



The
**ABORTION
DILEMMA**

Is Abortion Actually Ethical, Moral,
and Sanctified by God?

Rev. Jonathan D. Moll

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Acknowledgement

The world is complicated and life is highly nuanced. No matter the scope of one's experience or expertise, there are always more things to learn and to consider, which is why it's good to know individuals smarter than oneself. I have come to understand that writing a non-fiction book is not an activity for an individual. It starts that way, but quickly is revealed that more minds are essential for deeper clarity and understanding, especially when dealing with complex issues. I am grateful to know people who are smarter than me.

My sincere thanks to the many people with different faiths, philosophies, expertise, and points of view who contributed to the creation of this book. In what follows is no intention to be right, only to present facts and reasonable ideas that hopefully will facilitate understanding and decision-making.

–jdm, March 2021

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To Begin

No object is fully illuminated on which light shines from only one direction. This book seeks to present a clearer understanding of a fraught issue by providing illumination from multiple sides. Difficult decisions that change forever the course of a life should come from a place of reasoned and rational inquiry, mediated by compassion and free from guilt or shame. It is hoped that what follows will help both women and those around them who may be wrestling with the choice of whether or not to undergo an abortion. It is a difficult and personal decision that has consequences. If that choice is mediated by issues of ethics, morality, or biblical interpretation, then what follows will be revealing.

The Issue at Hand

Few issues inspire emotions and controversy in the way abortion does; even the word can bring discomfort. Nevertheless, most people know of someone who has undergone the procedure, irrespective of their belief system. There are people, both secular and religious, who believe abortion is unethical and/or immoral and thus oppose it. Others who wrestle with the choice of whether to terminate a pregnancy seek guidance from science to gauge when termination, even if regrettable, is acceptable. And there are those who believe the rights of the mother/host are supreme and final over anything that may have taken up temporary residence within her.

In addressing the issue, there is a challenge in that different frames can be placed around the issue — religious, secular, scientific, and emotional — each of which placing limits on how we understand the ethics and morality of the decision. Secular pro-life people claim the guidance of science, and British journalist, critic, and intellectual Christopher Hitchens summed it up when he said that “if we consider the concept child means anything, the concept unborn child can be said to mean something,” with the

unborn child worthy of equal protection. Among those who see abortion as a moral issue, who are not atheists, many are guided by the words of the Bible. There is no clear and simple path to reconciling all the positions and any attempt to do so should include an honest look at the basis for our various beliefs.

We have laws, both secular and religious, that tell us terminating a life is not acceptable. When it comes to abortion, however, there are questions about the definition of “life” and what it means to “terminate,” and they are not the only issues. A woman must surrender herself to playing host and incubator to that potential life for nine months, at an increasing rate of discomfort. For the entire period, she must maintain a lifestyle and regimen of nutrition that, at very least, causes no harm to the developing human. After the birth, she is obligated to love and provide care for that new being — for decades — unless she abdicates and places the child with a family or an agency and an uncertain future.

No matter which side of the abortion issue one takes, having life developing inside a woman who doesn’t want it is not a good circumstance. *Life is a gift*, many of us believe, but life can also be suffering. No one can see the future, and today’s world has no scarcity of challenges. The moment one forces *another* to bestow the gift of new human life — which carries a physical burden and decades of responsibility — it’s not unfair to be asked the basis for that demand. I have a friend who likes to joke that she never had a single bad day in the formless void before she was embodied, only after. What does it mean to insist another person bring a life into existence? On what is that belief based? What obligation does it require?

What Do We See in Communities of Faith?

There is a perception that people of faith naturally are pro-life and that the Bible demands it. Neither idea is quite true. There happens to be a great deal of variation among denominations, with some declaratively anti-abortion and others actively supporting a woman’s right to choose.

Despite a general opposition, fundamentalist churches, including conservative evangelical, non-denominational, independent Baptist, and Pentecostal movements do not have a consensus doctrine regarding abortion. Some may see abortion as a form of infanticide, however, there is no general opinion as to whether or not exceptions should be allowed when the mother’s life is in danger, or in cases of pregnancy resulting from rape or incest.

Setting aside belief, in practice there’s a striking discrepancy, with two-thirds or more of abortions being performed for women of faith. That’s a significant number of women, considering how many years the annual number of abortions in this country exceeded one million.¹ Participants in a 2014 Guttmacher Institute abortion study revealed that most had a religious affiliation — 24% were Catholic, 17% were mainline Protestant, 13% were evangelical Protestant, and 8% identified with some other religion — with only 38% claiming no religious affiliation.²

In 2015, the online newspaper *The Christian Post* reported that more than 70% of women who get abortions identified as “God-fearing” Christians, with 18% of all abortions obtained by “born-again/evangelicals.”³ Sadly, with the majority of Christian

churches not supporting the procedure, only 7% of those women said they discussed their abortion decision with anyone at church, especially since 64% felt the members of the church more likely to gossip about their pregnancy or abortion consideration rather than actually help them understand their options.⁴ More than a third said they expected or experienced a judgmental reaction from a church, while 26% said they expected or experienced condemnation from the congregation.

In 2018, Focus on the Family reiterated that many women with unplanned pregnancies go silently from the church pew to the abortion clinic, convinced that the church would gossip rather than help.⁵ They corroborated that 70% of those receiving the procedure claimed a Christian religious preference, with 43% attending church monthly or more at the time of an abortion. Sadly, only 38% of women who have terminated a pregnancy considered church a safe place to discuss pregnancy options including parenting, adoption, and abortion.

Women facing an unwanted pregnancy need the compassionate support of their community yet aren't receiving it. Are Christians ignoring a lesson from Jesus' life and ministry? When Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman in John 4:7-42, we forget that for his time it was a shocking act; the Samaritans were despised by the Jews for reasons going back centuries and no man talked earnestly to women, who were often demeaned and treated as second-class citizens. Yet Jesus was most drawn to the forsaken and despised, the marginalized, those who had stumbled and fallen. Why are women being marginalized in their own communities? Are the people doing so certain their reasons are sound?

“The Only Moral Abortion is My Abortion”

The protest is clear and strident when it comes to protecting the life of the unborn, yet so many Christian women who experience an unwanted pregnancy opt for the solution they vociferously deny other women, as the data show. Many are convinced that their need for an abortion is unique, unlike those “other” women who are doing it merely for “convenience” or as a method of birth control — they believe they are good Christians and that their babies are going to be with God. What's curious is that even while having an abortion, many have no problem being abusive during the procedure or telling their providers they are murderers.⁶ The cognitive dissonance, internal conflict, grief, and shame are all clear, but are they necessary?

Since many Christian communities accept abortion under certain circumstances⁷, the real question is not whether women *can* have abortions, but which women and for what reasons? And how should they be treated afterwards? Many women of faith who were judgmental about friends, family, and other women's decision to have an abortion, when faced with an unwanted pregnancy of their own, suddenly see a different truth. Unfortunately, they may still believe that they are somehow different from everyone else in that *they* deserve to have an abortion — while no one else does. That won't stop them from keeping it a secret, however, and living with private shame or torment.

Many people of faith don't have the spiritual tools to deal with such contradictions and aren't dissecting their faith to see which parts make proper, if any, sense. Questioning

doctrine is antithetical to the way most people of faith are raised, and doubt to the devout is the slippery slope to Hell. The Bible is clear...or is it?

Why Do We Believe This Idea is From God?

It may come as a surprise to many, but there is absolutely no scriptural witness against abortion. So where does the idea come from that the Word of God forbids it?

Evangelicals form the core of the pro-life movement, but that wasn't always the case. In fact, Southern Baptists played an integral part in the pro-choice movement prior to 1980. Even several years after *Roe v. Wade*, evangelicals were overwhelmingly indifferent to the subject, which they considered a "Catholic issue."⁸ The Christian Medical Society and *Christianity Today* sponsored a symposium in 1968, where they refused to characterize abortion as sinful, stating "individual health, family welfare, and social responsibility" were justifications for ending a pregnancy.

The Southern Baptist Convention was declaratively pro-choice before they became fervently pro-life. In 1971, delegates to the Southern Baptist Convention — the largest evangelical organization in the U.S. at the time — passed a resolution encouraging "Southern Baptists to work for legislation that will allow the possibility of abortion under such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of severe fetal deformity, and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother."⁹ They reaffirmed that position in 1974, one year after *Roe*, and again in 1976.

Shortly after the 1973 *Roe* decision was handed down, *The Baptist Press*, a wire service run by the Southern Baptist Convention, ran an op-ed praising the ruling. Their Washington bureau chief, W. Barry Garrett, said, "Religious liberty, human equality and justice are advanced by the Supreme Court abortion decision." He continued,

"Religious bodies and religious persons can continue to teach their own particular views to their constituents with all the vigor they desire. People whose conscience forbids abortion are not compelled by law to have abortions. They are free to practice their religion according to the tenets of their personal or corporate faith.

"The reverse is also now true since the Supreme Court decision. Those whose conscience or religious convictions are not violated by abortion may not now be forbidden by a religious law to obtain an abortion if they so choose."

Wallie Amos "W. A." Criswell, the Southern Baptist Convention's former president and pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas — one of the most famous fundamentalists of the 20th century — was also pleased: "I have always felt that it was only after a child was born and had a life separate from its mother that it became an individual person," he said, "and it has always, therefore, seemed to me that what is best for the mother and for the future should be allowed."¹⁰

It wasn't until 1979 — a full six years after *Roe* — that evangelical leaders, at the urging of religious conservative political activist and commentator Paul Weyrich, seized on the abortion issue. Weyrich co-founded the conservative think tank The Heritage Foundation

in 1973. He was also the one who coined the term “moral majority,” the name of the political action group that he co-founded in 1979 with Jerry Falwell.

As late as 1979, when Weyrich, Falwell, and Howard Phillips were working to establish the Moral Majority, they discovered that for the majority of the churches, denominations, and Christian colleges and universities, abortion wasn't on the list of societal evils to combat.

In this context, and knowing that abortion isn't even mentioned in the Bible, it's not unfair to say that it is actually a political issue rather than a moral or ethical one. As W. Barry Garrett advocated in *The Baptist Press*, each individual should be free to have a moral or religious viewpoint about what a person is or when life begins. No one has the right to insist on legislation with the claim that abortion is a sin against God or the Bible, because it isn't. Nowhere in the Bible does it forbid abortion.

Historical Context (Why Does Moses Have Horns?)

It's useful to take a historical view to understand why there is confusion over what the Bible teaches with regard to abortion. The books that comprise the Hebrew Bible, the basis of the Old Testament, developed over roughly a millennium. The oldest texts seem to come from the eleventh or tenth centuries BCE, while most of the other texts are somewhat later. They are edited works, collections of various sources intricately and carefully woven together. When considering the different modern Bible translations, one must also consider that within them are disagreements about translation that go back thousands of years.

In 382, long before the Great Schism of 1054 and the split of Christianity over cultural and theological differences, Saint Jerome was commissioned by Pope Damasus I to revise the *Vetus Latina Gospels*, the collection of biblical manuscripts in Latin of the Septuagint and New Testament passages used by the Roman Church. Jerome's translation, *The Vulgate*, was done from the original Hebrew Scriptures into Latin and finished in 405 (the Catholic Church would affirm the Vulgate as its official Latin Bible at the Council of Trent in the 1500s).

Unfortunately, Jerome made questionable choices in translation, which would be carried forward into the first translation into English, made by members of the English College, Douai, in the service of the Catholic Church. The Douay-Rheims Bible is still available and you can go online any time and read it for yourself. Jerome's choice in understanding the combination of the Hebrew letters *qoph, res, nun*, which could be read as either “to have horns” or “to shine,” depending on the inserted vowels, described the radiant face of Moses in the Book of Exodus 34:29-30 (DRB) thus:

And when Moses came down from the mount Sinai, he held the two tables of the testimony, and he knew not that his face was horned from the conversation of the Lord. And Aaron and the children of Israel seeing the face of Moses horned, were afraid to come near.

A Christian tradition developed that Moses had horns, a fallacy that exists even today. Jerome's mistranslation, clearly so different from anything else one can read, inspired

much art, from stained glass windows to Michelangelo’s famous sculpture for the tomb of Pope Julius II, placing it permanently into the culture. It also facilitated 1,600 years of anti-Semitism with the idea that Jews have horns and are touched by Satan.



Oviedo Cathedral, Spain; Diebold Lauber biblical illustration; Michelangelo’s *Moses*

Many centuries later, the mistranslation would be corrected to read Moses’ face “shone” or “beamed” with the light of divine revelation, but the damage was done. I have personally met people who believe that Jews have horns. So why isn’t this mistranslation — and many others that still appear in modern Bibles that have yet to be corrected — better known?

It was not until the invention of the printing press and the mass production of books that began in the sixteenth century that average people could possess and read a Bible written in their own language. It’s worth stating that when the Gutenberg Bibles were printed, the church was so against ownership of the book an individual could be put to death simply for possessing one. The word of God was reserved for the clergy, who interpreted God’s Word on our behalf. Today, we’re still led to believe that’s the best pathway to the divine.

In 1604, King James I decreed that an authorized English Bible should be prepared. A group of 54 scholars, organized into six committees, accomplished the task in 1611, creating the “Authorized Version,” the King James Version of the Bible, which would become the most read Bible in history. As context, the author William Shakespeare was writing at the time the King James Version was completed. Shakespeare produced most of his writing between 1589 and 1613. In order for modern society to understand the Elizabethan English of Shakespeare, many volumes of translation and interpretation have been written.

With all of this and knowing how language changes, it’s no surprise that many translations now exist. The New International Version is the second most read Bible¹¹ and has supplanted the King James Version as the best selling English translation.¹² The NIV was published in 1978 to meet the needs of a modern audience. It was created by a team of 15 biblical scholars, representing a variety of evangelical denominations, working from

the oldest copies of reliable texts, variously written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Each section was subjected to multiple translations and revisions, and those were assessed in detail to produce the best contextual meaning and understanding. For that reason, challenging the wording in the NIV, which we'll discuss more closely in a moment, is problematic. It is not for us to reinterpret the Bible as published. If it is and we're free to ignore words and choose our own interpretation, what good is the book for moral instruction?

One last thought is that until Gutenberg invented his printing press, every Bible would have been a manuscript and, contrary to what many believe, being written by hand they were subject to copying errors and intentional changes. We see how altering a single word, as with Moses, can have dramatic and lasting consequences. When Scriptural contradiction, reason, and biology (which we'll explore later) suggest different understandings, we may wonder if a biblical teaching or instruction is that of a scribe, a translator, or a pastor — and not necessarily the Creator.

The King James Only Movement

The King James Version of the Bible has been described as one of the most important books in English culture and is one of the most printed books, ever. It's worth taking a moment to acknowledge that there are those who believe it to be the greatest English translation ever produced, needing no further improvements. They believe that all other English translations produced after the KJV are corrupt.

