

Why I Am Pro-Life

Rich Nathan

January 20th and 21st, 1996

Home Improvement Series

You know, I don't know if you realize what you just heard from Sara Beaumier but to me she has expressed so powerfully a fact that is absolutely buried in the current media coverage of abortion. Friends, how is abortion portrayed in this country? In all of the discussion and all of the rhetoric and all of the media, how is abortion covered? It is covered as a political issue between the Republicans on the right and the Democrats on the left. It is covered as an issue that pits women and the rights of women over against the interests of their unborn children. And so what you continually see is a discussion of women's rights, women's choices, and women's bodies over against the unborn. The media portrays the current abortion debate by suggesting that Republicans on the right support the unborn, but hate women. And Democrats on the left love women and don't care anything about the unborn.

Do you understand what Sara was saying to us? She is saying that regarding abortion, women and their unborn children stand exactly on the same side fighting a pitched battle against boyfriends, against family members, against social pressures, against shame. We have to stop seeing abortion as an issue of mother against child, because regarding these women and children often stand on the same side of the divide.

I want to read to you two brief excerpts from letters from two women who have had an abortion. I am going to change the women's names that sent them. Here is a woman who we will call "Paula". She said that she agonized over her decision whether to abort her baby or not. She was 17, from a good family, she wasn't from a poor family or an unsupportive family, but she was from a good family. But when she told her mother about her pregnancy, her mom informed her that "you have a choice, either you keep your baby or you keep your family." That was her right to choose, her unborn child or her family. Paula said that she recalls crying convulsively on the abortion table. The doctor finally said to her, "Look, if you don't stop crying, we cannot do this abortion because someone may be forcing you." And so, she just choked back her sobs.

After the abortion, she began taking drugs because she said in the letter that she just "found it hard to believe that anyone could ever love me anymore." She even attempted suicide three times.

You know, the choice that so many advocates of choice suggest is that of a stylish, confident woman who has an array of possibilities and options before her. And she just prefers this option of abortion over other options. So often on this really difficult issue of abortion, women and children stand exactly on the same side of the divide. They are completely weak, unempowered, feeling like there are no choices.

Another woman that I'll call "Debbie" said in her letter that she first submitted to her boyfriend's demands for sex. "He told me that either we had

sex or he was gone.” Because of her low self-esteem, she decided in her mind that without him she was nothing. And then, after she discovered that she was pregnant, she submitted again to her boyfriend’s demand that she get an abortion. I appreciate the way her letter closes. She said, “You know, the truth is that no matter what pressure I faced, I have no one to blame for getting this abortion but me. I now see that I was ultimately responsible.” She goes on to say that she has found real freedom by shouldering the responsibility for the abortion and not passing off the blame onto other people. But she concludes her letter with a note of sadness. She writes, “If I knew then, what I know now, that what was growing inside of me was a baby, I never would have gone through with it.”

You say, “Rich, these are powerful stories, but do they, in fact, represent the full picture of abortion in America?”

Let me give you a few statistics. In a recent study done by a University of Minnesota psychologist, she found that 54% of women still suffer from nightmares regarding their abortions five to ten years after obtaining the abortion. She also found that 96% of women, ten years after their abortions wished they had never had it and believe now that they killed a life.

To show you the change of heart of women after they have obtained abortions, do you know that 39,000 women who have obtained abortions joined the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL)? 39,000 women after they had obtained their abortions still believe their decision was correct. But 245,000 members of National Right To Life are women who previously have had abortions. By a 6-1 margin, women say that they now strongly disagree with what they previously did and they want to somehow pay back or make up for it, I guess, by joining National Right to Life.

You know, if you have come to Vineyard for any length of time, you know that I don’t preach politics from this pulpit. I don’t believe my job is to try to shape your political opinions regarding so many of the political issues of our day – whether we adopt a flat tax or not; or a balanced budget amendment; or whether we go into Bosnia or not. I don’t believe there is a unified biblical perspective. And so as the pastor of this church, I have never believed it was my responsibility or my calling to try to share with you my views on issues that Christians can very legitimately disagree with each other on and still be within the confines of biblical wisdom and biblical counsel.

Friends, the reason why I speak about abortion today on Sanctity of Life Sunday, is because I think abortion is different than other political issues. You see, abortion pulls together so many fundamental themes from God’s Word – themes of life and death and truth and suffering and freedom and love that a Christian pastor cannot and should not avoid speaking out. And churches ought to take a stand for the sake of the unborn, for the sake of women who are injured by abortion, and for the sake of what has been revealed to us by God’s Word.

