulnerable people by denying their full humanity. Enslaved Africans were treated as less than fully human by white supremacists, and Jews were declared genetically inferior by Nazi ideology. In both cases, injustice was justified by redefining what it means to be human. The abortion debate follows the same logic. Many argue that the unborn are not fully human and therefore don't deserve the same protection as those outside the womb. The S.L.E.D. acronym refutes this by showing that the unborn deserve the same protection as people outside the womb.

Size: Are the unborn less human because they are smaller?

Pro-Choice Argument: A four-week embryo is microscopic (about the size of a poppy seed). Something so small cannot legitimately be considered a human. Something so small cannot legitimately be considered a human. Something this small is considered to have the potential to grow into a human, but it is not yet a human with the right to life.

Pro-Life Argument: While size certainly changes throughout life, size doesn't determine value. Is someone who stands 6'5" and weighs 305 lbs. more valuable than someone who is 4'5" and weighs 120 lbs.? An unborn child is simply a smaller member of the human race. Growth changes our size, not our dignity.

Level of Development: Are the unborn less valuable because they are less developed?

Pro-Choice Argument: Something that isn't self-aware or able to reason cannot be considered fully human. Since the embryo's heartbeat, brain activity, hearing, vision, and ability to survive develop gradually, so does its personhood. Until full human capabilities are present, abortion is morally permissible.

Pro-Life Argument: We must never confuse what a person can do with what a person is. People with intellectual disabilities may never develop to meet certain standards of "normalcy," but that doesn't mean they are any less human. Would we say Helen Keller was less human because her sight never fully developed? Are elderly people who suffer from memory loss or reduced ability to control their capacities less human than when they were younger? Dignity doesn't disappear when development is lacking. From the moment of conception, unborn children are developing human beings and must be protected as such.

Environment: Are the unborn less valuable because of where they are?

Pro-Choice Argument: Life inside the womb is fundamentally different from life outside the womb. The mother's rights are primary until the child is born. The unborn do not possess the same rights as those who live outside the womb, because its right to life infringes on the woman's right for reproductive freedom and bodily autonomy.

Pro-Life Argument: Location has never determined someone's personhood. People on a remote island, in a maximum security prison, or

in a hospital's ICU are all in very different environments. But they are all equally human. A child does not become a child simply because they relocate from the womb to the world. Moments before birth, a child rests in her mother's womb, and moments after birth, she rests in her mother's arms. Nothing about their nature changes based on a short trip down the mother's birth canal.

Degree of Dependence: Are the unborn less valuable because they can't support themselves?

Pro-Choice Argument: The unborn cannot breathe, eat, or survive apart from its mother's body. Dependency limits the unborn's claim to legal protection.

Pro-Life Argument: Human value is not determined by dependence. Young children depend on parents for food and shelter. Some with disabilities require lifelong assistance. Elderly people rely on others for help with daily needs. At different points in life, people may depend on ventilators or dialysis machines to survive. Dependence does not determine personhood.

Before we move on, one final acknowledgment is necessary. Protecting the rights of an unborn child does mean limiting a mother's freedom to decide every outcome for her own body and future. This runs counter to a natural human desire (shared by men and women alike) and is reinforced by our culture, which promotes the belief that life should be governed primarily by ease and comfort. But the sacrifice asked of a mother is not a civil rights travesty. It is part of what keeps a society civilized. We do not strip rights from the vulnerable in order to make the powerful more comfortable. No one modeled this truth clearer than Jesus, who left the glory of heaven to come to earth to sacrifice for our eternal good.

What About Hard Cases?

At times, the option of abortion feels more reasonable than any of us would like to admit. We must be willing to engage with these instances carefully, compassionately, and clearly. What follows are three common and critical questions that require clear answers.

What if the child is handicapped?

Discovering that an unborn child has a serious disability or genetic abnormality can be one of the most heartbreaking moments a parent ever faces. The thought of their child suffering, coupled with the reality of lifelong medical care, can tempt any parent to question what to do. Some doctors advise that terminating the pregnancy is the most compassionate option. But a difficult diagnosis does not change the reality that the unborn child is a human being made in God's image. Their value is not determined by their expected quality of life.