It is useful to remember that, while King James “authorized” a particular translation for the Church of England in the 17th century, it is no more authoritative for us today than any other translation. It was highly criticized in its day by those who preferred earlier translations, and it went through a number of revisions.¹³ By the mid-18th century, the wide variation in the various modernized printed texts of the Authorized Version, combined with the notorious accumulation of misprints, had reached the proportion of a scandal,¹⁴ and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge both sought to produce an updated standard text. The 1769 Oxford edition became the Oxford standard text, and is reproduced almost unchanged in most current printings. The King James Version most widely used today is the 1769 revision, which includes thousands of differences compared to the original. No one today reads from the 1611 version, which also included the Apocrypha. The various corrections and standardization of spelling and punctuation caused the 1769 text to differ from the 1611 text in around 24,000 places.¹⁵

Modern translators have had the advantage of using many older Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, discovered after the King James translation. Most scholars consider these older manuscripts more reliable than those available to the 17th century team attempting to create a definitive translation and, thus, understanding. Today we have many translations, inspiring many online sites devoted to proclaiming which are the best,¹⁶ most popular,¹⁷ most accurate,¹⁸ ones to avoid,¹⁹ and even ones considered heretical.²⁰

The Question of Interpretation

How can there be so many conflicting ideas regarding the Word? The Bible is the most widely owned book that has ever existed, by far. Yet, while there is now a common canon for all Christians, this was not always the case; the Western (Roman) and Eastern churches employed different versions of the New Testament for more than a thousand years. A number of biblical canons exist, with overlapping and diverging contents from denomination to denomination. There are at least five different official versions of the Bible, each containing a different number and sequence of books, which begs the question of whose Bible is the “right” one? You can go online to biblegateway.com and look through sixty-one different versions of the Bible in English alone, none of which just appeared one day in its final form.

The preacher, poring over Scripture to understand the will of the Creator, is constrained by the version of the Bible he reads. During a recent replay of a Billy Graham Classic Crusade, Graham said, “...Someone asked me which version of the Bible I was using. The same one that Paul used, the King James Version...” This elicited laughter from the audience, although there may have been laughter for different reasons. For some, it may have been because Paul had only the Hebrew Scriptures available — the KJV wouldn’t be printed for another 1,600 years. For others, it may have been the idea that there is another acceptable version that brought a chuckle.

Graham continued preaching, saying, “...We have so many versions today, that if you stand up and quote Scripture today — and misquote it — they think you’re using another version.” His comfort with variation, and thus inaccuracy, seems a frightening admission. When a preacher proclaims abortion is a sin, are we sure he is reading from the right translation?

In considering whether a decision is in accord with biblical mandates, one must also contend with an apparent epidemic of biblical illiteracy in today’s churches.²¹ Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research claims, “Most Americans don’t know first-hand the overall story of the Bible — because they rarely pick it up.” A LifeWay Research study found only 45% of those who regularly attend church read the Bible more than once a week and almost 20% say they *never* read the Bible.²²

There winds up being a considerable gap between what the Bible contains and what people *think* the Bible contains. For example, the Bible does *not* say that Eve ate an apple in the Garden of Eden or that Satan was a fallen angel who rebelled against God or that Jonah was swallowed by a whale or that three wise men or kings brought gifts to the infant Jesus on the night he was born.²³

Most people understand Scripture through the lens of their clergy member, who chooses chapters and verses to craft an understanding or a framework through which lessons are to be derived. To question the lessons of your pastor, priest, minister, or whoever leads your congregation is to demonstrate a lack of faith. Such questioning is frowned upon to the point that people refrain from doing so even if they are struggling with apparent contradictions. What is one to do?

Read your Bible, is the answer many get. A friend who was raised Southern Baptist wrestled with many biblical contradictions. He couldn't admit them to his pastor, to his family, or to his girlfriend who was part of the congregation, for fear of being exposed as losing faith. He feared Hell, so he read, and read, and read — as he was told — and wound up an atheist.

The research on biblical illiteracy demonstrates that most people don't dig that deep; they simply accept — and then defend — the beliefs given to them. Such beliefs aren't the conclusion of a process of critical thinking, especially considering that the only time most Americans hear from the Bible is when someone else is reading it.²⁴ While 89% of households own a Bible, only 11% of Americans claim to have read the entire Bible once, and 30% have only read several passages or stories.²⁵ Whatever the quality of one's personal connection with the divine, we know that many beliefs are rote and not necessarily discovered through reading, contemplation, and introspection.

So it is with abortion, which is never mentioned in the Bible. The things we're taught from youth get planted deep and can become decoupled from the underlying rationale. Defending those beliefs can elicit what social psychologist and ethicist Jonathan Haidt calls "moral dumbfounding," in which we just *feel* something is wrong but are unable to express in words the reason why.²⁶ When we're talking about the health and safety of women and children, however, we have to do better than capitulate to feelings born of conditioning, especially at the expense of compassion and knowing that evangelicals were formerly pro choice.

What Does God Have to Say?

When it comes to the issue of terminating a pregnancy, many people of faith seek to follow the standard of morality set forth by God. There is a challenge because the Bible doesn't forbid abortion nor does it specifically speak to the issue of when life begins. However, thousands of years before *Roe v. Wade*, the Bible spoke very clearly on the subject of fetal termination in Numbers 5:11-31, the Adultery Test.

Num. 5:21-22 NIV: "here the priest is to put the woman under this curse — 'may the Lord cause you to become a cursed among your people **when he makes your womb miscarry** and your abdomen swell. May this water that brings a curse enter your body so that your abdomen swells or **your womb miscarries**.'"

Num. 5:27 NIV: "If she has made herself impure and been unfaithful to her husband, this will be the result: When she is made to drink the water that brings a curse and causes bitter suffering, it will enter her, **her abdomen will swell and her womb will miscarry**, and she will become a curse."

As hard as it may be for some people to reconcile, these passages direct priests to administer an abortifacient to induce miscarriage, a procedure that can only be described as an abortion. It is performed while invoking God, which means the procedure is sanctified by God. Yes, those forced miscarriages were administered to unfaithful women. Circumstances aside, a procedure prescribed by God's law is carried out with God's approval.

I've read rebuttal that this section in Numbers isn't about pregnancy, despite it clearly addressing the issue of sexual relations and of a wife being "impure" — which would include the issue of paternity. Any rebuttal is clearly disputed by the scholars and scriptural experts who created the New International Version, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), and the Common English Bible (CEB), since all three translations specifically claim miscarriage to be the outcome of the Adultery Test.

There are those who counter that the NIV, NRSV, and CEB are outliers, offering instead words from the King James Version and others. We know the challenges with the KJV, and the scholarship and process behind the NIV. It is curious to call the NRSV an outlier when it's the Bible of choice for most scholars, having received the widest acclaim and broadest support from academics and church leaders of any modern English translation.²⁷ It was translated by a truly cross-denominational committee (including Jews, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians) and was designed to be used for both study and liturgy.

Fortunately, one can easily see online what the most common Bibles say:

Numbers 5:22

- May this water that brings a curse enter your body so that your abdomen swells or **your womb miscarries**. (New International Version)
- now may this water that brings the curse enter your bowels and **make your womb discharge**, your uterus drop! (New Revised Standard Version)
- And may the water that brings these curses enter your stomach and **make your womb discharge and make you miscarry**. (Common English Bible)
- May this water that brings a curse enter your body. May it **make your body unable to have children**. (New International Reader's Version)
- Now may this water that brings the curse enter your body and cause your abdomen to swell and **your womb to shrivel**. (New Living Translation)
- May this water that brings a curse enter your stomach, causing your belly to swell and **your womb to shrivel**. (Christian Standard Bible)
- And this water that causeth the curse shall go into thy bowels, to make thy belly to swell, and thy thigh to rot: And the woman shall say, Amen, amen. (King James Version)
- and this water that brings a curse shall go into your stomach, and make your abdomen swell and your thigh waste away. (New American Standard Bible)
- May this water that brings the curse pass into your bowels and make your womb swell and your thigh fall away. (English Standard Version)
- and this water that causes the curse will go into your stomach and make your abdomen swell and your thigh rot. (New English Translation)

What does it mean for a woman if her abdomen swells and her thigh "rots," "wastes away," or "falls away," as is said in some versions? It's clearly a euphemism, but for what? We know the consequence of failing God's test is that she will "become a curse," but we aren't told what that means. Is she crippled? Does she die? And what happens to a life growing within her? Nothing...? As harsh as it may sound, it's hard to imagine that the

man who would go so far as to compel his wife to take the biblical adultery test would then contentedly raise a bastard child.

It seems clear that recognizing the procedure described in Numbers as an abortion is hardly an outlier position. Three translations specifically use the word “miscarry” or “discharge.” The NIRV’s claim that a pregnant woman will be made unable to have children and the NLT and CSB’s claim that a woman’s womb would shrivel all would be consequential for a woman subjected to the biblical test who was already pregnant. That means six of the ten most common Bibles describe forced miscarriage.

Clearly, these words from Numbers 5:22 are not what is said from the pulpit, and to be at odds with one’s preacher is not trivial. The essence of faith is not to question. However, one could consult Jewish scholars, since Numbers is Old Testament, derived from the Hebrew Scriptures. The Jewish people received the Torah hundreds of years before Christ was born, and Jewish scholars believe a fetus is “just water” until the 41st day.²⁸ Even after, if the pregnancy is risking the life of the mother — until the head of the child begins to emerge — the mother is saved, not the fetus.

This is because, in Jewish law and tradition, an unborn fetus is not considered a person until it has been born, as Pastor Criswell believed. The fetus is regarded as a part of the mother’s body and not a separate being until it begins to exit from the womb during childbirth and has taken breath.²⁹ This view is affirmed in Genesis 2:7, where God forms man, but it is only after He “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and it was then that the man became a living being.” Job 33:4 states: “The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.” Likewise, it is made clear several times in Ezekiel 37 that bone, tendon, and skin do not suffice — it is not until breath comes into the body that there is life.

It is this rationale that allows even strict rabbis to permit abortion in the case of Tay-Sachs and other diseases to prevent what definitely would be suffering for a child if born. Understanding all of this, have Christians lost both adherence to Scripture and compassion in this conversation? The 1971 resolution by delegates to the Southern Baptist Convention affirmed the rabbis’ understanding and was in favor of the procedure to preserve individual health, family welfare, and social responsibility. Why shouldn’t that apply today?

Seeking Meaning, Finding Confusion

Understandably, a major complaint lodged against the Bible is that it can be hard to understand, especially the ornate, poetic, English Renaissance words of the KJV. Many Christians trust their internal dialogue and see their sense of right and wrong and of empathy as a direct connection to God. However, Christians believe in special powers, called gifts, and everyone’s gift is different. Members of the clergy often claim their gift is a closer communion with God, so they become the authoritative word. It makes sense to accept the wisdom or interpretation of those who have studied and devoted themselves to a task. Unfortunately, it’s not uncommon for politics to creep into our lives under the guise of holy directive. A careful reading of the Bible reveals some surprising truths.

One truth is that the available translations of the ostensibly inerrant Word of the Creator contain a lot of contradictions and errors. It's easy enough to find lists of them online. This book won't expand beyond the Moses error in EX 34:30 because the aim is not to proclaim which translations are right and which are wrong. People of faith simply should know that there is room for interpretation and that they should always check to see if a directive makes sense, especially to the heart, which from a biblical perspective is part of our spiritual makeup, comprised of our mind, emotion, will, and conscience.

We know there is room for interpretation. A lax quality of adherence to Scripture is illustrated in the fact that Christians seem unconcerned that Leviticus 20:10 states, "And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress **shall surely be put to death.**" (Yet Lev. 20:13, just three verses later, is the one that condemns homosexuals — a point of morality that appears to dominate the spectrum of sermons on Sunday mornings.) Despite the existence of Lev. 20:10 in the rules, the evangelical community had no qualms embracing an admitted multiple adulterer as president of the United States. It seems fine not to follow the Bible sometimes.

That's good, since putting adulterers to death would be illegal, regardless of what the Old Testament says. Even with a new covenant in the New Testament, we're left with a challenge in that sometimes what you hear from your preacher may have come from a mistranslation.

Who Gets to Decide?

When facing difficult choices that are caught between conflicting beliefs, how do we decide what to do? If the NIV, NRSV, CEB, NIRV, NLT, and CSB are correct, then sin is not the moral imperative in the abortion decision. We're left with the spirit of what it means to be a person of faith; we're left with our desire to be good and ethical humans. To say that abortion is sanctified by God is only to say it *can* be done. It is not the same as saying it *should* be done.

To make abortions illegal, however, can be seen as an attack on people of faith. Num. 5:16 says, "The priest shall bring her and have her stand before the Lord." The Bible says it is God who decrees a woman "shall become a curse" and be denied the miracle of childbirth. And it would be a curse — women understand the gravity of having a pregnancy terminated. And if the Lord has judged that sometimes termination is required, it is not for the government to outlaw it. Is not religious freedom guaranteed by our Constitution?

According to Jewish belief, the five books that comprise the Torah — *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* and *Deuteronomy* — were given to Moses by God during the Exodus. In studying those books, Jewish scholars see no possibility of murder in terminating a pregnancy within the first 41 days. As mentioned, this is because they don't yet see the fetus as a human being, but only as "water."

Science, however, doesn't see a fetus as just water; it says the fusion of egg and sperm immediately forms a genetically distinct entity. It will go through a process of replication, specialization, and organization until it forms a new human that emerges from its mother's

maturation chamber/womb. At all times, it is genetically and distinctly human. Science takes no position on terminating a pregnancy but makes clear that without the mother providing life support for most of the process of development, that developing human has no future.

A central concern in the secular pro-life movement is for that candidate human's future. They see the killing of an embryo as depriving it of a future that is as much its right as ours. They conclude that eliminating a possible future through abortion is wrong and immoral.

That future is what troubled the Supreme Court in trying to determine when a fetus became "viable," or eligible for that future, which they believed was sometime between the beginning of the sixth and seventh months of pregnancy. Their opinion in *Roe v. Wade* was: "We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to the answer."

Under these circumstances, in making a just choice, we should embrace the Creator's gift of being able to follow a path of systematic and rational inquiry, look carefully and reverentially at the creation, and use the eyes and heart the Creator gave us to see and understand the divine design — despite any preacher's insistence on the "correct" way to relate to the ever-shifting words of men.

Can We Glean God's View?

Why argue over biblical translations? If one believes there is a Creator, then humans, as part of the creation, are the realization of divine intent. Everything is designed as it must be, which is part of the reason we study biology: to understand the design. The Creator is generally thought to be beyond human conception or reasoning, yet would be revealed throughout the creation just as a painting suggests the presence of the artist and offers a small window into his or her mind.

People of faith believe that God doesn't make mistakes. Everyone knows what a miscarriage is and it is a biological mechanism from the Creator that makes it clear that not every fertilization is viable. We know that 30–50% of fertilizations end spontaneously. It's possible that number is even higher, since the failure of a fertilized egg to attach to the uterine lining or find viability within the first month would be indistinguishable from normal monthly menstruation. A large number of women have irregular periods and sometimes skip a month, which also would mask a miscarriage and the true percentage of terminated embryos.