Several years ago, about four or five now, I did a message that I called “Why I am Pro-Life.” It is rare that I repeat a message from the pulpit, but this evening [morning] what I would like to do is take that message and update it for you. And I decided to use the same title in this series that I have been doing on

the family. It is so appropriate that we talk about the subject of abortion in a series on the family. And so, again, I offer you this message that I am calling "Why I am Pro-Life." Let's pray.

You know, I said that the reason I am talking about abortion today is because it brings together very fundamental themes from God's Word. One of those fundamental themes of God's Word is truth. Throughout the Bible, God is said to be the one who does not lie. For example in Titus 1, Paul says that he *"proclaims a faith that rests on the hope of eternal life which God who does not lie promised before the beginning of time."* And in the book of Hebrews, we are told in Hebrews 6 that God who doesn't lie promised eternal life to those who believe in him. God does not lie.

And this theme of God not ever lying to us or hiding the truth goes way back in Bible history back to the Pentateuch. God is said to be trustworthy. And it is interesting that all the members of the Trinity have this quality of truth. Jesus Christ says about himself, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." Jesus is the truth.

And John, in talking about Christ in John 1 says, *"The word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the Father full of grace and truth. The law came from Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."* Jesus is called the truth.

And then we see that the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth by Jesus in John 14. He says, *"I will ask the Father and he will give you another counselor to be with you forever, the Spirit of Truth."*

The Triune God is called the truth and God's Word is always said to tell us the truth. Jesus said in John 17, *"Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth."*

God is so concerned about us telling the truth that he makes one of his commandments this commandment to never lie. It is one of the Big 10; don't bear false witness, don't lie. In fact, in the Old Testament the truth is so venerated that one of the Old Testament writers, David, said in Psalm 15 that the characteristic of a person who gets to heaven is that they tell the truth. Psalm 15, David says this:

"Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who will go to live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless, who does what is right, who speaks the truth from his heart."

Truth is a big issue with God because it is part of his character and he wants people to know him and follow him to tell the truth. On the other hand, God's enemy, Satan, is a liar. Jesus says about the Devil in John 8 that he was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44) not holding to the truth for there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks his native language because he is a liar and the father of lies.

Regarding few issues in this country right now is a war between truths and lies so crystallized as regarding abortion. Bernard Nathansen who was the founder of NARAL, was a physician, a gynecologist, founded the National Abortion Rights Action League and later wrote a book called *Aborting America* which is a wonderful book on how the whole pro-choice movement got started in

this country, the tactics that were used to promote abortion and promote acceptance of abortion nationally. Nathansen says in his book that “We used to speak of 5,000-10,000 deaths a year from illegal, so-called back alley, abortions. I confess that I knew the figures were totally false. But it was a useful figure, widely accepted so why should we go out of our way to correct with honest statistics?”

This notion that thousands of women were killed through back alley, illegal abortions were killed before abortions were legalized is, in fact, known to be false. The truth is that since the discovery of antibiotics, penicillin and sulfa drugs in the 1940s, very few women lost their lives through illegal abortions. And yet the statistic of thousands of women losing their lives through back alley abortions, even though admitted to be false, by the person who first created this lie continues to be promoted by the press.

We are told that abortion is a means of reducing child abuse because children who are abused are often the result of unwanted, unplanned pregnancies. A University of South California professor did a study of children who were abused in Los Angeles. He discovered of the almost 700 abused children that he was able to survey and investigate that 91% were from planned pregnancies. You know, nationally only 63% of pregnancies are planned. What the study suggests is that abuse is not the result of an unplanned pregnancy. 91% of the children who were abused were at least at conception wanted and planned.

You know, we are told that child abuse rates should be falling. There ought to be less sexual abuse in America, less physical abuse of children in America, less verbal abuse of children in America, because in the words of Planned Parenthood, every child ought to be a wanted child. Since abortion was legalized in this country, the truth is that the number of reported cases of child abuse has gone up 1500% from 167,000 reported cases of child abuse to 2.5 million in 1991. Is it not obvious that abortion has coarsened our attitude towards children? 31 million abortions have not made America more compassionate or more caring towards our children but made us callus.

We are told that if we had all of these children there would be no place for them. There are currently 2.5 million couples waiting to adopt children in America. Millions of couples never even sign up for these long waiting lists because there are now 30 abortions in America for every single adoption. The truth is there are families who would do anything to adopt a child – white, black, brown – they would do anything. I was an attorney. I did adoptions and I had many more requests for children than I had babies to place in homes. I have seen this first hand.