Ben and Anna faced this reality when doctors told them their unborn son had a severe brain abnormality. They were warned that if he survived birth, he would likely live with profound disabilities. People encouraged them to terminate the pregnancy to spare their family from suffering. But Ben and Anna chose a different path. They believed God had entrusted them with this child and chose to love him no matter what that meant. Not every parent feels as ready to trust God in circumstances like these. Grief and uncertainty make the future frightening. But the answer to suffering is never to eliminate the sufferer. Rather than asking whether a child with a disability deserves to live, God's people must lean into the Lord and lean upon the church for prayer and practical help.

What about pregnancy resulting from rape or incest?

A pregnancy resulting from rape or incest is uniquely heartbreaking. Crimes like these inflict physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds that a woman should never have to endure. Those who face these circumstances should be met with compassion and unwavering support. But no matter how horrific the circumstances of a child's conception, they never justify harming the child in response. The child should not be held responsible for the sins of their father (Ezek. 18:20). The circumstances surrounding a person's conception do not determine their right to life. Because the child is made in God's image, the child deserves the right to live, regardless of how his or her life began.

It is worth noting that pregnancies resulting from rape or incest account for an extremely small percentage of all abortions.[19] Sadly, the conversation about abortion often uses these circumstances as a way to justify abortion in all cases, which ends up cheapening the conversation.

People who endure rape or incest should never be used as disingenuous talking points.

A mother in these circumstances will require prayer, encouragement, and support from God's people. She needs to be reminded that choosing to abort her child cannot erase the trauma she has endured. Instead, abortion ends the life of her child, often leaving her with more unhealed wounds. The answer to one act of unjust violence is not another act of unjust violence. Christians must surround women who have endured such hardship with compassionate care and the healing truth of the gospel. A mother who chooses to give life to her child despite unjust and painful circumstances mirrors something of the sacrificial love of Jesus himself (Jn. 15:13).

What if the mother's life is in danger?

Every pregnancy carries some degree of risk, and in rare cases, those risks are truly life-threatening. Whenever a mother receives a serious diagnosis, our first recommendation is to seek the counsel of qualified physicians and, if possible, more than one. Doctors are skilled but not infallible. Women have been told their pregnancies were hopeless only to discover through additional testing that the diagnosis was incomplete or incorrect. Unless there is a true medical emergency that requires immediate action, families should take time to gather information, seek multiple opinions, pray for wisdom, and consider every available option.

Cases in which a pregnancy genuinely threatens a mother's life are mercifully uncommon, but because they are so serious, they deserve careful and compassionate consideration. These complications typically arise later in pregnancy after a child has developed enough to survive outside the womb. In these circumstances, physicians can often deliver the baby while also providing aggressive care for both the mother and child. The goal in these circumstances is to save two lives, not intentionally end one to preserve the other.

One important exception is an ectopic pregnancy. This is a tragic circumstance in which the embryo implants outside the uterus, most commonly in a fallopian tube.[20] If left untreated, an ectopic pregnancy can rupture and cause catastrophic internal bleeding. In these heartbreaking circumstances, ending the pregnancy is not morally

equivalent to an elective abortion. The physician's intent is not to end the child's life but to treat a life-threatening condition to save the mother. Tragically, the child cannot survive because of where he or she has implanted, but the child's death is not the goal of the procedure.

My wife and I were forced to make this grueling decision early in our marriage. We conceived twins, but they implanted in my wife's fallopian tube. After exploring all options, we chose the procedure necessary to preserve my wife's life. We grieved the loss of our children and cast ourselves upon the mercy of God. For any others who face these seemingly impossible choices, we pray for God's grace to supply the comfort and healing that only He can. Even today, we long for the day when we will be reunited with our lost children in that Land where death shall be no more.

4

HOW CAN THE CHURCH BE PRO-LIFE?

Jesus calls His people to embody the truths He reveals in His Word. Deep convictions about the sanctity of life have marked the church in every age. Early Christians warred against infanticide and abortion by taking in abandoned children and taking care of vulnerable women. The question of **abortion and the church** in every generation is not only, *"What do we believe?"* but *"What are we doing about what we believe?"* What follows are six ways the church can put conviction into action.