Religious pro-lifers proclaim and seek to codify law based on a notion that life begins at the moment of conception. However, a biological mechanism that terminates at least half of those potential humans makes clear that God does not agree. It seems far more likely that Jewish scholars understand divine intent, especially with regard to the first trimester. More important, codifying life from the moment of conception, when half of fertilizations spontaneously end, proclaims God guilty of mass murder under man's law. Is that what Christians should believe? Science will agree that technically there is life, but it won't be viable for quite some time. Biologically speaking, we are designed with a waiting period.

A dear friend who teaches biology likes to joke how it's probably better that people don't understand how their bodies actually work: if they ever grasped the huge number of biological and chemical processes that have to go right at any given moment just so that they don't die, they would be horrified. Whether you believe in God or evolution, the human body is truly a wonder and a human being may be the most complicated thing in the universe. In reproducing the six billion base pairs of our DNA, it's not surprising that the Creator gave us a biological time period that looks at development and says, "Hmmm... I don't like the way this is turning out."

Most women understand this period of questioned biological viability. Many will wait months before announcing to friends and family that a new life is on the way. In the event of miscarriage, they don't call God a murderer.

The choice to undergo an abortion is the choice to interrupt the biological development that creates new life. Miscarriage is also a process that interrupts biological development. Its prevalence provides a window into the Creator's intention regarding the developmental period should we consider intervening. Certainly, God's will is not transferable to mankind for acts taken by choice, but are we sure we understand God's point of view?

Numbers 5:11-31 is a lengthy passage that describes in detail the test that permits priests to perform forced miscarriages. The biological design of humans provides a period of viability to see if development is even possible. An insistence that "life begins at the moment of conception" creates an emotional word-prison where murder is the necessary consequence of termination. Biologically, new human life "begins" with conception, but in a latent sense, in the way an exposed negative will be a picture — eventually, and at the end of a series of processes that bring fruition to intention. Biologically, the fertilized egg begins with an initial stage where it is merely a clump of cells, replicating by doubling its mass in a manner that, using a biological lens, is basically indistinguishable from the way a tumor grows.

Taking a cell's-eye view in looking at our design and development helps us avoid emotional word-prisons. For the first month, you could be shown an embryo from a chicken, a fish, a dog, and a human and you couldn't tell them apart. Proclaiming "human" or "child" confirms genetics, but more so is an attempt to give the still-dividing cells a face in order to stimulate empathy and make them seem like a minuscule person, immediately viable outside of the womb. They aren't.

Shouldn't we trust that the Creator doesn't make mistakes? When considering the moment life first demands protection, should we ignore the Creator's biologically banal, if emotionally painful, mechanism of miscarriage? How can the notion of labeling the Creator a murderer with man's laws, or attempting to ban His sanctioned process of induced miscarriage cause anything other than outrage among people of faith? We should embrace the Creator's gift of being able to follow a path of systematic and rational inquiry, look carefully and reverentially at the creation, and use the eyes the Creator gave us to follow His will — irrespective of mistranslated words.

What Can We Learn From Biology?

Everything is designed as it must be. We're blessed to have the tools, cognitive and technological, to be able to witness and understand that design by studying the mechanisms of biology. What's been revealed has allowed us to create medicines, surgical techniques, replacement parts, and an extraordinary array of capabilities that lengthen and enhance life. We've solved the ancient mystery that challenged our ancestors: how do humans actually create new life?

The transformation of a fertilized egg, a single cell, into a fully-formed baby with 30–40 *trillion* cells³⁰ is awe-inspiring. We're quite familiar with the end product, but calling an embryo or a fetus a “baby” is not biologically correct. During the process of development, the growing fetus goes through three distinct stages, each characterized by specific events. It takes around 24 weeks to reach a threshold of “viability” where that developing human has any chance to survive outside the womb, although from that point to 35 weeks, the developing child could only do so with the intervention of advanced modern medical technology. It is only at 37 weeks that a fetus is considered an “early term” baby capable of surviving outside the womb, although the brain and lungs won't be fully mature for weeks.

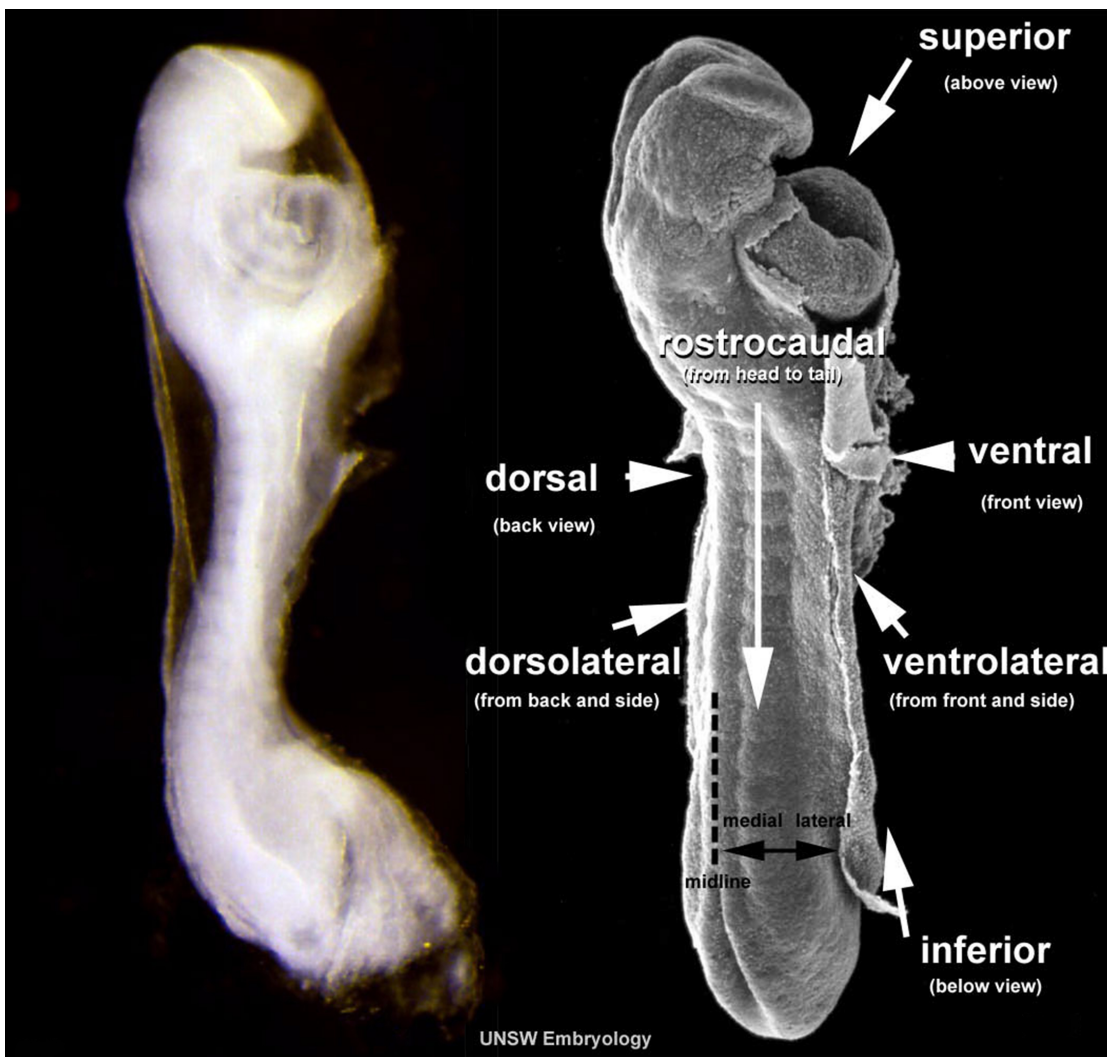
Likewise, saying that a new life begins at *the moment of conception* is technically true, yet it is a word-prison by means of an emotional framing that works counter to deeper understanding. Contrary to what one may believe from seeing the shocking images on anti-abortion protest signs, here's a closer look at the actual milestones a developing life in utero typically reaches, looking only at the first trimester (12 weeks) — the period during which nearly 90% of abortions occur — specifically from four to eight weeks, the second half of what's called the embryonic period.



https://embryology.med.unsw.edu.au/embryology/index.php/Embryonic_Development³¹

In the process of fertilization, an already-living sperm and egg fuse to create a one-celled entity known as a zygote. It is an instruction manual for growing a new human, encoded in living tissue. The zygote takes three or four days to travel from the fallopian tube to the uterus, dividing into 100 or more identical cells along the way. Now called a blastocyst, it will implant into the endometrium (the membrane lining the uterus) a day or two later, where it continues to grow and divide.

It will take almost three weeks for the dividing cells to organize into a little ball, or an embryo. By this time, the first nerve cells have formed. During the first four weeks, the placenta develops, which will transfer nutrients from the mother to the embryo, and transfer waste away from the embryo. At this point, the developing human is smaller than a grain of rice. Can you call it a baby? Sure, but that wouldn't be accurate. Is this highly magnified object what you picture in your mind when you hear the word baby?



Hill, M.A. (2021, January 20) **Embryology Stage11 bf2.jpg**. Retrieved from https://embryology.med.unsw.edu.au/embryology/index.php/File:Stage11_bf2.jpg (left); <https://embryology.med.unsw.edu.au/embryology/index.php?curid=6905t> (right)

At five weeks, the tiny tadpole-like embryo hasn't even grown to the size of an apple seed. It is made up of three layers — the ectoderm, the mesoderm, and the endoderm — which will later produce all of the organs and tissues. The brain, spinal cord, and nerves develop from the neural tube, which is starting to organize from the top layer — the ectoderm. The heart and circulatory system begin to take shape in the middle layer, or mesoderm, and the tiny heart begins to beat. The third layer, or endoderm, will become the lungs, intestines, and early urinary system, as well as the thyroid, liver, and pancreas. In the meantime, the primitive placenta and umbilical cord are already functioning, delivering nourishment and oxygen to the developing embryo. Is this what you picture when you consider that seed-sized “baby” at five weeks, likely still unknown to the woman yet now eligible under a “heartbeat law”?

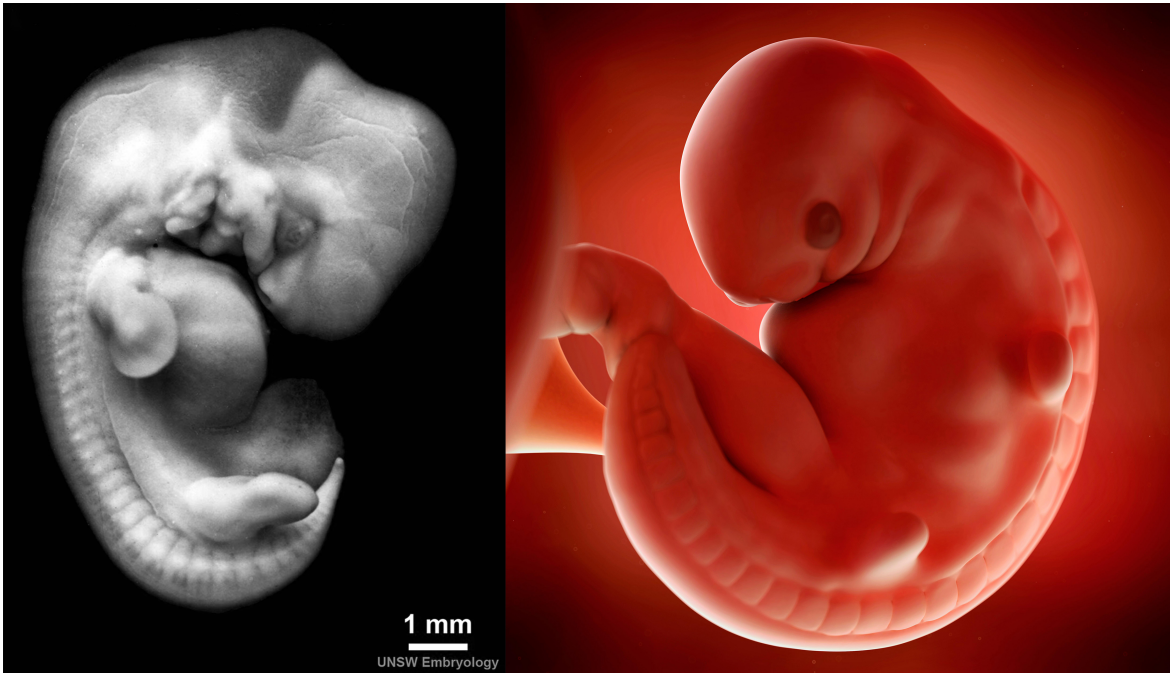


Apple seed; <https://embryology.med.unsw.edu.au/embryology/index.php?curid=7298>

At six weeks, that developing human's heart is “beating” at a rate twice as fast as ours, which we know only because an ultrasound machine can detect the electrical signals being fired by the developing heart's “pacemaker” mechanism. That heart is certainly not functioning in a way that is capable of sustaining life. With much growth still to happen, there is no audible heartbeat detectable by a stethoscope. Overall, the embryo is still less than half an inch in length, although there are many changes in development. Facial features are beginning to form and there are dark spots where the eyes and nostrils will be. Small depressions on the sides of the head signify where the ears will grow and the tongue and vocal cords are beginning to develop, as well. The arms and legs form into tiny paddles. The backbone extends into a small tail that will disappear within a few weeks.

Are you picturing that six-week old embryo, likely still unknown to the future mother? Do you see an innocent baby in your mind and does it resemble the one that follows...? These questions are asked to keep us from being trapped in an emotional word-prison: “murdering babies” is clearly unacceptable; for most people, “terminating the biological development of a potential human” doesn’t have the same emotional charge, allowing a more level-headed inquiry into our beliefs and whether the Creator would approve.

Is this what you pictured...?



<https://embryology.med.unsw.edu.au/embryology/index.php?curid=18872>) (left)
Science Photo Library / Alamy Stock Photo (right)

Below is the developing embryo at seven weeks. It has grown to about the size of a blueberry, shown for comparison. It’s starting to take shape, with eyes, nose, mouth, and ears starting to look more defined. The arm and leg buds are growing longer. The main parts of the eye are starting to develop, although won’t be fully formed for a few weeks. The stomach, esophagus, and digestive organs are just starting to develop. It’s clear this developing human isn’t viable on its own. It’s difficult to see the inherent dignity asserted by pro-life advocates.



<https://embryology.med.unsw.edu.au/embryology/index.php?curid=7726>; blueberry

Within 24 hours after fertilization, the egg that eventually will become a baby rapidly divides into many cells. It clearly is living tissue, but those trained in medicine, philosophy, theology, and law can't agree as to whether this constitutes life. By the eighth week of pregnancy, the embryo will be called a fetus. Is that an unborn child? Again, medicine, philosophy, theology, and law say different things. At eight weeks, the fetus has taken on familiar characteristics: its arms and legs are growing, and it now has little fingers, as well as a nose and upper lip. That developing human has only grown to the size of a grape, 5/8 of an inch long and about 1/30 of an ounce. Is it worthy of protection? Of course! We clearly can tell it's a human child, however there is no possibility that fetus is viable but for the mother providing life support for quite some time yet while it continues crucial development. At this point, biology can't answer as to whether the fetus should be prioritized over the mother, should a choice be necessary. Do you believe God thinks it should?