And in terms of covering up the truth, do you know who is most lied to? The mom who is deciding whether to have an abortion or not. In an OB/GYN newsletter, one gynecologist wrote, “Seeing a blown up moving image of the embryo she is carrying can be distressing to a woman about to undergo an abortion. The ultrasound screen should be turned away from her.”

One ultrasound technician said, "I have been personally told that I am to turn the monitor away from a woman considering an abortion so that seeing the baby jump around on the screen does not influence her choice."

Clinics hide the actual pictures of what is going on inside a mother's womb from her so she doesn't get to see her baby. So she won't be influenced by the truth so the facts don't get in the way.

We are continually told that the decision to have an abortion is a decision between a woman and her doctor. But in a detailed survey of women who had abortions, over 90% said that the first time they met their doctor was when they were lying on the table waiting to get the abortion. All of their contact beforehand was by clinic staff that are trained to sell abortions. Do you know that abortion is a $\frac{3}{4}$ billion-dollar industry?

I know I am giving you statistic after statistic. But friends, one day what is done in darkness will be shouted from the housetops. God is very concerned about the truth and he is deeply distressed by those who cover up the truth.

Abortion is not just an issue of truth. It is also an issue of life and death. Along with truth, the themes of life and death run through the fabric of the whole of the Bible. You say what accounts for the fact that there have now been 31 million unborn children killed by abortion? 31 million unborn children have been killed by abortion since 1973. That's about 1.6 million abortions per year, 4400 deaths a day, 183 every hour. Three abortions are performed every minute in America. What accounts for this?

It is not just rooted in America's throwaway culture that Americans don't want to take the consequence for their activity. Abortion goes way beyond the issue of separating actions and consequences. Abortion goes beyond a discussion of free sex or the women's movement, or any of the other things that people point to for the reason for this enormous number of unborn who are killed each year. Abortion points to something deeper, what has aptly been called a culture of death.

Did you know that every culture before Christianity took hold of the western world's consciousness, do you know that every culture in antiquity was stained with the blood of innocent children? Unwanted infants were left on the walls in Rome to die from exposure to the weather or attack by animals. Greeks gave pregnant women harsh medicine, abortifacients, to abort their babies. Chinese women used to tie ropes around their stomachs so tight that they either miscarried or they actually made themselves unconscious. The Canaanites and the Mayans used to take their children and throw them into the fire as an offering to their gods. Japanese women used to straddle pots of boiling water to force an abortion. Egyptian women would kill their babies after birth and then use the products of their baby's skin as cosmetic cream, for make-up.

And if you look over all of pre-Christian history and over all of the philosophers, Plato, Aristotle, they all were very, very callous in their discussion of child killing. They recommended it and they recommended abortions. Have you ever noticed how many fairy tales and myths from pre-Christian cultures discuss child abandonment and child killing, infanticide? Did you ever wonder

why the Romans would pack stadiums filled with people to watch gladiators battle to the death?

Let me make this more relevant. Have you ever wondered why movies today in post-Christian America are becoming more and more violent and Hollywood is coming up with new ways to graphically blow people up or to allow us to watch blood spurting from people's necks or heads? Why post-Christian America is so fascinated with death? With rock songs that sing about death? Skateboards that portray death? Skinheads celebrating death? Symbols of death?

You know to account for abortion, you have to account for what I call the death factor, or what others have called the culture of death. The Bible says in Romans 5 that death has reigned in this world since Adam. There is a spirit, there is a pressure, and there is an influence of death on this planet. There is on planet Earth a spirit, an influence, that wishes to wound and kill and destroy all that God loves. Romans 8:6 says that the mind or the mindset of sinful people is death. It is a preoccupation of people, an obsession – death. Isaiah 28:15 says that folks have actually made a covenant with death, a pact with death. Proverbs 8:36 sums it all up by saying that those who hate the Lord love death.

Abortion cannot be explained apart from understanding this overwhelming influence spiritually of a culture of death ultimately pointing to Satan, as the Bible says is a murderer from the beginning. But in contrast to this culture of death, everything connected to God breathes and communicates life.

You know, the reason why I am pro-life is because I have discovered a relationship with the living God whose obsession is life. It says that when God created the waters, they were literally teeming with life. Jesus Christ is called the Bread of Life. He is the Resurrection and the life. He is the word of life. He calls himself the way, the truth and the life. He offers a promise of life, a crown of life, the tree of life. To those who receive the Prince of Life, Jesus offers eternal life.

