

# CONVERSATIONS

Social Awareness, Living Truth

Series 3, Paper 2

## SANCTITY OF LIFE: CARING FOR THE UNBORN

*In a culture of information overload, the prolife/prochoice debate is highly polarized with many conflicting views. What is the truth? Is there another way? As a person who believes in the teaching of Jesus, how do I respond? How can I speak in a way that will be heard? Who am I called to protect? Is it the woman, or the child? Where are the men in this conversation? This paper sheds light on this issue so people of faith can effectively create a shared vision of caring for those who need us most.*

### WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

An abortion is a procedure that ends a pregnancy. It uses medicine or surgery to remove the embryo or fetus and placenta from the uterus. Legal in Canada, the procedure is done by a licensed health care professional in an abortion clinic or a hospital.

An elective or therapeutic abortion is not the same as a miscarriage. Sometimes called a spontaneous abortion, a miscarriage is when a pregnancy ends on its own before the 20th week of pregnancy. The surgical removal of a tubal pregnancy is not an elective abortion but a critical medical intervention.

Statistically, 1 in 3 Canadian women will have experienced abortion by the age of 45. Reports on these statistics state there is very little difference in the numbers among those surveyed in the faith community and those in the secular. We must understand that for every woman who has experienced abortion, there is a man, a family, and a community involved.

While men are equally responsible for an unintended pregnancy, abortion is still seen as primarily a “woman’s issue.” Sadly, both in faith and in secular culture, a woman is often made to feel that she carries the total responsibility for this decision because it is “her body, her choice.” This inequity should concern us all. Biblically there are many passages instructing men on how to care for their families, their responsibility toward women, and their own sexual decision-making. It is rarely addressed that men also experience negative consequences, including grief and loss after an abortion decision.

### WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH?

“I am increasingly impressed by the Christian possibility of celebrating not only moments of joy but also moments of pain, thus affirming God’s real presence in the thick of our lives. A true Christian always affirms life, because God is the God of life, a life stronger than death and destruction. In Him we find no reason to despair. There is always reason to hope, even when our eyes are filled with tears.” (Henri Nouwen)

While the Bible doesn’t specifically speak in today’s terminology about abortion, it speaks clearly of honouring God by honouring life. In

the Psalms David speaks of the value of life from the womb onward, marveling that God knew and created him (Psalm 139:13-18). God presented as the Creator of our lives is all throughout the Old and New Testaments. (Isaiah 49:1 and Galatians 1:15 are just two examples)

We see the incarnation of God’s Son, Jesus, as an affirmation of the sacredness of all human life. Christ’s birth and death demonstrates His love for humanity.

Reading the creation account in Genesis also compels us to cherish all human life. Human beings have meaning because we were intentionally created by a perfect Being. We are sacred, created in God’s image (*Imago Dei*) (Genesis 1: 26-27), and unique in all of creation because of our imperishable souls.

“Every life is God given. Every life begins at conception. Every life has purpose and meaning.”

Historically, early Christians believed because we were made in God’s image, human life was good. This belief inspired them to be countercultural, not just opposing abortion and infanticide but also caring for the poor, their neighbour, and those who were disenfranchised by their culture. This radical lifestyle often came at a cost, a threat to both life and livelihood.

#### Abortion and the Church

Biblically, the church community has the privilege and responsibility to love and care for those without the needed supports to move forward with an unintended pregnancy. These may be some of “the widows and orphans” of our day. None of us who believe we are created in God’s image and accountable before Him can stand back and say, “this has nothing to do with me.” We are called to be “salt and light” in our culture - to be change agents for justice and to strive for the good of all, especially the innocent. And, perhaps most difficult of all, we are the representatives of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit, called to do everything with love - the highest biblical virtue (1 Corinthians 1:1-13)

## 7 WAYS TO BE PROLIFE WITH IMPACT

What does it mean to be positively pro-life? If we want more than a war of words, we need to seriously consider how we each must respond. To start, let us speak of what we are for, rather than what we are against. God is, after all, for people and for life.