About that Heartbeat

It is important to point out that many doctors are coming forward to say that the "fetal heartbeat" isn't a real medical point in fetal development.³² The distinctive thump-thump sound that we identify as a heartbeat is produced by the opening and closing of the heart's valves. At six weeks of gestation those valves don't exist.

There is always variability in biological development but the general consensus is that around 21-23 days after conception two groups of cells that form a horseshoe shape fuse together to form a tiny, hollow tube, known as a heart tube. Initially, it is very simple; it's straight, a bit like a straw, and doesn't have the chambers that are typical of a developed heart.

Very soon after the tube forms, some cells of the tube begin to contract spontaneously, their electrical discharge creating the first "heartbeat," detectable by an ultrasound scan

although the heart isn't pumping blood. This generally happens a few days into the sixth week.

Over the next several days, the heart tube elongates and loops, bending and twisting into a more recognizable heart shape. It still has yet to become the characteristic four chambers and four valves, and the veins and arteries, including the aorta, must also develop.³³

The last key element of the heart that begins to develop are those sound-producing valves, which are important flaps between the upper and lower chambers and between the ventricles and the major arteries. Those valves make sure blood moves only in one direction through the heart.

It takes about 9-10 weeks for the valves to form.³⁴ By the end of week 10, the heart is fully formed and is beating normally, yet continuing in its development. There is, for example, some fine tuning of the valves later in pregnancy, and the entire heart continues to grow. Scientists are able to identify all of the major structures in the tenth week. As one cardiology textbook explains, "The heart is the first functional organ in the mammalian embryo; however, its full development spans the whole intrauterine period and is finished only in the postnatal period."³⁵

The exact developmental timeline of the human heart remains elusive. Owing to the complexities (both technical and logistical) of exploring development in utero, we understand little of how the ventricular walls develop. Cardiac muscle also changes its composition and structure over time, including a shift to a more mature helical organization well into the second trimester.³⁶ That helical structure allows the peristaltic wave of successive activation, the sequence of which creates systemic blood circulation.³⁷

To hear a true heartbeat using a stethoscope, one must wait 20-22 weeks. Even at that point, oxygen comes not from the lungs but from the mother, via the placenta, so fetal blood circulation is not yet sustaining life.

The Brain and the Question of Consciousness

In considering whether terminating a pregnancy is ethical or moral, the central disagreement seems to rest in a declaration that life begins at the moment of conception — thus, ending that life is seen as the murder of a child, despite the biological inaccuracy of the label "child." Can you "murder" an aggregation of cells that have no emotions, feelings, awareness, thoughts, personality, or capacity for memory? To be considered a being, does one need consciousness, as many argue?

All living cells respond to outside stimuli, yet just seeing a response makes no commentary on how a living organism relates to the stimulus. The reaction can't be claimed as an issue of consciousness since no one can say what proves consciousness. We *can* say, however, that without a brain, consciousness is highly unlikely, which is why comparing a fetus to a coma patient, a point brought up in pro-life commentary, isn't applicable.

During brain development the neural tube closes around week 6 or 7, at which point the brain separates into three parts: front brain, midbrain, and hindbrain. These three parts will eventually develop into the specialized regions of the brain and the cerebrum will fold into the left and right halves. From the time the neural tube closes, around week 7, the brain will grow at a rate of 250,000 neurons per *minute* for the next 21 weeks (a newborn's brain has more than 100 billion neurons).³⁸ The fetal brain stem, which controls vital functions like heart rate and breathing, is almost entirely developed by the end of the second trimester, and the cerebral cortex, responsible for voluntary actions, thinking, and feeling, doesn't take up its duties until the third trimester, around the end of pregnancy.³⁹ The fetus is emitting its own brain waves by the seventh month.

Brain development in the third trimester is marked by the rapid development of neurons in the brain and explosive growth. The cerebellum is the fastest-growing part of the brain in the third trimester. This is the part responsible for motor control, so the developing child will begin to move more, wiggling fingers and toes, stretching, and kicking. The developing child's brain will triple in size during this time, growing from a little over 3 ounces to almost 11 ounces at birth.⁴⁰

The hippocampus is thought to be the center of memory (contextual and working) and emotional reactivity. While it is one of the earliest systems to begin forming, the hippocampus is not fully developed at birth; that takes about two and one half years. An interesting effect of this is infantile amnesia — most people do not have declarative memories from their first couple of years of life.⁴¹

An embryo doesn't have fear, joy, or cognitive experiences. It can't experience anticipation or loss. A child isn't just an aggregation of cells with identifiable DNA, it is a conscious being with emotions, feelings, thoughts, and a personality. We have multiple imaging technologies that let us watch in real-time how emotions and feelings activate specific parts of the brain — parts that don't exist early in human development. Babies, toddlers, and young children can all experience suffering. Yet we know for a fact that fertilized eggs, blastocysts, and embryos don't.

Lessons from the Creation

While followers of some religions may disagree, Sufi teacher and philosopher Hazrat Inayat Khan said, "There is one Holy Book, the sacred manuscript of nature, the only scripture which can enlighten the reader. Most people consider as sacred scriptures only certain books or scrolls written by the hand of man, and carefully preserved as holy, to be handed down as divine revelation... To the eye of the seer every leaf of the tree is a page of the holy book that contains divine revelation..."

Nature's abundance is a gift from the Creator. Within that abundance are plants that function as abortifacients, which are found in medicine in all cultures across the globe. Pharmacological methods of abortion using plants from nature are cited in medical literature going all the way back to antiquity. The scope of their use is extensive and easy enough to look up.

The practice was documented in some of the earliest writing. An herbal prescription for abortion can be found in an Egyptian papyrus dating back to the 16th century BCE. Cuneiform texts discuss the ingestion of ingredients to “return a missed menstrual period.” In Ancient Babylonian texts, scholars detailed multiple prescriptions and instructions for ending pregnancies. Hippocrates himself — the Greek physician who is considered one of the most outstanding figures in the history of medicine — prescribed their use 450 years before Christ. (Consider that the next time it is suggested abortion violates the Hippocratic Oath.) Likewise, detailed descriptions of abortifacient use are found in the works of Aristotle, one of the greatest philosophers of classical antiquity, whose influence is felt to this day through writings that covered subjects from physics, to biology, metaphysics, logic, ethics, politics, and government. Dating to 50 AD there is a 5-volume Greek pharmacopeia — an encyclopedia about herbal medicine and related medicinal substances — that details abortifacients and was widely read for more than 1,500 years.

Is it any wonder there is no law in the Bible forbidding the common practice of induced miscarriage, which is what happens in Numbers 5?

We are biological beings designed to function within an environment. Nature is filled with abortifacients, which is not to say they *should* be used, only that they were given to us as options. We are created in God’s image and must comport ourselves with that understanding, despite disagreements over the interpretation of Scripture. Jesus made it clear that love, care, and compassion are measuring tools towards that comportment. How are we showing love, care, and compassion when we deny women free access to the things in nature, in the Creation, that allow them to avoid potential pain and suffering for themselves, their offspring, and greater family?

Guilt, Shame, and Other Manipulations

Slut. Baby murderer. Your soul needs saving. You’re going to Hell.

Are you...?

Sadly, few women will publicly discuss the choice to have an abortion for fear they’ll be harassed or called murderers. Until recently, the stigma surrounding abortion seemed inviolable. And yet, the process detailed in Numbers is carried out with God’s approval; there is no condemnation. Claims of sin or murder or that women insult the sanctity of life through abortion comes neither from God nor the Bible.

The simple fact is that women who choose to terminate a pregnancy commonly report their sense of responsibility to current or future children as key to the decision.⁴² Before the 2008 financial crash, the Guttmacher Institute had found that 61% of abortion recipients already had one or more children.⁴³ In 2011, the National Abortion Federation found that 72% of women who called their hotline had already given birth at least once.⁴⁴ And yet all of them faced potential condemnation or ostracism by friends, family, or community, were forced to keep their choice secret, and lived with unnecessary guilt and shame.

How could you bring such shame to the family...?

There is often a huge social stigma associated with unwanted pregnancy. This applies even more so for teenagers and unwed mothers, who face additional shame for perceived moral failures regarding their sexual activity. There are those who see an abortion as an admission of promiscuity, not to mention bad parenting, thus it is an indignity not just for the woman but for the family.

Although abortion is common in the United States — one in four American women will have an abortion in her lifetime⁴⁵ — women who terminate pregnancies report experiencing significant social stigma, including worries about judgment, isolation, self-judgment, and community condemnation.⁴⁶ The stigma, parental shame, community whisperings of personal or moral failure — all of these offer consequences far worse than living with a secret abortion. One can always confess and ask for forgiveness. But that won't eliminate guilt or shame.

Should a woman live in silent torment because of a decision made as a teenager? Should a woman, alone and barely able to provide for her family, be forced to add an additional dependent and be pushed into poverty? Should fear, embarrassment, shame, or guilt prevent women from seeking knowledge, aid, or emotional support that would ease the decision process or offer safety? Currently, we compel many women to suffer alone in silence, hide, or lie.

Women with strong religious beliefs have even higher levels of self-judgment and greater perception of community condemnation.⁴⁷ The high percentage of abortion recipients identifying as a born-again, evangelical, charismatic, or fundamentalist Christian, means hundreds of thousands of Bible-believing women are facing terrible conflict each year. Christian ministries working with this population report that the vast majority of them will never reveal their choice to have an abortion.⁴⁸ They remain isolated, ashamed, and hide a part of themselves permanently in the shadows simply because the biblical interpretation they were given of Numbers was just wrong.

Abortion stigma reaches beyond women to abortion providers, threatening access to healthcare. This stigma hurts all women, not just those who seek abortions, as witnessed by the attempt to defund Planned Parenthood in Texas. A Texas Health and Human Services Commission study showed that the year after their funding changes took effect, the number of women served by clinics within the Texas Women's Health Program dropped 25% statewide.⁴⁹ Two of 11 HHSC regions reported drops of more than 50%.

Part of the hypocrisy is a class element: those of wealth always have and always will engage in abortions, morality aside. Wealthy men can always find a doctor to help them hide an "indiscretion." Wealthy parents can send a child "on holiday" and arrange for a procedure or an adoption. Women of means will always be able to find a "sympathetic" doctor. More typically, they have an obstetrician-gynecologist who can schedule a common diagnostic and treatment procedure called a "dilation and curettage" (D&C), which is a minor surgical procedure to remove tissue from the uterine lining, often to treat excessive or unexplained bleeding. It also can be used to perform an early-term abortion, thus providing a perfectly viable cover story.

Abortion stigma is everywhere. It's in the silence when a woman won't tell a friend about her procedure for fear of judgment. We see it in the media every time a woman who

has an abortion is portrayed as self-serving. It shows up in hospitals that exclude abortion care from their range of medical services for fear of protest. We see it in the constant barrage of laws and policies that target abortion providers and restrict access to abortion services.⁵⁰ It would be a tragedy if we were failing to provide care, comfort, and compassion because we were given the wrong understanding of Scripture's view of terminating a pregnancy.

Not If, When

Life is highly nuanced, and binary thinking doesn't allow for a real consideration of women's needs. Medically necessary abortions are performed as an act of mercy. Some women suffer with conditions such as cardiovascular disease, renal disease, preeclampsia, cancer, and intrauterine infection, all of which can imperil their lives during pregnancy. Beyond medical disorders, a lack of medical care, as well as conditions like poverty, homelessness, lack of education, and lack of a social safety net, individually and collectively can threaten a woman's well-being or her life.

There are an unfortunate number of fetal abnormalities, such as congenital birth defects, which are incompatible with life, often ending in death shortly after birth. Those conditions include spina bifida and other spinal abnormalities, anencephaly (where the brain doesn't grow), conjoined twins, genetic disorders, as well as severe heart and kidney abnormalities that are fatal. Maternal infections can also prove fatal to a developing life. Even when everything goes well and a child is born healthy, many circumstances offer risks to life and well-being.

Pro-life advocates want to believe that abortions other than for extreme medical reasons are done in lieu of birth control, for matters of convenience, or for other frivolous reasons. That is simply not the case and is a rationale to deny compassion. Because of the legitimate hazards that face pregnant women, physical and otherwise, it behooves us to really understand the basis of our feelings about this common health procedure and those who undergo it. It makes sense that Southern Baptists previously urged legislation to allow the possibility of abortion in the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother. We'd do well to remember that.

Economic Oppression.

When women are asked why they want to end a pregnancy, the most common reasons are financial — in particular, not having enough money to raise a child or support an additional child.⁵¹ Women denied an abortion are more likely than women who received one to experience economic hardship and insecurity lasting years.⁵² Laws that restrict access to abortion may result in worsened economic outcomes. That's saying a lot since 75% of women who obtain abortions are low-income, with nearly half living below the federal poverty level.⁵³ Reproductive policy becomes economic policy and this denial of service worsens the hardship of those already struggling to make ends meet.

Texas abortion restrictions have led to widespread clinic closures by applying regulatory burdens, ostensibly designed to make reproductive care safer, but that in fact simply make it too costly to provide this much-needed health care. As women have lost

access to clinics in Texas and other states with similar restrictions, they have been forced to travel long distances. That has meant lost wages from taking time off work, childcare costs, paying for transportation, as well as for hotels and restaurants, both because the clinics are so far away and because many states have also imposed waiting periods and counseling requirements on women seeking abortions. The resulting delays have forced many women to bear unwanted children because they got into clinics too late in their pregnancies.⁵⁴

Low-income women face the prospect that the procedure will become so costly as to be essentially illegal. Add that to an overall diminishment of affordable health-care services, and one can wonder how the pro-life movement became so concerned with embryos that it became blind to the needs and the suffering of women. Suffering is not a gift from God that we need to bestow on His behalf. That is not upholding biblical morality.

A 2018 study shows that women who were not able to get abortions had higher odds of poverty 6 months later than did women who received abortions.⁵⁵ They were also less likely to have full-time work and more likely get some form of public assistance. Both effects remained significant for 4 years. The study concluded that laws that restrict access to abortion may result in worsened economic outcomes for women, an outcome the women expected, since the most common reasons women give for wanting to end their pregnancies are financial.

Occasionally, individuals are forced to make heartbreaking decisions. Women have the right to support, not judgment or punishment, regarding the decision to terminate a pregnancy. People of faith should lead with their compassion, not their condemnation, in dealing with women who face a painful choice. Jesus preached this message over and over.

Destabilizing the Family

A shotgun wedding is one that is arranged to avoid embarrassment, often due to premarital sex that has led to an unintended pregnancy. It's a colloquialism used to describe a scenario where the father of the pregnant bride-to-be "invites" a reluctant groom to marry his daughter using a shotgun. Sure, those marriages *can* last, but often they don't, and the already unhappy families fall apart. When the institution of marriage is seen as more important than the individuals forced into it, the result diminishes the family unit.