It says in 2 Timothy, you know what Jesus' mission was, to abolish death, to break the pact, the contract with this death factor, this death spirit that people have made. Jesus came to break our agreement with death and to bring life and immortality to life through the gospel.

God created life. And life is more than just biological. The reasons why Christians are so concerned about abortion is that the Bible tells us that every human being has a sacred spark. Look at Psalm 8:3-5 where it states that we are just a little lower than the angels.

Do you know what the final act of history is going to be? What is the last thing that will happen before time ends and we enter eternity? It says in the book of Revelations that what God is going to do at the end after he judges people, after he judges Satan and the Beast, and all the other events that are described in the book of Revelations, the very last act of history before heaven comes down and we enter the new Jerusalem, the very last act of history is God is going to take death and the spirit of death and this obsession of death – God is going to take death and throw it into the Lake of Fire and destroy it forever.

What came into the world through sin is going to ultimately be removed from the world. And we will enter the New Jerusalem where we will eat from the Tree of Life and drink freely from the fountain that pours forth the water of Life.

Why am I pro-life? It is not because I line up with some particular politician or I read a book or saw a video, or heard a convincing argument. It is not because I am anti-woman or anti-mom. It is not because of my family background. In fact, all of my extended family and my wife's extended family stand on the other side of this issue. It is because of my connection, my relationship with God who is utterly pro-life, who is utterly pro-truth, and who hates death and lies and all that brings death and advocates death in this country. To be a Christian and to be anti-life is an impossibility because God is pro-life.

There is a fourth major issue that runs through both the abortion debate and also the Word of God and that is the issue of freedom. You know, so much of the rhetoric in the pro-choice movement concerns itself with freedom, the right and the ability of a woman to choose and be free to make that choice regarding whether to abort or not abort. To hear it portrayed in the media, one would think that Christians who oppose abortions are not concerned about freedom.

But we Christians understand freedom very differently than the way the modern, secular world understands it. In the modern secular world, freedom means the ability of an individual to do whatever we feel like doing without anyone ever telling us that we cannot do something that we choose to do. No one is going to tell me what I can do. No one has the right to impose his or her thoughts or views on me. I make my own law. Freedom to the modern secular person really reduces down to autonomy. It is my right to manage all of life, to control it and to manipulate it the way that I want to control and manipulate.

Do you know in contrast what freedom means for a Christian? Freedom for a Christian does not, in any way, mean the right to do whatever I feel like doing or my right to control and manipulate my life. Freedom for a Christian means, first of all, to be free from the things that create the greatest tyranny, the greatest oppression for human beings. It means to throw off the constraint of that which truly oppresses us and to be free from oppression.

You say, "Well, what is it, according to Christianity, that oppresses people? What do Christians think we need to be free from?"

Two things. Guilt and Self. Christians say that the thing that weighs down a person, first of all, is guilt. No one is free who is guilty. If that internal monitor inside of you, that voice of God called the conscience, is weighing you down because of something that you have done, you are not free. No matter what your rhetoric is, no matter how educated you are, no matter how busy you are, you are not liberated until you are forgiven and freed from the oppression of guilt.

See, Christianity does offer people freedom. But the means of freedom is to be forgiven. To have the weight of guilt and sin lifted off of us. With the Lord there is forgiveness. With the Lord there is pardon.

And Christians would say that no one is free who has to live under the burden of self. Do you know what weighs us down? It is not other people and how they try to control us. It is not economics. It is not circumstance or stuff

from the outside. What weighs us down, according to Christ, is ourselves. It is the burden of self. See the secular world has it exactly backwards. It tells us that following self and celebrating self and asserting self is the way to freedom. But Jesus tells us self is our biggest problem. You see, sin is primarily self-centeredness. And if you look up in a dictionary all the words that are hyphenated with a prefix of self, they are all negative self-absorption, self-assertion, self-promotion, self-indulgence, self-gratification, self-pity, self-importance, self-interest, self-will. No one is free who is still dominated by self.

Christianity alone offers freedom and real choice, real liberation. But it is not the liberation to serve one's self. As forgiveness is the way out of the tyranny and oppression of guilt and sin, love and self-denial are the ways out of the oppression that self demands. Love and self-denial are the ways out.

I want to finish my talk today by just sharing a little bit about what love means in the context of this current battle over abortion. Mothers, you who have chosen to bear children, to keep them and to care for them, you understand the meaning of the word "love." You cannot be a mother and care for a child without understanding love. Because mothers continually put the interest of another person above their own interest. You moms every time you get up at night to comfort your crying child, every time you cook a meal for one of your kids, or buy them clothes, or drive them somewhere, or pray for them, or teach them the Bible and help them to understand the difference between what is right and what is wrong, you are being liberated from the burden of self by putting another human being's interest above your own.