Clearly proclaim the gospel

Doctor Jay was invited to our church by a nurse practitioner. He had been practicing medicine for over 30 years and was highly esteemed in the community. After a few months, he asked to speak with me privately. His eyes welled with tears as he spoke, "I have been listening to your messages. I have always thought of myself as a Christian, but something is haunting me—*I have performed thousands of abortions*. I have taken the lives of many innocent children. But I want you to know that, beginning today, I promise I will never commit another abortion."

The incredible thing to me was that I never once mentioned abortion during the messages he heard. I didn't preach on murder or the sanctity of life or anything related to the issue. Then, what did he hear that was so life-changing? He heard the good news that God's Son came into our world to save us. He heard that Jesus was conceived in a virgin's womb and born to live a perfect, sinless life. He heard Jesus's words about the Kingdom of God and the need to repent to enter it. He heard that Jesus

loved all people, cared for the outcast, and performed miracles to prove He had authority to forgive sins. He heard that Jesus was unjustly put to death, but that God purposed His death to be the punishment sinners like him, like me, and like you deserve. But then three days later, Jesus rose from the dead to forgive any who will come to Him for mercy.

That good news should provoke conviction about our sin and comfort that it can be forgiven. The most important way a church can be pro-life is to proclaim the good news of eternal life in Jesus Christ. No amount of legislative change regarding abortion matters apart from heart change. And it is Jesus alone who changes the heart. Proclaiming the Gospel is the duty and honor of every Christian and every church. This is the most important way to uphold the sanctity of life.

Cultivate a gospel culture

Sarah was pregnant and didn't know what to do. She went to a local abortion clinic but felt uneasy, so she called a friend, who connected her with a woman from church named Carrie.[21] Sarah was desperate, so she met with Carrie, who was four months pregnant at the time. Carrie cried with her, prayed with her, and challenged her to believe that what was in her womb was a baby. Carrie asked if Sarah would be willing to get a sonogram, but Sarah said the clinic assured her she wouldn't see anything. Carrie called Doctor Jay, who agreed to meet at his office, even though it was a Saturday. As the ultrasound's speaker began to thump with the baby's fluttering heartbeat, Sarah wept. She was scared but knew it was her baby.

Churches must not only preach the gospel, but they must also live out its implications. A gospel culture is a place where grace and truth intersect in practical, sacrificial love. It's a place where judgmentalism is absent, and Jesus's tender care is embodied. It's a place where former abortionists like Doctor Jay can work alongside fellow believers to serve people like Sarah in their time of need. Churches who love the gospel welcome people with messy lives, trusting that God supplies all they need. Gospel cultures are marked by generous love from grace-filled members.

Commit to whole life ministry

Kelly was a newly pregnant 19-year-old with a boyfriend who was about to leave her. She couldn't imagine telling her strict mother she was pregnant or carrying the weight of being a single mother alone. Kelly connected with a local pregnancy resource center that worked closely with our church. Jeremiah and Ashley began meeting regularly with Kelly and her boyfriend to help them plan for the life they hadn't anticipated. When Kelly's boyfriend abandoned her, Jeremiah and Ashley moved Kelly into their home. They organized a baby shower and rallied support to cover her expenses and school tuition that she couldn't afford.

Why did our church do all that? Because being pro-life is being for all of life. Kelly is part of our church family, and we believe that raising a child is a shared responsibility. Men step up as father figures and church members serve as extended family. When that kind of support isn't there, abortion can often feel like the only way out of hard circumstances.

Consider adoption

Alexandra was pregnant again. The last time, she discovered she was carrying twins and thought abortion was her only option. The procedure was traumatizing, and she knew she couldn't do it again. This time, she began searching for options on social media and found Carrie's profile on an adoption page. Carrie and her husband had posted it for someone exactly like Alexandra who needed an alternative to abortion. They began talking several times a week throughout the pregnancy and made plans for adoption together. But as Alexandra's delivery date approached, she decided to keep the babies. Today, Alexandra is married, has had another child, and keeps in touch with Carrie.

Though Alexandra didn't go through with the adoption, having the option gave her courage to avoid abortion. While the Lord doesn't call all of His people to adopt, all should be willing to help adoption be a real option for others. God's Word declares, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction..." (James 1:27). The spirit of true religion keeps the option of adoption alive for those in need. Churches can speak about adoption from the pulpit, set aside funds for those who foster or adopt, and pray regularly for adoption efforts.