There are enough challenges that already face newlyweds. Sadly, many marriages still end in divorce and statistics suggest marriages that occur as a result of an unplanned pregnancy have a 90% divorce rate within six years of getting married.⁵⁶ Even when a family is planned, worries, stress, bills, food insecurity, childcare, educational needs, and the mountain of other issues that face parents can all be detrimental to a successful marriage, let alone a child's development. When a couple begins a marriage with the added responsibility of raising an unplanned child, things become much more stressful.

Unplanned births are linked with child abuse and neglect. In families with two unplanned births, children are twice as likely to be victims of abuse as are children in families without an unplanned birth.⁵⁷ In families with three or more unplanned births, the risk increases five-fold. Unintended pregnancy demonstrates predictive value as one of the earliest identifiable risk-factors for child maltreatment.⁵⁸ There is a vicious cycle in that

childhood emotional, physical, and sexual abuses are all shown to increase the risk of having an unplanned pregnancy later in life.⁵⁹

Many marriages end in divorce, and financial hardship plays a major role. 59% of Americans who have gotten divorced within the past five years said finances played a role in their divorce.⁶⁰ Couples who argue about finances once a week are 30% more likely to end their marriage.

The uncomfortable truth for pro-life advocates is that the option for abortion strengthens families. The procedure frees families from being victims of circumstance and allows them to choose the time and conditions that optimize success in building a healthy family. They free those who shouldn't be married from committing to an unhealthy union just for the sake of an unplanned child. People of faith should support the things that allow families to maintain stability and flourish. An unwanted child is *not* one of those things.

If This is Really About the Children...

People against choice need to advocate for and help to create better outcomes for children.

Four of the five leading causes of infant death — birth defects, preterm birth and low birth weight, maternal pregnancy complications, and sudden infant death syndrome⁶¹ — are closely connected to a pregnant woman's access to prenatal health care. Georgia, Ohio, Missouri, Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi have passed some of the most restrictive abortion policies in the nation. They also have the highest rates of infant mortality in the nation.⁶² Take a moment to really contemplate that fact — that the places with the most restrictive abortion policies have the *highest* rate of infant mortality — and it becomes evident that their solution is a problem.

The numerous problems associated with maternal poverty are well known and cannot be overstated. The American Academy of Pediatrics released a policy statement called *Poverty and Child Health in the United States*, based on extensive research.⁶³ It states that children who experience poverty, particularly during early life or for an extended period, have increased risk of many adverse health and developmental outcomes throughout their lives. Poverty has a profoundly detrimental effect on specific circumstances such as birth weight, infant mortality, language development, chronic illness, nutrition, and injury. Child poverty also influences genomic function and brain development, later causing poor school performance and peer relationships, among other challenges. Additionally, children living in poverty are at increased risk of having difficulties with self-regulation and executive functions such as working memory, self-control, and cognitive flexibility.

In 2019, the year with the most recently available data, 14% of children under age 18, or 10.5 *million* children, were living in poverty,⁶⁴ which brings lifelong hardship. Poor developmental and psychosocial outcomes are accompanied by a significant financial burden, not just for the children and families who experience them but also for the rest of society. Children who do not complete high school, for example, are more likely to become teenage parents, to be unemployed, and to be incarcerated, all of which exact heavy social and economic costs. A growing body of research shows that child poverty may contribute to the development of chronic cardiovascular, immune, psychiatric, and

substance-use disorders. The economic cost of child poverty to society can be estimated by anticipating future lost productivity and increased social expenditure. A study compiled before 2008 projected a total cost of approximately \$500 billion each year through decreased productivity and increased costs of crime and health care, nearly 4% of the gross domestic product.⁶⁵ Other studies of “opportunity youth,” young people 16 to 24 years of age who are neither employed nor in school, derived similar results, generating aggregate lifetime costs in the trillions.

Is this the world we are compelled to make when considering the lessons in Scripture, because this is the reality.

Denying the Future?

Secular pro-life people make the argument that abortion deprives the fetus from future experiences or value. That assumes what awaits affirms the precious nature of life. For those who weren’t planned or wanted, the more likely future is quite the opposite, since so many are born into poverty and poor circumstances. Physical and cognitive development are so negatively affected by poverty that their effects will last a lifetime. It’s specious reasoning to demand protection for the future experiences of the unborn without offering protection *from* those same experiences.

What secular rationale is there to force new life into existence only to have it suffer decades of poverty, physical impairment, pain, abandonment, hopelessness, or violation? Life isn’t always a gift. An estimated 26% of Americans ages 18 and older suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year⁶⁶ and almost 10% of those “saved” from abortion will suffer from a depressive illness (major depression, bipolar disorder, or dysthymia). Can pro-life activists insure that the experiences awaiting the lives they want to force into existence are ones anyone would want?

Yes, those never born will be denied a future, although for many it is a future delayed, not denied. A 2012 Canadian study revealed 53% of the women who received an abortion said they wanted children in the future, with another 29% still unsure.⁶⁷ The data show that abortion is not reducing the birth rate. When we look at the period from 1973-2017, we see a longstanding decline in pregnancy rates among people aged 24 or younger, whereas pregnancy rates among older age-groups have been increasing since 1973, with the rate for those 40 or older reaching a historic high in 2017. Among women aged 30-40 and older, the rate of abortions has stayed relatively stable since the late 1970s, during which time birth rates have largely increased.⁶⁸

Meanwhile, those “denied a future” are also denied a future with decades of misery and pain, often a by-product of forcing unwanted humans into existence. There is no justification in ethics, morality, nor in science for condemning a new life to suffer or to live without love.

Escaping the Word-Prisons

Words are surprisingly messy things, prone to misunderstanding. I could tell you that my favorite color is blue, but you wouldn’t know which paint sample to pick at the store.

Did I mean the pale hue of a sky blue, the deep vibrancy of a cobalt, or the more violet periwinkle blue? Words can have multiple meanings, so clarity is key and context can be crucial. Just ask Moses...

Aside from multiple meanings, words have different emotional contexts, which can pull us in or drive us away depending on how the heart responds. Does the thought of a *family reunion* fill you with joyous anticipation or deep dread? If I say, “you’re doing a heckofa job,” am I congratulating or mocking you? Your emotional interpretation will certainly have an impact on the choice you next make.

A third potential for confusion lies in the metaphor frame that surrounds a word or an idea. In today’s politically charged world, if I say *freedom*, will you know what that means? If I say, “go to the table and help yourself to some *food*,” and you saw plates of crickets and dog, would you agree they were food? That would depend on the individual. What about dietary taboos that add disgust or sin to the equation? And if I labeled someone a sinner, wouldn’t you first need to know the label was valid beyond mere opinion?

So it is with abortion: are you a sinner, are you a murderer, are you selfish and without compassion? And if so, do you deserve support or contempt? There is a tremendous amount of guilt and shame, anger, and accusation that accompanies the procedure. A woman likely won’t admit the choice or her needs to her family or friends. Assuming you choose to undergo the procedure, how do you grieve while processing potential hatred?

And how does all of this change once you realize that abortion is sanctified by God?

Exodus 21:22 KJV says, “If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman’s husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.”

Said more clearly:

Exodus 21:22 NRSV- “When people who are fighting injure a pregnant woman so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no further harm follows, the one responsible shall be fined what the woman’s husband demands, paying as much as the judges determine.”

If God’s law as codified in Exodus states that causing a miscarriage is subject to a simple fine, then why do so many people of faith unquestioningly lock the word abortion into a word-prison where it can only mean murder and sin? Should a woman join a fight club to circumvent the mistaken taboo? The misunderstanding and misinformation about abortion has created a culture of fear, shame, loathing, and secrecy associated with this common and God-approved procedure.

The Bible’s Conflicting Messages

In seeking to use the Bible to validate an anti-abortion stance, the clergy provide an array of passages that *suggest* a law, which only proves the point: there isn’t one, and induced miscarriage is not forbidden. They seek implicit justification since there is no explicit prohibition, and wind up playing spiritual connect-the-dots with biblical passages. There is no passage or directive to counter the procedure in Numbers, so preachers proclaim they know God’s *true* intent by weaving together pieces of scattered verses:

Psalm 139:13 “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.”

Isaiah 44:2 “This is what the LORD says — he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you:”

Regarding these two passages, God creates *all* living things and humans aren’t the only creatures with wombs. Nothing is said to confer any special status to human fetuses nor that being “formed” or “knit” precludes terminating a pregnancy. Also, Psalm 139 continues at 139:15 with, “My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.” There is clearly metaphor being employed.

Jeremiah 1:5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart...”

This passage is in specific reference to one person — the prophet Jeremiah — whom God anointed. One need only read the rest of the sentence that has been omitted: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” Since we are not all chosen to be divine prophets, this verse cannot be construed as applying to any fetus except the unborn Jeremiah.

If anything, this reference to the Creator’s foreknowledge of the future reminds us that He would be able to foresee the modern controversy about abortion and take the simple step of plainly stating if it was wrong or prohibited, as done with the Commandments. But He didn’t.

Luke 1:15 “...and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born.”

This tells us that the 50% of fertilized eggs that spontaneously miscarry are also filled with the Holy Spirit. Clearly, it doesn’t trouble the Creator that they are not born, since miscarriage is His design.

Psalm 127:3 “Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him.”

For *wanted*, intentional pregnancies, children are a reward (or “gift,” as some translations say). A “reward” is something given in recognition, without obligation, and the recipient has the option to refuse it. By definition, rewards and gifts are not forced upon the recipient. This psalm offers yet another opportunity to specify any displeasure with abortion or induced miscarriage; yet nothing is said.

That God knit our inward parts or knew us before we were born sets no understanding or expectation of how long our lives should continue. In fact, the Bible reveals that we have been given fractional lifespans. Genesis 5 teaches that the early patriarchs often lived nearly 1,000 years, even fathering children when several hundred years of age. The ten patriarchs after Noah had an average lifespan well over three hundred years, concluding with Abraham, who lived a mere 175 years. Today, the average lifespan is only 70–80 years, as echoed in the 90th Psalm. The Creator may have formed us, but appears unconcerned with the length of human life. That isn’t surprising, since we’re told that

children before the age of accountability go straight to Heaven. At the end of the day, we're left with the simple truth that we are mortal and our lifespans are brief.

Clergy are content to ignore the words in Numbers while seeking scriptural justification to oppose abortion. They also ignore the design of the creation and of humans. We need only acknowledge the hand of the Creator, who installed in women a biological mechanism that terminates — not murders — half of all “unborn children” to escape that word-prison. Being pro-choice is not a declaration that killing is somehow okay.

Exodus 20:13 says flat out, “You shall not murder.”

That's a pretty clear directive and still Moses takes violent vengeance on the Midianites in Numbers 31, per God's instruction:

15 “Have you allowed all the women to live?” he asked them. **16** “They were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and enticed the Israelites to be unfaithful to the Lord in the Peor incident, so that a plague struck the Lord's people. **17 Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man,** **18** but save for yourselves every girl who has never slept with a man.

Even where there is a clear directive, there can be questions of interpretation and implementation. There is a separate discussion to be had about justified killing versus murder, as a great amount of killing happens in the Bible, but that's not for this conversation. Murder in Jewish law is based upon Exodus 21:12, where it is written: “He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.” The Hebrew word for “man” in this use would not include a fetus, which wouldn't be considered a person until it had egressed into the air of the world, since they see breath as part of the soul. (Thus, terminating an unborn fetus is not considered murder.) We're left with the fact that there is no biblical directive against forced miscarriage, yet there is a process for it, a person sanctioned to do it, and all the necessary ingredients freely offered by nature.

And as for Children...

I'm sure there are people of faith who remain unconvinced by all of this and still cry out, but they're *killing children!* If their objections to abortion are based in the Bible, then they should consider the passages that discuss the killing of children, some of which are rather harsh.

2 Samuel 12 tells of David and Bathsheba, who sinned in adultery. They had a child through that affair, which displeased the Lord.

13 Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Nathan replied, “The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. **14** But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the Lord, **the son born to you will die.**” **15** After Nathan had gone home, **the Lord struck the child** that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. **16** David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and spent the nights lying in sackcloth on the ground. **17** The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them. **18** On the seventh day **the child died.**⁶⁹

The simple truth is that there are many verses where grievous harm comes to children, including:

Exodus 13:12 “you shall devote to the Lord the **first offspring of every womb**, and the first offspring of every beast that you own; the males belong to the Lord.”

1 Samuel 15:2 “Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. **3** Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but **kill both man and woman, child and infant**, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’”

2 Kings 2:23 “He went up from there to Bethel, and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, ‘Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!’ **24** And he turned around, and when he saw them, he **cursed them in the name of the Lord**. And two she-bears came out of the woods and **tore forty-two of the boys**.”

Psalms 137:7 “Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom the day of Jerusalem, who said, ‘Raze it, raze it, to its very foundation!’ **8** O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed, happy the one who repays you as you have served us! **9** Happy the one who takes and **dashes your little ones against the rock!**”

Hosea 13:16 “The people of Samaria must bear their guilt, because they have rebelled against their God. They will fall by the sword; **their little ones will be dashed to the ground, their pregnant women ripped open.**”

It is important to point out that Abraham has no notion that God will spare the child he sets out to sacrifice in Genesis 22:

1 “Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ **2** He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and **offer him there as a burnt offering** on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.’”

This troubling passage says that to be faithful to the Lord in the harsh environment of the Old Testament, you had to be prepared in your heart to murder a child.

These aren’t the only passages that reveal the uncomfortable truth that God often shows no concern for children. Not a single fetus, infant, or baby was invited to join Noah in the Ark. The examples above don’t include common ones like killing innocent babies in Egypt as punishment when Pharaoh refused to release the Israelites (Exodus 11:1-10), the total annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah, which included both children and pregnant women (Genesis 19:23-29), and throughout Deuteronomy, God commands the faithful to completely destroy the people in the lands they will be invading with no exemption for children or pregnant women (Deuteronomy 2:34; 3:6; 20:16-18).

These passages appear in stark opposition to an Old Testament that generally displays an overriding sense of justice, a remarkable egalitarian emphasis on the rights of the individual, and a concern for the welfare of the sick and the poor. The fact remains that there is destruction and slaughter brought upon enemies that in no way would adhere to the Geneva Convention. Modern society has moved beyond a wide array of questionable

behaviors in the Bible that no doubt were influenced by the tribal culture, regional violence, and lack of scientific knowledge of that period. To use biblical morality in an attempt to restrict abortion, one must judiciously turn a blind eye to quite a few passages, particularly its treatment of children.

Let's Actually Reduce Abortions

To be pro-choice is not to be pro-abortion. Even those who are pro-choice would rather a woman not have to go through the procedure. A challenge in reducing abortion rates is that it is impossible to separate the abortion issue from the issue of sexuality. Regardless of your opinion as to when young humans should engage in sexual activity, we know from a biological perspective when the hormones start acting on the brain, what they control, and that arguing with the hormones is a losing battle. The fact that young teenagers of a past era were considered marriageable certainly made the conversation easier as to whether sex belongs only within the confines of marriage. People of faith have an uncomfortable choice: studies confirm that more comprehensive sex education lowers abortion rates.⁷⁰ Studies confirm that better access to contraception lowers abortion rates.⁷¹ Abstinence can still be encouraged, but it is a flawed policy by itself.