Yes, you are sacrificing. Yes, you are loving. But the loving and self-denial results in your liberty.

Every time you dads provide for your families, every time you keep your commitments, every time you support the product of your own procreation, every time you cook a meal, buy clothes, drive your kids somewhere, your love is not just sacrifice, it is freeing you from the burden of self.

There are a number of women here who have found freedom through loving care for others.

1. Margi Moriarty and the Women for Life Care Group provide counseling training for women who are willing to counsel women in crisis pregnancies.
2. Intercessory prayer for women in crisis pregnancies, abortion issues and pro-life ministries. Both men and women are involved.
3. Barb and Phil Huneke, a couple in this church, are providing a home for Lamonica Holden and her son, Tory. Phil and Barb's own children are grown and, yet, they continue to care for these new members of their household. Phil gets the privilege of being a male influence in Tory's life. I'm told that Tory's little face lights up when he hears Phil's voice.
4. Mike and Diana Nelson lead the Young Marrieds Kinship, which as a group has committed to financially assisting pregnant women through crisis pregnancies by taking an offering each week at kinship and donating it to them.

5. There is a lady in our church who crochets booties and hats to give as a gift to women who make an on-the-spot decision to not abort their babies.
6. Rhodie Shreve is actively involved in volunteering many hours of her time to the Pro-Life Movement.
7. Debbie Neybert and Sara Beaumier offer post-abortion counseling for women who are suffering from the trauma of having had an abortion.

I want to finish with a closing word to those of you men and women who have at some point in the past committed the sin of abortion – men, you as boyfriends, as husbands, perhaps as fathers, friends, pressed women in your life or counseled a woman to get an abortion. Women, I know in a church like this, I have talked with some of you, there are many, many of you who have committed the sin of abortion. You men and women, you sit here and listen to a testimony like Sara's, listen to a talk like this, you say, "What can I do? What should I do?" Of course, as I have already mentioned, that famous verse from Psalm 130, *"With the Lord, there is forgiveness."* There is forgiveness with the Lord. And anyone who comes to God, acknowledging fault, confessing responsibility whatever the pressures, and asking God to sincerely forgive them, will be forgiven. With the Lord, (Psalm 130:4), there is forgiveness.

And you know, men and women, you who have participated in the sin of abortion, I believe you are going to be given an opportunity to ask forgiveness not only from God, but I believe in heaven you are going to have an opportunity to ask forgiveness from the baby you aborted and you will be forgiven.

I also believe that there is healing power in paying back, in giving back what we have taken. You know, many Christians today wonder about why they don't feel forgiven even though they have confessed a sin. They say, "You know, this area in my life remains unhealed, untouched, even though I have talked to God about it and have asked God's forgiveness." Many Christians have missed a biblical concept of healing called reparations, to pay back. It is not an earning thing.

You say, "What are reparations?"

There is a story in the book of Luke about Zacchaeus, the Tax Collector, who stole from the poor. After he met Christ and gave his heart to Christ, he said, "If I have taken anything that wasn't mine, I am going to pay it back four times over."

Jesus said, "Truly, salvation has come to your house today, Zacchaeus."

Men and women, listen to me. If you want salvation to come to your house, I am talking about real healing, not eternal life, but real healing of the sin of abortion, pay back.

You say, "Rich, how can I pay back at this point in my life?"

I believe that Sara Beaumier has set an example for you. You know, as she counsels women against having an abortion, as she gives of herself at the Pregnancy Distress Center to assist women who are caught, who are lonely, who would be tempted to have an abortion because they have no one to talk to and nowhere to turn, I believe healing is coming to Sara.

This week I received a letter from a family in our congregation on a very different note who had some tough economic/financial times and this family wrote about how Vineyard had helped them through some very difficult times and assisted them. I was so touched because in the letter, the family said, "Now, we want to pay back. We have received so much blessing, we want to give back something."

Men and women, particularly those of you who have been involved in the sin of abortion, don't just walk away with a confession, give something back. Give something to women who are struggling. Take some money out of your purse or pocket and give to an organization that is helping. Give something of your time, something of yourself.

Why am I pro-life? I am pro-life because I am a Christian. Because I believe in the truth. Because God is a God of life. Because God is a God of freedom. Because God is a God of love. I am pro-life because I am a Christian.