Advocacy should be done with empathy: those to whom you are speaking deserve dignity and respect. Anger and harsh words turn people away. We are called to be “wise as serpents and gentle as doves.”

There are many ways to be involved. It is a matter of personality, gifting, and calling. Whatever form it takes, humility and love must drive our approach.

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” (Colossians 3:12)

### 1. Support parenting

Without support, we set up a vulnerable person for failure. A difficult and unsuccessful parenting experience is likely to result in a woman choosing abortion in subsequent pregnancies. One child may be safe, but the next is not. Continued participation in the long-term outcome for parents and children tells the life affirming story that will change generations.

### 2. Honour adoption

Adoption is becoming increasingly rare. How are we willing to invest in education about adoption? How often is it even discussed in our churches? Being pro-life also means truly honouring birth mothers and fathers publicly and privately.

### 3. Care for the post-abortive

A woman who has chosen abortion needs to hear words of hope. She

We need to give up stereotypes and be aware that an unintended pregnancy can happen to anyone. Any woman of child-bearing age can experience the emotional pain and the pressures that compel her to contemplate abortion.

Changing the abortion conversation involves sacrifice. It means, in practical terms, doing more, becoming more informed, and getting involved long term in the lives of people whose choices we may disagree with. Support, encouragement, care and love will not be turned away. How we approach today’s issues and those impacted lives matters. It is how we present the *imago dei* in us.

In these challenging times, it is easy to be cruel and divisive on social media. Avoiding polarizing or politicizing the discussion is a way to represent faith communities as safe places.

Jesus will show us the way if we care to pay attention. He did not treat women as “unclean” as many did in His culture and as many do today through topics of sexuality and abortion. He did not use them, judge

needs to heal rather than face judgments that will wound her, driving her further into shame and secrecy.

### 4. Encourage men toward equal responsibility

Men who treat women with dignity and respect can lead the way in positive conversations about all social issues. Imagine a society in which Christian men purposefully mentor young men, helping them fully care for their children. Imagine a world in which all women are treated as co-inheritors of the kingdom.

### 5. Have the hard conversations with our children

Those in our care and community need to know that if they ever find themselves facing the consequences of their sexual choices, you will help them support the new life for which they are responsible. They need to know you will stand with them, without shame, in front of family, friends and community.

### 6. Have open conversations in our churches, families and communities

It means becoming educated even if it is uncomfortable. Listen to things you might not want to hear from your children or others who have the courage to confide in you. Seek understanding without judging. Take a stand against abuse: refuse to make victims responsible for the choices of their perpetrators. Do not cover up abuse in your church or home. Speak positively of sexuality as God’s good idea and educate about the context in which it is meant to be safely enjoyed.

### 7. Have grace-filled conversations

Grace-filled words heal. Empathy heals. Providing places of safety and good, informed counsel and connection can diffuse conflict and show that the church is a community that values and practically cares for those caught in this divisive issue. It is hard to be critical of a church and a people that offer hope, help and healing, especially if done thoughtfully and with excellence. Do we want to be known as a community that opposes abortion, or one that helps young families thrive?

them or discard them. He called them “daughter.” Valuing life means valuing women who carry life through the burden of unintended pregnancy and offering support to make parenthood more possible. Jesus’ example gives us a high calling: defend those needing help, advocate for truth and justice, and make a difference through one person, one victory, and one life at a time.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

*Perfectly Human: Nine Months with Cerian* by Sarah C. Williams

<https://youtu.be/9U0aOhncprU> In SBC video, Eric and Ruth Brown recall daughter Pearl Joy, whose life still speaks.

<https://www.albertafamilywellness.org/resources>

*Living in Color: The Goal of Post-Abortion Recovery* by Jenny McDerimid.

A comprehensive healing program for small facilitator-led support groups, individuals, or with a mentor, pastor or counselor, designed to engage those who have experienced the loss of abortion.