Unintended pregnancy rates are highest in countries that restrict abortion access and lowest in countries where abortion is broadly legal.⁷² It may seem counter-intuitive, but the fact remains that countries with the most restrictive abortion laws also have the highest rates of abortion,⁷³ accomplishing the opposite of their law's intention. If the goal is drive down the rate of terminated pregnancies, and simple actions like better education and easier access to birth control do so, should we not support all the factors that reduce them, including the ability of women to seek legal abortions? We must not allow government to eradicate the will of the Creator. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." is quite clear.

Abortion remains a normal and necessary part of many women's reproductive health, which also includes contraception, sex education, and assisted reproductive technologies. Birth control failure is more common than most people realize and all methods except abstinence are subject to failure. Even married couples being careful with the hope of a future family may have an accident. Birth control pills are 99% effective under optimal circumstances, yet, for a variety of factors, between 2 and 8 percent of women become pregnant each year while using them.⁷⁴ With more than 12 million U.S. women using the oral contraceptive pill, there can be as many as 960,000 accidental pregnancies every year. We need to increase education, optimize prevention, and provide alternatives. Abortion should be safe, legal, and rare — it is up to society as a whole to make it possible for abortion to be rare.

We have seen a steady 40-year decline in the rate of abortions during this era in which they are legal, with the abortion rate now at the lowest level since *Roe v. Wade* was passed.⁷⁵ That decline wasn't linked to new state abortion restrictions or to a drop in the number of abortion providers. Looking at data across multiple factors, it is clear that making abortions illegal would more likely increase their numbers than hasten the decline. That abortion could be made illegal, however, is shocking. The Supreme Court exists to protect us. What parent could fathom a daughter, the victim of rape, forced by the government to

nurture what the family believes is a violation growing within her? Suppose she's on her own, struggling, and that forced child would end her employment and enslave her to poverty? Neither state nor the federal government should impose suffering as a legal statute. Especially not when God has already authorized a solution to the problem of a child not from a woman's husband.

All Talk, No Action, More Hypocrisy

If you're convinced that abortion is against God, there is no real need to consider which trimester the pregnancy is in or whether the procedure actually helps a woman — a prohibition is a prohibition. There's no requirement to render aid but for your own conscience or sense of empathy. The secular case against abortion is perplexing with their curious ethical and moral gray areas. The secular argument is that "if the preborn are indeed human beings, we have a social duty to find compassionate ways to support women, that do not require the death of one in order to solve the problems of the other."⁷⁶ Most people would agree. The world would be better if abortion was never necessary because women had every support mechanism available. So what support do secular organizations offer to allow for another choice? Is there something people of faith can facilitate or learn from?

If you look online at the most prominent secular pro-life groups, you'll see none of them offer ongoing services to help women and their newborn children. Unfortunately, this underscores a key issue underlying the attempts to restrict abortion, whether religious or secular: what truly happens afterwards to those compelled to give birth and their offspring?

Raising a child involves a vast amount of learning, hopefully in advance: issues with breastfeeding, SIDS, creating a bedtime ritual, keeping your baby healthy, hormonal shifts, post-partum depression, sleep deprivation, and being overwhelmed, just to name a few. Babies are time-intensive and new mothers need help, whether around the house, running errands, preparing meals, or watching the kids so mom can sleep. The first six years are crucial, as that's the period of the greatest physical, neural, and cognitive development. And those years are expensive. Mom likely still has to work and childcare facilities consume a large portion of family income. That growing child will need medical care, multiple levels of schooling, possibly braces, after-school activities, and likely a car at some point. Who, among those demanding that life must be forced into existence, are volunteering to help? Raising a child is a massive undertaking, especially with so many women living below the poverty line.

Shouldn't we solve the problems that compel women to choose abortions before forcing women to face them? Go to secularprolife.org or prolifehumanists.org, for example, and one can see their stances, their photos, and their donation links, but you won't find the crucial resources necessary to allow another choice. Sites like feministsforlife.org declare, "We can't take away all the challenges of being pregnant or being a working or student mother, but we can empower women so that they never underestimate themselves." If only their empowerment included food, clothing, childcare, or money.

Poor or disadvantaged women facing unwanted pregnancy aren't seeking empowerment or worried they're underestimating themselves. When women in need select the link "Feeding your family" at womensdeservebetter.com, they aren't seeking the articles *5 Tips for Planning and Budgeting for Meals* or *The Do's and Don'ts of Formula Feeding*. The article entitled *Getting Help Paying for Your Food* comforts women with the message "Fortunately, there is help!" and then gives links to government food programs. That's not help, especially since, as of this revision in 2021, both the WIC and the SNAP links redirect to nutrition.gov pages that have displayed "page not found" for over a year.⁷⁷

The last link on the "Getting Help Paying for Your Food" page, embedded within "Never be ashamed of asking for help to feed your children," redirects those in need to the *5 Tips for Planning and Budgeting for Meals* article. Instead of providing a pathway to pay for food, it offers the tips: "Plan your menu for the entire week"; "Coupons, coupons, coupons"; "Go vegetarian at least once a week"; "Drink water and milk"; "Be creative and have fun." So much for giving women better choices. This is disappointing from an organization devoted to forcing women into breeding.

Where is the "six-year support" link on *any* site, secular or religious? Whether or not life begins at the moment of conception, it certainly continues once the decision is made to send it through the birth canal. Likewise, pregnancy Resource Centers claim to provide the support needed before, during, and after pregnancy, yet support after delivery seems only to include conversation.

Providing mechanisms to make abortion unnecessary, secular or religious, would be a huge gift to the world. However, something has to exist in order for it to be a choice. Finding "compassionate ways to support women" can't end in the delivery room.

Walk your talk. There's a difference between advocating for life and participating in it — or funding it. All candidate humans deserve life. Don't they also deserve a life without unnecessary suffering? We need to speak for those who can't speak for themselves. They would most certainly ask to be born into nurturing circumstances that will last throughout childhood. The first step is to ensure life-affirming options are available for all mothers-to-be.

A biblically-informed pro-life view supposedly explains human equality, human rights, and moral obligations better than its secular rivals. However, neither is doing anything that would allow women a true alternative to abortion, and both are leaving women to suffer alone. As Abraham Lincoln said, "Nothing stamped with the Divine image and likeness was sent into the world to be trodden on, and degraded, and imbruted by its fellows." What are those opposed to abortion doing to ensure that?

How to Save a Life

Here's a thought experiment for men. Women, follow along.

Your wife is in the delivery room and things have gone horribly wrong. The doctor looks you dead in the eye and says, "I don't know how to tell you this, but we can save the baby or we can save your wife, but we can't save them both. Please...now...which one do we save?"

There will never be a right answer based on an understanding of biology, morality, or law. There is only the emotional relationship between that man and his wife. In one framework, together they can create another child at another time and this woman is precious to him, is his other half — there is no question. In an equally valid situation, this couple has pursued every avenue of modern medicine at great expense and discomfort over their desire to create life. There were two previous miscarriages and this, their absolute last chance, is the culmination of both of their dreams to bring a child into the world.

Is there a correct answer? Of course not. This is a horrible choice that only the heart can decide, irrespective of dogma. Why say all of this? Because it is only our species who wrestles with these issues because we have choice. We alone have been given the capacity to reflect on human life and its place in the divine plan. Yes, we can look to the words considered divinely inspired, and we should also read from the divine word written into nature. And we should include the heart when making impossible choices and in supporting others who must do the same.

The Quality of Mercy

While off-topic, relative to the title of this book, it's worth touching upon the fact that, as a society, we seem to be terrified of death. That seems ironic considering the large percentage of the population who think they'll go to heaven, reincarnate, or otherwise enjoy an after-life.

When I was a child, my dog got sick with pancreatitis. It was a big word and a difficult topic for a young boy, and when other problems developed and it became clear the dog was suffering, we took him to the vet to be painlessly, compassionately euthanized. As a child, I was made to understand that the pain of personal loss was less important than the responsibility of mercy.

Many years later, my mother would end up in hospice with cancer. As her body slowly died, even to swallow caused her great discomfort. No one at the facility could tell me how long this would go on; they said her passing could take months. There was no discussion of mercy, of facilitating her transition, or of ending her pain by accelerating the inevitable. All they would do is make her “comfortable” by drugging her. She had no choice. That did not seem merciful to me. Yes, life is a gift — until it's a gift you want to return and have no recourse. Mercifully, my mother lasted only days.

I understand the distortion that can be added to this inquiry: sending people to heaven as a mercy is accomplished by murder, so then murder would be okay. It most certainly is not. And in the case of abortion, the claim that terminated fetuses are murdered is a word-prison that excludes the possibility of adding mercy and understanding to a woman's suffering in the decision to have an abortion. It is not supported by Scripture. Are we prepared to forsake mercy to perpetuate a mistranslation and misunderstanding?

What Does it Mean to be a Person of Faith?

Taking care of others is a foundational Christian value. Christians believe the way one renders care for those in need is a reflection of their love for Christ and their position as one of His children. It is evidence of one's salvation and the presence of the Holy Spirit within each person. St. Augustine wrote: "Charity is a virtue which, when our affections are perfectly ordered, unites us to God, for by it we love him."

The Bible has much to say about how we are to care for the poor and needy among us, well-stated with the last line of Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats ". . . Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). Christians say that when you care for someone in need, you do the will of Christ. So, when you do the opposite...? Denying abortion forces a life into an existence that has many needs and often lacks sufficient care.

James says, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, **faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead**" (James 2:14-17). A life forced into existence continues for decades — what actions are taken in ongoing support of it?

Forcing both a woman and the child she is compelled to deliver into hardship isn't ethical, isn't moral, and it isn't God's will. How many pro-life individuals know the fate of those they have "saved" even six months later? One year? Are they offering financial support and babysitter services during the terrible twos?

The Right to Exist

A regularly-heard notion within the pro-life movement is that all children have a right to exist. To explore the underlying notion would take a university-level course in philosophy. Practically speaking, the reference is to fetuses being brought to term, but has more recently been applied to the moment of fertilization. This causes a conundrum if we consider whether there is such a right in the context of whether abortion is ethical or moral.

A healthy adult male can release between 40 million and 1.2 billion sperm cells in a single ejaculation.⁷⁸ The triumphant sperm that created you was random and could easily have happened at another time with another winner. Every month a woman releases a candidate egg. It is a potential person, given the addition of a viable sperm. Does *that* potential person, washed away each month during menstruation, have a right to exist?

The more accurate question regarding a right to exist is whether a fertilized egg has the right to be brought to term. How is that applied when easily half end in miscarriage?⁷⁹ Imagine at fertilization we toss a coin and the hang-time of that toss is measured as the entire embryonic period. How is the right to exist applied as the outcome is awaited? An assignment of immediate rights is an attempt to imbue the egg with "personhood" and give it protection under the law. But one can not make demands from random probability, especially during the embryonic period. It is like asking, "Do I have a right not to have my

house destroyed by a tornado?” Conceptually, sure, but nature won’t recognize that right. Nor will the Creator. Nor should we codify that notion into law.

If the fertilized egg has no innate right to exist, at what point in development can we say the new organism does? This is what the Supreme Court decided 50 years ago.

It remains worth noting that countless people exist today because the person who would have existed instead of them didn’t survive miscarriage. It is equally true that many people exist only because their mothers previously had an abortion. What does that say of *their* right to exist?

The Right to Life

Those who oppose a woman’s right to choose call themselves “pro-life.” They see fertilization as immediately creating a *being* that must be protected, thus, to stop development is murder. To accept the premise is to necessitate the conclusion. This is a word-prison.

The abortion debate seeks to control the definition of the word “life.” When does it begin; when does it acquire human rights; what does it encompass? At the moment of fertilization, already-living haploid sperm and egg cells (each with a single set of unpaired chromosomes) fuse to create a diploid single cell (with a single set of paired chromosomes), which creates a new and distinct set of DNA. Over nine months that cell can grow into a child. But what about that cell justifies calling anyone who interrupts its replication, implantation, and specialization a murderer? Experts in medicine, philosophy, theology, and law have been unable to arrive at a consensus on a new life’s beginning, thus, when a developing embryo is entitled to rights and protection separate from its mother’s. The Supreme Court settled with the notion of biological “viability.”

Why do so many pro-life advocates focus only on the moment of emergence into the world? Simple existence is only the first step in a life’s long arc. Couples need to consider the timing and circumstances surrounding procreation. Fertilization is basic to all animals; it requires no real thought. Yet, on a spiritual level, it is one the most important choices humans make. If life is a gift from the Divine, then that gift is honored by efforts to optimize the success and well-being of both offspring and parents. The nature and complexity of our world is such that those choosing the multi-decade commitment to new life need to plan carefully. Myriad data show that unplanned fertilization creates pain and family destabilization.

Why should we consider that a handful of cells — not yet a life itself — negates careful planning and free will? Once the decision to create a new life is made, don’t we have the right to protect *that* life? A fertilization caused by accident or violence prevents the one that would have been caused through care, planning, and love. Which potential life should we deny? If every life has value and should be protected, does that include a potential future child whose existence is envisioned and carefully planned for? That life will never exist if the one caused by accident or violation is given priority. That unplanned, unwanted child, born under poor circumstances, is the result of protecting *one cell* instead of the plan for life.

We know the consequences of poverty, we know that sexual abusers can use pregnancy to control women⁸⁰, we know the range of challenges that parents face. Ample data confirm that planned pregnancies create stronger families and a better society. Most women are fertile for over 30 years and birth control is not perfect. The possibility of having an unintended pregnancy is high, which is why one in four women have an abortion. Experts across multiple disciplines don't agree that interrupting embryonic development is murder, so why should we, especially when we can see an absolute consequence of hardship?

A fertilization is not a child. To demand an accidental or forced fertilization continue until it *is* one is done at the expense of a planned life. Our ancestors didn't have the luxury of determining the timing of procreation. We do.

Gestation, whether from God or nature, has a built-in period during which the body determines the feasibility of growing one cell into 40 trillion. Easily half of all fertilizations end in miscarriage. No one is rushing miscarriages into ICUs and onto life support because they clearly aren't viable. Women who miscarry aren't investigated as potential murderers. During that same period when biological viability is being determined, shouldn't a woman be allowed an equal period of decision, of exercising free will? Both medicine and modern advancement are about improving the quality of life. Why should victims of accidental fertilization be denied the ability to optimize the conditions for the life they actually choose to create?

Legal abortion has not diminished overall birth rates; it has only served to control the timing. Prioritizing a random fertilization too often obviates the choice to have a future child who would have access to better developmental, emotional, and financial resources. Why advocate for accidental, unwanted lives instead of promoting a pathway toward lives born into love and stability?