When a church cultivates an adoption-ready mentality, it stirs courage in its members. Some may fear a lack of resources to adopt, but God's people can remind them that God will provide. Adoption requires sacrifices, but when a church comes alongside adopting families financially, it shares the burden together (Gal. 6:2). Adoption will expose your insufficiencies, but we need to remind each other that God promises, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). When God's people are at their weakest, the Lord shows His strength. The church can move forward in adoption trusting the same promise Joshua received, "Be strong and courageous...for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9).

Care after abortion

Michelle desired to grow in her relationship with God, but her past haunted her. In high school, she had an abortion without telling anyone. She tried to move past it, but she could never seem to escape what she'd done or the question, "**Can God forgive abortion**?" During the membership process in a local church, she came clean for the first time. She sobbed with grief as she shared the darkest part of her story. Yet it was there that God met her with healing she never knew was possible. Her confession brought her afresh to Christ's finished work that replaced her burden with the peace of knowing she was forgiven and forever loved (1 Jn. 1:9). God used the church to help her understand that while her sin was great, God's grace in Christ was greater still (Rom. 5:20).

Michelle's experience is not unique. Many women carry the silent grief of a past abortion into their lives, marriages, and ministries. God designed the church to be a refuge for sinners like Michelle, not only to be received but to be comforted with truth. They need to hear the Lord say, "Come now, let us reason together...though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool" (Isa. 1:18). The stain of sin can be cleansed because Jesus "was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5). Jesus offers peace that the world cannot (Jn. 14:27). The church must be the harbor of hope for people with stories like Michelle's (Gal. 6:1-2).

What is less often acknowledged is that men also need care following an abortion. Some men pressured their partner into having the abortion or passively stood by while it happened. Others tried to prevent it but could not. Our culture does not make room for men to feel the loss or the **guilt after abortion** that comes with their role. Men are left with unaddressed pain that can lead to anger, anxiety, depression, or reluctance. This is part of my own story. One of the things the Lord used to awaken me to my own sin was the abortion I participated in. God used it to show me I wasn't the good person I thought I was (Rom. 3:23). I loved myself so much that I was willing to end my own child's life to keep my life as I wanted it. But that was also the beginning of finding healing in Christ (Rom. 8:1).

Men and women alike need biblical counselors and pastors to show them **how to heal after an abortion** and to help them walk through honest confession and repentance so they can lay their burden at the cross (Matt. 11:28-30). If God can give mercy to a murderer like me, He can give it to anyone else who needs it (1 Tim. 1:15-16). Some will mistakenly think that if they still grieve an abortion, they must not truly be forgiven. But God uses the church to help people carry **abortion grief** and learn to lament the loss of something precious (Matt. 5:4). Christians learn not to suppress their grief, but bring it to Jesus, who not only forgives but comforts our sorrows while promising a Day when every tear will finally be wiped away (2 Cor. 1:3-4; Rev. 21:4).

Community Advocacy

Churches have been given a clear mission from Jesus: make disciples among the nations by preaching the gospel (Mt. 28:18-20). As those disciples mature, they learn to love God and their neighbors, serving as salt and light in their broken world (Mt. 5:14-16). Not every Christian will do this in the same way, but all should strive to in some sense. Scripture exhorts us, "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Prov. 31:8-9). Caring for vulnerable mothers and unborn children is one way to put their discipleship into practice.

Christians who have the freedom to choose their governmental leaders should give sober thought to their stewardship. While every political

servant will fall short in some areas, Christians who vote should consider how their candidate's policies will impact the well-being of their neighbors. Supporting political candidates who uphold the dignity of life for all people is a way to honor God and bless their communities.

Beyond the ballot box, Christians can stand with ministries that support life on the frontlines. Christians can consider spending their time and/or resources serving with pregnancy resource centers or sidewalk ministries outside abortion clinics, opening homes to foster and adopt, and caring for families facing unexpected pregnancies. Ministries like this show vulnerable women that God will meet them where they are and care for them. The members of every local church should ask, "How has God uniquely equipped us to protect life and love our neighbors?" Faithful advocacy speaks against abortion; it also actively serves those who are most vulnerable.