Those of us who believe in a Creator and the value of life find no statement in Scripture defining when life begins nor any prohibition of abortion. What we do find is the Golden Rule: what you don't want done to you, don't do to others. No one wants to be forced into hardship, nor should they be. Yet many insist on forcing a child into the world when timing and circumstances will do just that. Let us be faithfully pro-life and default to the considerations of mercy, which would prioritize a planned life over an accidentally fertilized egg. A right to life should encompass more than a demand for forced existence.

Be Pro-Life

Being against abortion is not being pro-life. Being pro-zygote, the fertilized ovum, is not being pro-life. Being pro-fetus is not being pro-life. Life is the whole existence of a human being, the period of time from birth until the moment of death. Too often those who are against abortion are pro-life only until the moment of birth, and then have no further concern. How can you call yourself pro-life if the life you compel into being is likely to be full of pain, suffering, degradation, and/or hopelessness?

I am pro-life.

I refuse to cede that word to individuals whose interest in “life” only extends to humans for the 40 weeks of development.

I am pro-life because I have used the methods and practice of science to see the orchestrating hand of the Creator and the complexity of nature, of which we are a part. It inspires awe in a way that can’t be described. It conveys a sanctity on all that is within the creation. All I can do is demonstrate what it inspires by honoring the creation. I honor life.

To be pro-life is to seek harmony, peace, and joy for all humans, not strife, suffering, and scarcity. To be-pro life is to be someone who looks deeply and carefully at the gifts we’ve been given, at all of the creation, and considers what it means to live in harmony with all of it. Beyond Scripture, the Creator gave us nature, and in it we see endless examples of different possibilities with regard to life and procreation. There are female-dominated species; there are male-dominated species. There are fathers that tend to the young and mothers who tend to the young. There are monogamists and non-monogamists and ones that use sex as bribes and to curry favor. There are mothers who eat their young and young that devour each other in utero. Life is endlessly full of different choices that allow harmony with nature.

Why should the continued existence of an insentient group of cells have priority over the life of a fully-developed woman? Each possesses a natural and inalienable right to life, but what about liberty, the second of our ostensibly God-given rights? Doesn’t liberty include a life free from enslavement to breeding? Why are women being asked to give up their lives as they choose to create them because of an accident of fertilization?

The People Have Spoken

There are many polls available online that show the nation to be overwhelmingly in favor of abortion to protect the health or life of a mother. Three quarters of the nation say the Supreme Court should uphold *Roe*, which is not to say there isn’t a lot of nuance regarding the conditions under which the procedure should be performed, even knowing that 90% of the procedures occur within the first trimester. (Fewer than 1% occur after 20 weeks.⁸¹) The easiest way to reduce abortions is to reduce unplanned pregnancy, which is accomplished with expanded education and birth control.

The extreme views on abortion shaping much of this country’s policies have never represented the opinion of most Americans. A 2019 Pew Research Center poll found that 61% of Americans say that abortion should be legal in all or most cases, while only 28% believe that *Roe v. Wade* should be overturned.⁸²

It’s time for people of faith to reclaim their true voice in this debate. The loudest faction isn’t representative of the majority nor of religious people historically. Nationwide, abortion is overwhelmingly supported by religious and secular people alike. We should also support the factors that reduce unwanted pregnancy. But more than that, we should acknowledge that supporting a woman’s right to choose the course of her pregnancy is *not* unethical, is *not* immoral, and is *not* against biblical guidelines. Don’t forget, those contrary ideas were conceived and pushed by the political organization The Moral Majority.

Women who seek abortion, by and large, aren't doing so because they're lazy or selfish or too busy or had a vacation planned. It is a serious decision. They feel like they have no other choice. They live in a house built with the various cards of age, school, career, health, previous children, financial challenges, and an uncertain future — that all can easily collapse upon them. They likely love children enough to already have one. It is tragic that adding another could crumble the fragile balance they've created. They need people of faith — they need all people — to see them and act to help them, not to penalize them or treat them as pariahs over a misfortune of circumstance.

Compassion. How Many Ways Can This be Said?

People are taught at church from a young age that God is love, and are told He is the kindest being who has or ever could exist. It's time for people of faith to decide how to manifest that, and which god they believe in: the one of anger and vengeance, or the one of love and compassion. (It's a subject for another book as to why there are two choices, not just one...)

We must use the eyes the Creator gave us to see beyond the 40 weeks of gestation. New life ripples out across time, affecting all of society. When desired, it is a propagating wave of joy. When unwanted, it is a wave of despair. Let's be pro-life, not just pro-the-first-40-weeks-of-life. Let's focus on different words in the Bible and care for each other, reduce suffering, show compassion, and offer support in times of trouble. Is that not the basis of Christian Charity? Is that not what it means to be a good person?

Women faced with unwanted pregnancy are people with need. Women with families and lives and connections with community have needs infinitely beyond those of a still-unformed human.

A Portrait of an Abortion-Minded Woman

There is a site online of abortion demographics that were summed up by its author, Chaney Mullins, with the title above, who said, "If all these statistics are taken together, you may end up with a picture like this.

"A woman named Maria is living in Baltimore. She is 23 years old and already has a two-year-old named Michael. She baptized Michael into the Catholic Church, but hasn't been to church much since, though she's always considered herself Catholic. Maria is unmarried and living below the poverty line. Michael's dad left just before she found out she was pregnant again. She works two jobs, but is shouldered with the responsibility of her son and her aging mother, who is soon going to become unable to care for Michael when Maria's at work. The cost of childcare and nursing care will be heavy.

"At seven weeks pregnant, Maria goes to Planned Parenthood. She is reluctant to go through the trauma of abortion, as she's heard that it is unpleasant. But she just can't figure out how to fit another baby into her crumbling world. So she faces it — like everything else in her life lately — alone.

"The crisis of girls with stories like this is not that they are particularly desirous of abortion through some ideological feeling of career advancement and reproductive rights

and freedoms. Instead, some women who choose abortion feel like they don't have a choice. Poverty, age, and everything else feels like it's stacked against them. And although they love children enough to often have already had one, how tragic is it to see that they cannot fathom another?"⁸³

How does this conversation shift when people of faith understand that God doesn't have a horse in this race? God sanctified priests to induce miscarriage. In that context, why do we object to women or doctors doing the same?

Returning to the Question of Compassion

The previous story finds form in society over, and over, and over, and over. In a now viral video, Lake Highlands High School 2021 valedictorian, Paxton Smith, beautifully and passionately expressed the terror that faces her and all girls that their dreams, hopes, ambitions, and entire future could be stripped away without consent in the wake of the recently passed Heartbeat Bill in Texas.⁸⁴

There was a poignant article in the *New York Times* by Michelle Alexander, titled *My Rapist Apologized*, that illustrates a simple and unfortunate reality of so many women who seek abortion: the choice not to have one is too awful.

"It was my first semester of law school and I was terrified that everything I had hoped for my future was suddenly unraveling before my eyes. At the time, my father was unemployed. My mother was working a minimum-wage job. Miraculously, I was at Stanford Law School with a chance to pursue my dream of being a civil rights lawyer. But now everything was falling apart. I was devastated, emotionally wrecked, not only because I had been raped but because I was pregnant with my rapist's child. I wondered aloud whether I should just quit law school and give birth to the baby that had been forced inside me.

"...Nor did I want a baby. I had no extended family to fall back on; no one who could loan me money to help raise a child; no place to go except to my parents' rented home — a place that felt temporary, at best, given their financial insecurity and recent eviction. I did not want to give a baby away and I did not want to raise my rapist's child.

...Even if I wanted to give birth to my rapist's baby — which I did not — I, like so many others, could not turn to my family for help."⁸⁵

"You Can Just Give it up for Adoption"

There are those who would claim that women should be compelled to give birth and then can give up the child for adoption. That seems glib and ignores the difficulties of giving birth and of finding a surrogate family, only then to face the emotional anguish of having given up a child. Many women suffer with that anguish for years. With regard to the physical process, a friend who is happily pregnant as of this writing told me, with a smile, that the baby is a parasite that sucks all your nutrients, causes nausea, vomiting, tiredness, increased peeing, constipation, anemia, bleeding gums, and sometimes fainting. She happily laughed at what she was going through and the future efforts to restore her body post-delivery, knowing it was her choice and that she was supported in the process.

Before we force women into that process and worse as a legal or moral statute, let's consider what happens afterwards to see if it is an act of mercy and compassion.

The number of adoptions each year in the U.S. is approximately 120-130,000.⁸⁶ What would happen if abortion was forbidden and we added into the system some large percentage of those one million "rescued" children annually? Hundreds of thousands of children would find no home, would find no love, and would be cast into uncertainty and potential harm year after year. Is that pro-life or just pro-birth?

A child is abused or neglected every 47 seconds in America — 1,844 each day. Think about that. In 2018, more than 673,000 children were victims of abuse or neglect.⁸⁷ More than half of all child maltreatment cases involved children who were six years old or younger. Infants were disproportionately victimized, with 15.3% of cases involving children under one year of age.⁸⁸ Children who have been abused and neglected, removed from their families, and placed into foster care are among the most vulnerable children in America.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services put out their 2018 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data in which they reported that 437,283 children were in foster care at the close of that fiscal year. Nearly one-third of those children were in a relative's home, nearly half were in nonrelative foster family homes, 6% were in institutions, and 1% had run away. 182,833 children in foster care were less than 5 years old and 31,693 were babies less than 1 year old. Each of them is a human with the right to a future without suffering in need of someone with a voice to make that case. In 2018, 262,956 children entered into foster care and 250,103 exited.⁸⁹ Since the system doesn't accommodate the current number of children, what would be the impact of an annual flood of "saved" children? Where is the compassionate concern for the lives of those saved? Is it ethical or moral to force babies into a system already overburdened, knowing that suffering likely awaits but that adoption likely doesn't?

Quite separate from the foster system is private adoption, which is only open to those who can pay the high associated costs, so only accounts for a fraction of annual adoptions. Adopting from foster care may cost up to \$2,500, while private domestic adoption can cost up to \$50,000.⁹⁰ That small percentage of adoptions through private agencies is difficult to track but American Adoptions, which claims to be one of the largest domestic adoption agencies of its kind in the U.S., declares that they are involved in an average of 300 adoptions each year.⁹¹ Again, we should consider the effect of abortion made illegal and the fate of hundreds of thousands of additional children, well beyond the capacity of private adoption. They would be entered into a foster system described this way in the National Council for Adoption's 2017 *Comprehensive Report of U.S. Adoption Statistics*: "Politicians and child welfare advocates agree that the U.S. foster care system is still broken. It is a system that fails to serve the physical, emotional, and educational needs of children in its care. Children are denied their basic need and human right to a permanent family to care for them when they are left languishing in foster care."⁹²

Why is *Roe v. Wade* Still Under Attack by People of Faith?

Life is highly nuanced, yet we live during a time when people are pushed to binary thinking, creating a polarized society unable to unfold complex issues. What is life? What is liberty? What does it mean to pursue your happiness? What is our responsibility to others? None of these questions have just one answer that applies to all people.

Since the founding of this country, the laws and rights codified into our system of government have continually evolved. The Supreme Court of the United States made a ruling nearly five decades ago that granted to women the right to decide what to do with the human maturation chamber they carry within them. Since the moment *Roe v. Wade* was established, it has been under attack by people who object to its existence, many of whose objections are ostensibly born of religious reasoning.

Humans have argued for thousands of years as to whose god is the right one, pointing only to their books as proof. Because there are those who want to rewrite laws to reflect the Creator's supposed will, we're compelled to ask the basis of those beliefs. All religions with a god say they speak for that god and derive their code of ethics from their creator. Not one can objectively demonstrate that as true. How can a human, limited by mind and body, understand a Creator unbound by time or space? The great Judaic philosopher, Maimonides, said about the concept of *Hashem* — God — that you cannot describe God or what God would do, only what God isn't and what God wouldn't do. I choose to believe in a Creator who would not intentionally cause suffering or make it a by-product of faith.

The formation of religions and their attempt to explain the unknown and to codify human behavior happens throughout the history of our species. Judaism, Christianity, and Sufism of Islam all assert that human beings are created in God's image. If so, what does that metaphor imply and what is our obligation?

Life, and the capacity to continue it in our offspring, truly is a gift, as is the free will we're told is divinely granted. The orchestrated biochemical changes that commence after fertilization extend from that free will. Creating a new human should be a choice, made when that responsibility can be honored. It shouldn't be a mindless biological enslavement to breeding controlled by randomness, as found in non-human animals.

I don't believe that women should be denied sovereignty over their beings or enslaved to breeding. Nor do I believe that newborns should be cast into an uncertain future that more than likely will contain pain. Those who would claim otherwise while attempting to bend our laws to match their beliefs should have the courtesy of explaining the basis of those beliefs. Emotional reasoning and hyperbole are insufficient. Holding others hostage within word-prisons is insufficient.

Protecting the Sanctity of Life

As we consider whether the termination of a pregnancy is ethical, moral, or in accordance with the Divine plan, it's worth looking at the phrase "sanctity of life," which isn't as commonly used today, yet was the basis of eponymous proposed legislation. The Sanctity of Life Act was introduced into the House of Representatives in 1995 by Rep.

Steve Stockman, was taken up again by one-time presidential candidate Ron Paul in 2005, and has been brought forward multiple times since. It was never made into law, but spawned various “personhood” bills that are continually argued in state legislatures and were certified in both Virginia and North Dakota. The bills attempt to undermine *Roe* by granting the full rights and equal protection of a person from the moment of conception.

The phrase “sanctity of life” reflects the religious belief that we are beings of incalculable worth, made in God’s image (per Genesis 1:26–27), and set apart to be used for the purpose in which God created us. Because of this, human life has an inherently sacred attribute and dignity that should be protected and respected at all times throughout the course of our existence as a fundamental, foundational truth of a civil society. The pro-life movement contends that life is God’s first gift to every person and thus treat birth as sacred, seeking to protect our right to live that sacred life each day to its fullest.

One might think, in that context, that protecting “sanctified” life would have temporal continuity, yet none of the bills address any of the moments that follow birth. If the moral argument posits a quality that is intrinsic to life, then all life must be preserved. For example, if we see sanctity in life, then capital punishment is a profane act by necessity, a point never included in the bills. In fact, these bills overlook the entire range of moral and ethical problems that human beings face, whether the death penalty, child abuse, poverty, war, global health threats, wealth inequity, bioethics, or environmental hazard, among the many issues. The oxymoronic phrase has become mired in a political and cultural war of ideas, now more a product of intractable ideological ossification than serious moral or ethical reflection. Rather than clarifying our moral obligations to other human beings, addressing respect, compassion, empathy, or justice, the bills only protect birth, criminalize a part of women’s healthcare, and perpetuate the suffering previously discussed.

Juxtapose that with a Bible that offers practical ways we’re to value human life by loving others: tending to the sick, visiting the imprisoned, feeding the hungry, clothing the needy, seeking justice for the oppressed, and caring for orphans, widows, and strangers (Matthew 25:35–36; James 1:27; 1 John 3:16–18; Ezekiel 45:9; Deuteronomy 10:18–19). It becomes all the more clear that invoking a notion of “sanctity of life” while attacking abortion is window dressing for a pro-birth stance that shuns the moral obligation not to debase a life or imbue it with suffering.