CONCLUSION

A day is fast approaching when standing up for the unborn and caring for those who suffer from the effects of abortion will no longer be needed. The Lord Jesus has promised that soon, He will return and will swallow up death forever (Isa. 25:8; 1 Cor. 15:54-57; Rev. 21:4). On that day, all those who have trusted in Christ will find the full and final healing that He purchased with His blood and assured through His resurrection. Between now and then, the hope of the world will not be found at the ballot box, in political parties, or through mere cultural change. The hope of the world has been entrusted to His church so they can herald the gospel to the hurting and hopeless. Christ's people must preach the truth that God uses to open eyes and change hearts. A changed heart is what God will use to change the world. The church is filled with members who will pray, serve, sacrifice, foster, adopt, and advocate for the unborn and the mothers brave enough to bring them into the world. May God use His people to uphold the sanctity of life to glorify their God, the Author of Life.



END NOTES

1. Jesus was miraculously conceived in the womb of Mary through the work of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18; Lk. 1:34-35).

2. A modern commentator helpfully points out that these offenses against the unborn are assumed to be unintentional and indirect, whereas abortion is a direct and intentional action against the child in the womb (cf. Jay Skylar, ESV Expository Commentary, Vol. 1, *Exodus*, pg. 650-651).

3. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK518961/

4. Statistics from the 2024-25 Planned Parenthood annual report and the quotation is from https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/planned-parenthood-votes-connecticut/blog/what-is-abortion

5. This definition comes from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists website - https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/induced-abortion

6. Language drawn from the AAPLOG (American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists) website https://aaplog.org/stories/acog-publishes-incoherent-response-to-aaplogs-maternal-fetal-separation-terminology/

7. World Health Organization website accessed June 9, 2026 - https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abortion

8. The Guttmacher Institute Fact Sheet (2026): *Abortion in the United States* puts the numbers at 1,126,000 total abortions with 24% of them coming through telehealth

9. Shai Linne and Stephen Brindle, "What Could Have Been?," track on *Lyrical Theology Pt. 3: Sociology* (Lamp Mode Recordings, 2026).

10. Information drawn from the National Library of Medicine (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK507237/), National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM), https://www.prolifedoc.org/how-abortion-hurts-women, (*Iranian Journal of Psychiatry*): *Psychological Consequences of Abortion among the Post Abortion Care Seeking Women in Tehran*.

11. The American College of Pediatrics released a statement in 2025 that explained "Laboratory evidence and clinical practice during fetal surgery suggest that as early as 15 weeks gestation noxious stimulation negatively affects immature human beings. Given what we are continuing to learn, pain induced reactions likely also exist at 12 weeks and possibly earlier." (cf. https://acpeds.org/fetal-pain/)

12. Reed Lessing, "How Early Christians Viewed the Sanctity of Life," Concordia Publishing House Blog, accessed June 17, 2026. Taken from his insightful book *Love, Marriage, and Family: Learning from the Early Christians.*

13. The Didache is an early Christian guidebook on doctrine and Christian living written in the late first or early second century. Didache 2.2, in Michael W. Holmes, The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

14. Epistle of Barnabas 19.5, in Michael W. Holmes, The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

15. Tertullian, Apology 9, New Advent text

16. John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, Homily 24, New Advent text.

17. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, Vol. 3, "The Law: The Sixth Commandment," commentary on Exodus 21:22, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom05.ii.ii.v.ii.html.

18. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 4 of *Luther's Works*, American Edition (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 304.

19. According to a study published by the Guttmacher Institute, only 1% of all abortions are related to rape or incest. A follow-up study published in *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* reported that 1% of patients cited rape as the primary reason for abortion, and less than 0.5% cited incest. Another study by the Charlotte Lozier Institute found that abortions due to rape and incest accounted for 0.4% of all cases.

20. Ectopic pregnancies can also occur in the ovary, abdominal wall, or in very rare circumstances, other internal organs.

21. Carrie is my wife who has a remarkable ability to meet with people in challenging circumstances and help them see the hope of Jesus.


THE
MENTORING
PROJECT