A Matter of Faith

I believe that preventing maternal mortality, lowering the risk of suicide, reducing domestic violence, protecting against poverty, supporting families, precluding dangerous illegal abortions, and preserving human dignity are all among the things that we as humans owe to each other. Are we not to care for the world and each other?

Faith is an active process; it is something you *do*, as the Bible says, not something you have and defend, especially just because you were born into it. It’s not a rigid structure; it’s a living process and a tool to use. It is not demonstrated by our capacity to memorize texts.

Fortunately, we humans have been endowed by our Creator with minds that allow us to engage in the process of systematic and rational inquiry. We can ask questions. We can resolve contradiction. If we recognize and honor the unique gifts we’ve been given, we

should use them compassionately, guided by our hearts, and always with a desire to preserve human dignity. No one should be enslaved to the needs of another's life. No one should have to beg for a life without suffering. No one should be shamed or punished for an accident of biological fertilization.

My hope for this book is that it lessens the burden of decision for women who are trapped between what they are told their faith should be and the honest needs of their lives. I hope that it reduces shame and guilt. I hope it heals the rifts caused by a false ethical and moral schism. I hope that it inspires people to create better options and better resources that allow women not to choose abortion. Most of all, I hope that it helps to reduce suffering.

I also hope this book helps to end the pointless attacks on *Roe v. Wade*, and helps to preserve reproductive freedom, protect health care, and protect a woman's right to decide what will or won't grow inside her body as a matter of human rights.

Follow your heart, follow your God, and follow them with truth.

Honor the Creator; honor the creation.

Addendum, May 2022

The leaked draft of the upcoming Supreme Court ruling, which shows it poised to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, brings a new urgency to this conversation. Two-thirds of the country firmly support a woman's right to choose, with a greater number being against the overturning *Roe*, which has offered protection for women for 50 years. Of course, popular opinion does not offer proof that this position is a correct one.

Taking a religious point of view on the issue, abortion is not prohibited in Scripture and there is no claim for it being immoral, as was explored in earlier pages. From this point of view, to eliminate a woman's right to choose is to strip away from the human race God's first gift, which is free will. It is not for the government to rule on God's gifts.

Both the religious and secular viewpoints speak to the notion of killing as being wrong. The word-prison at the center of the pro-life objection is created by insisting that the outcome of an abortion is either the "murder" or "killing" a "child." It is a conscious choice of language to emotionally link terminating a pregnancy with an image of either killing an unborn baby or murdering a child. Clearly, no one but a monster would want that.

When we look at the Carnegie stages of embryonic development on page 20, the picture of a four-week-old embryo on page 21, and the five-week-old on page 22, we can see life, but to call that living tissue a baby, child, or person is inaccurate and an emotional appeal. That embryo is not a person, just at an earlier stage of development, as the pro-life movement likes to argue; it is development *before* there is a person. Murder is the unlawful premeditated killing of one human *being* by another. We can see in those pictures that the developing human, still with no organs, brain, nor sentience, does not qualify and thus cannot be murdered. (Again, reaffirming what was understood in ancient Jewish law.)

Another part of that word-prison is using the word "human" as a noun when it is meant as an adjective. There is no arguing that, at the moment of conception, a distinct

set of human genetics is encoded into living tissue. Yet we understand, biologically, that a living human cell is neither a baby nor a child, it is not a human *being*, it is not a viable organism. At fertilization, there is only an instruction manual encoded in living tissue that needs to be followed over time — should the dividing cells survive the 50% failure rate. That single, living cell is in no way the being, person, baby, or child that those in the pro-life movement want to claim exists. Their insistence finds no consensus among the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, theology, or law. And we don't grant rights to adjectives.

The process of following DNA, the living genetic instruction manual, is accomplished using a woman's body, nutrients, and life support over a nine month period. To separate that woman from the process at fertilization and treat her as merely a host incubator, without free will or the capacity to make hard choices about her own offspring, is more than troubling. Equally troubling is to ignore the myriad difficulties we already know await unwanted lives and to force them into being anyway, against a potential parent's wishes.

The challenge in this dilemma is that those on the pro-life side are not wrong, it's just that the level on which they're right is of a much smaller order of magnitude. To terminate development ends a potential being, which one *can* classify as killing that potential life — neither a baby nor a person — but why is that the only point of focus? All people who procreate limit the number of children they have, despite the viability of every released egg. The existence lottery happens monthly and with each fertilization. Accidental fertilization does not have a greater right to life than planned fertilization. This book has shown the considerable hardship facing the already-existing lives of mothers, fathers, siblings, communities, and society at large due to unwanted pregnancy. It's time we stop capitulating to the lie that a single cell is a person who needs to be defended, especially by taking away all the rights of the mother, while offering nothing in support for an ongoing life that is "saved."

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The Abortion Dilemma: Is Abortion Actually Ethical, Moral, and Sanctified by God?

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This is a living document. It was last revised Nov 13, 2022.

A free download of the most current version is available at
<https://www.churchofinquiry.org/the-abortion-dilemma>

Endnotes

¹ <https://christianliferesources.com/2021/01/19/u-s-abortion-statistics-by-year-1973-current/>

² <https://www.guttmacher.org/report/characteristics-us-abortion-patients-2014#full-article>

³ <https://www.christianpost.com/voices/why-do-christian-women-continue-to-have-abortions.html>

⁴ <http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Care-Net-Final-Quantitative-Report.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/pro-life/survey-women-go-silently-from-church-to-abortion-clinic/>

⁶ <https://www.prochoiceactionnetwork-canada.org/articles/anti-tales.shtml>

⁷ A 2013 Pew Research Center study found that except for Roman Catholics, all other denominations, including “the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), the Southern Baptist Convention, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS), and the Missouri Synod Lutherans concede that abortion is justifiable when a woman’s life is in danger. The LDS, the NAE, and the Episcopalians also specifically mention that rape and incest are considered justifiable reasons to terminate a pregnancy.”

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¹⁷ For example: <https://www.learnreligions.com/popular-bible-translations-701260> or <https://media.ascensionpress.com/2019/12/06/5-most-popular-catholic-study-bibles-ranked/>

¹⁸ For example: <https://lavendervines.com/bible-translation-comparison/> or <https://faithfoundedonfact.com/the-5-most-accurate-bible-translations/>

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²⁰ For example: <https://bereanresearch.org/new-nar-passion-bible-a-dangerous-heresy/> or <https://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/what-are-the-best-bible-translations/>

²¹ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/july/epidemic-of-bible-illiteracy-in-our-churches.html>

²² <https://lifewayresearch.com>

²³ 1) Nobody knows because the Hebrew Bible just says “fruit.” 2) Satan, first revealed in Job, is an advisor to God whose role as “the accuser” is akin to a prosecution attorney in a trial. Satan’s fall, prophesied in Revelations 20:10, has not yet come to pass. 3) Jonah was swallowed by a huge fish, and a whale is a mammal, not a fish. 4) While their gifts numbered three, the Bible does not tell us the exact number of wise men. Despite their depiction in nativity scenes, the men didn’t visit the stable at Jesus’ birth. Instead, they came days, months, or possibly years later. Matthew 2:11 says they visited a house: “On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.”

²⁴ <https://religionnews.com/2017/04/25/the-bible-helpful-but-unread/>

²⁵ <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/study-americans-fond-of-bible-but-how-many-read-it/>

²⁶ Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. Haidt makes the case that “morality is the extraordinary human capacity that made civilization possible” and details some wonderful experiments in understanding the basis of moral reasoning.

²⁷ <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-Revised-Standard-Version-NRSV-Bible>

²⁸ The Talmud, in Yevamos 69b:10. https://www.sefaria.org/Yevamot.69b.10?ven=William_Davidson_Edition_-_English&lang=bi

²⁹ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-fetus-in-jewish-law/>

³⁰ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/there-are-372-trillion-cells-in-your-body-4941473/> also, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/318342>

³¹ The Carnegie embryo collection is at the National Museum of Health and Medicine (NMHM) in Washington, D.C.

³² <https://www.businessinsider.com/texas-abortion-fetal-heartbeats-dont-exist-at-6-weeks-doctors-2021-9>

³³ <https://www.factcheck.org/2019/07/when-are-heartbeats-audible-during-pregnancy/>

³⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3411176/>

³⁵ <https://accessmedicine.mhmedical.com/content.aspx?sectionid=176574585&bookid=2046&Resultclick=2>

³⁶ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-017-11129-9>

³⁷ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11807730/>

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- ³⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK234146/>
- ³⁹ <https://www.whattoexpect.com/pregnancy/fetal-development/fetal-brain-nervous-system/>
- ⁴⁰ <https://flo.health/pregnancy/pregnancy-health/fetal-development/fetal-brain-development>
- ⁴¹ https://cogsci.ucsd.edu/~pineda/COGS107A/studyguide/module_11.htm
- ⁴² *The Stigma of Having an Abortion: Development of a Scale and Characteristics of Women Experiencing Abortion Stigma* Kate Cockrill, Ushma D. Upadhyay, Janet Turan, Diana Greene Foster
- ⁴³ <https://www.guttmacher.org/news-release/2008/concern-current-and-future-children-key-reason-women-have-abortions>
- ⁴⁴ <https://prochoice.org/abortion-and-motherhood-series/>
- ⁴⁵ <https://www.guttmacher.org/news-release/2017/abortion-common-experience-us-women-despite-dramatic-declines-rates>
- ⁴⁶ *The Stigma of Having an Abortion: Development of a Scale and Characteristics of Women Experiencing Abortion Stigma* Kate Cockrill, Ushma D. Upadhyay, Janet Turan, Diana Greene Foster
- ⁴⁷ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1363/4507913>
- ⁴⁸ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/february-web-only/secret-shame-of-abortion-in-church.html>
- ⁴⁹ <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/texas-defunded-planned-parenthood-congress-learn/story?id=32807130>
- ⁵⁰ <https://www.myabortionmylife.org/abortion-stigma>
- ⁵¹ <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2017.304247>
- ⁵² Diana Greene Foster, M. Antonia Biggs, Lauren Ralph, Caitlin Gerdts, Sarah Roberts, M. Maria Glymour, “Socioeconomic Outcomes of Women Who Receive and Women Who Are Denied Wanted Abortions in the United States,” *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 3 (March 1, 2018): pp. 407-413.
- ⁵³ <https://www.guttmacher.org/infographic/2017/abortion-rates-income>
- ⁵⁴ <https://prospect.org/economy/will-court-restrict-abortion-wealthy/>
- ⁵⁵ Diana Greene Foster, M. Antonia Biggs, Lauren Ralph, Caitlin Gerdts, Sarah Roberts, M. Maria Glymour, “Socioeconomic Outcomes of Women Who Receive and Women Who Are Denied Wanted Abortions in the United States,” *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 3 (March 1, 2018): pp. 407-413.
- ⁵⁶ <https://www.divorcesource.com/ds/main/u-s-divorce-rates-and-statistics-1037.shtml>
- ⁵⁷ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-legal-abortion-helps-american-families_b_7302440
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/1936217/>
- ⁵⁸ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26070372/>

⁵⁹ <https://obgyn.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1471-0528.16037>

⁶⁰ <https://comparecamp.com/divorce-statistics/>

⁶¹ <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/infant-mortality/topicinfo/causes>

⁶² <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/womens-health/states-pushing-abortion-bans-have-higher-infant-mortality-rates-n1008481>

⁶³ <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2016/03/07/peds.2016-0339.full.pdf>

⁶⁴ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/11/30/prior-to-covid-19-child-poverty-rates-had-reached-record-lows-in-u-s/>

⁶⁵ <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/137/4/e20160339>

⁶⁶ <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/mental-health-disorder-statistics>

⁶⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3470537/>

⁶⁸ <https://www.guttmacher.org/report/pregnancies-births-abortion-in-united-states-1973-2017>

⁶⁹ People of faith are consoled that the child does go to heaven, per 2 Samuel 12:23. The Rev. James Saurin, Late Pastor of the French Church At The Hague paraphrases that verse, “If I cannot have the consolation to partake with this infant the temporal happiness wherewith the divine goodness hath blessed me, I hope to rejoin his soul one day in heaven, and to partake with him eternal felicity.” Why aren’t the faithful equally consoled when an aborted fetus goes to heaven?

⁷⁰ <https://www.aclu.org/blog/reproductive-freedom/study-finds-comprehensive-sex-education-reduces-teen-pregnancy>

⁷¹ <https://medicine.wustl.edu/news/access-to-free-birth-control-reduces-abortion-rates/>

⁷² <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/induced-abortion-worldwide>

⁷³ <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-07-abortion-highest-legally-restricted.html>

⁷⁴ <https://www.foxnews.com/story/five-reasons-women-get-pregnant-while-on-the-pill>

⁷⁵ <https://www.guttmacher.org/news-release/2014/us-abortion-rate-hits-lowest-level-1973>

⁷⁶ <https://www.prolifehumanists.org/secular-case-against-abortion/>

⁷⁷ The dead-end links are:

<https://www.nutrition.gov/food-assistance-programs/wic-women-infants-and-children>

<https://www.nutrition.gov/food-assistance-programs/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program>

⁷⁸ <https://www.livescience.com/32437-why-are-250-million-sperm-cells-released-during-sex.html>

The normal count of sperm cell per milliliter of semen is over 15 million sperm as per the World Health Organization so that's around 75 million if the man ejaculates 5 mL of semen. <https://socratic.org/questions/how-many-sperm-are-found-in-a-single-typical-ejaculate>

⁷⁹ <https://www.sciencealert.com/meta-analysis-finds-majority-of-human-pregnancies-end-in-miscarriage-biorxiv>

⁸⁰ <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/Wellness/domestic-abuse-abusive-men-sabotage-birth-control/story?id=9639340>

⁸¹ <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/fact-sheet/abortions-later-in-pregnancy/>

⁸² <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/08/29/u-s-public-continues-to-favor-legal-abortion-oppose-overturning-roe-v-wade/>

⁸³ <https://concernedwomen.org/abortion-demographics-who-has-an-abortion/>

⁸⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpJkErsb7UE>

⁸⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/23/opinion/abortion-legislation-rape.html?action=click&module=Opinion&pgtype=Homepage>

⁸⁶ <https://adoptionnetwork.com/how-many-adoptees-are-in-the-us/>

⁸⁷ Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. 2020. "Child Maltreatment 2018," Table 3-5, Victims by Age, 2018. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/child-maltreatment-2018>

⁸⁸ <https://www.childrensdefense.org/policy/resources/soac-2020-child-welfare/>

⁸⁹ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/afcarsreport26.pdf>

⁹⁰ <https://adoptionagencies.com/adoption-agency-information/how-much-does-adoption-cost/>

⁹¹ <https://www.americanadoptions.com>

⁹² <https://adoptioncouncil.org/press-release/new-domestic-adoption-study-leads-discussion-on-current-state-of-adoption-2/>