

## The Gospel and Abortion

### Psalm 10

Ask any adult where they were the morning of September 11, 2001, and they'll be able to tell you. I was in the dentist's chair, getting a cavity filled. We remember, because on that day our nation was glued to the television, watching the largest terrorist attack on American soil unfold, as two hijacked airplanes flew into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, and another into the Pentagon in Washington D.C. On that day, over 2,900 people lost their lives. It was shocking, utterly tragic—such that we'll never forget where we were when it happened.

But do you remember where you were on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015, when another 2,900 people were killed on American soil? Or on March 15, April 12<sup>th</sup>, July 7<sup>th</sup>—2,900 people each day? Where were you yesterday, when another 2,900 people were killed right here in our country, 53 here in Massachusetts,<sup>1</sup> for a total of over 1 million people per year in the U.S. according to the most recent statistics<sup>2</sup>—lives taken through the brutal act of abortion?

More importantly, what do we do about this crisis? How do we respond—personally? As mothers and fathers? As brothers and sisters? As citizens? As Christians? As a church?

Do we shrug in indifference, or throw our arms up in defeat? Do we respond in outrage and protest—taking to the streets or social media? Do we get involved, through political channels or pregnancy centers, giving or helping where we can?

No doubt there's a place for many of these responses (save indifference or defeat). But our question this morning is specific: *how does the gospel of Jesus speak to the abortion crisis in America?* How does the good news of Jesus and what he's done to establish God's kingdom and deal with our sin guide us and equip us in how to *feel* and *think* and *act* in light of this tragedy?

The gospel tells us that sin really is sinful, because God really is holy. But it also tells us that grace is sufficient, because Christ's death on the cross really was enough to deal with our sin. Which bids us to be *honest* about sin and brokenness—how ugly and terrible and sorrowful it is, and yet *hopeful* that God will do and in fact *already* has done something about it.

If our goal is to let the gospel of Jesus shape our reaction to the abortion crisis—how we feel and think and act—then I think the place to begin is with *lament*. Lament. Which is what brings us to Psalm 10.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Mass Citizens for Life, there were 19,501 abortions in Massachusetts in 2012, an average of 53 per day. See <http://masscitizensforlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Abortions-in-MA-Hosp-Clinics-2012.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Ertelt, "57,762,169 Abortions in America Since Roe vs. Wade in 1973," *LifeNews.com*, Jan. 21, 2015. Available at: <http://www.lifenews.com/2015/01/21/57762169-abortion-in-america-since-roe-vs-wade-in-1973/>.

## The Sorrow of Abortion (10:1)

The Psalms are filled with laments—honest expressions of frustration and complaint, looking to God for help from the midst of a serious trial. That’s what Psalm 10 is doing when it begins with the cry, “Why, O LORD, do you stand afar off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” (Ps. 10:1).

Lament songs are dominated by “feelings of grief, loneliness, perplexity, anger, frustration, abandonment, despair.”<sup>3</sup> They show us that it’s okay to be honest about how messed up the world is, and how frustrated and needy we are within it, while at the same time directing us to the one who can actually do something about it. A lament is a prayer. It’s not just a venting session, though there is a fair amount of release involved. And it’s not the same thing as grumbling. The difference between the kind of grumbling the Israelites did in the wilderness and lamenting is that a lament rises not out of disbelief in God, but belief that he is God and that he can do something about it. Again, a lament is a prayer, directed to the God who has the character and ability to deal justly with the problems we see, and who is in fact able to redeem our suffering and use it for his purposes.

Now Psalm 10 is not exclusively about abortion; it’s about injustice in general. But it speaks to abortion with a vivid and unsettling precision. And when we weigh this crisis in our nation and globally, I think this is the place to start. An expression of sorrow and grief, of sadness and frustration at how something like this can even be happening. “Why, O LORD, do you stand afar off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” (Ps. 10:1). This isn’t right. There are 44 million abortions worldwide each year,<sup>4</sup> over a million in the U.S. Nearly 58 million abortions have been performed in America since *Roe vs. Wade* in 1973.<sup>5</sup> 21% of pregnancies in the U.S. are terminated through abortion, and among ethnic minorities often targeted by abortion providers, the percentage is much higher. In New York City, the abortion rate among African Americans is closer to 60%, and 41% for Hispanics.<sup>6</sup>

“How long, O LORD? Will you forget [these children] forever? How long will you hide your face from [them]?” (Ps. 13:1). Our first response in the face of the abortion crisis is lamentation and sorrow on behalf of the unborn, to add our voices to Rachel’s lament from Jeremiah 31, which Matthew echoes as Herod slaughters innocent children in his effort to snuff out Jesus: “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more” (Matt. 2:18).

And yet, when we look again at v. 1, we realize that these words express not only our sorrow as we look at the abortion crisis as a whole, but for some of us, this is the cry of sorrow *from the midst* of a crisis pregnancy. The feeling of being alone and scared, not knowing what to do. “Why, O LORD, do you stand afar off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” (Ps. 10:1).

<sup>3</sup> Mark D. Futato, *Joy Comes in the Morning* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 50.

<sup>4</sup> As of 2008. See “Facts on Induced Abortion Worldwide,” *The Guttmacher Institute*, Jan. 2012. Available at: [https://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb\\_IAW.html?gclid=CjwKEAiAvPGxBRCH3YCgpdBcmYSJABqHRVwZeoV-6sEC60UOdW0yAoaVJBNO7dOoQROWVkdVwWR6BoC-1bw\\_wcB](https://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_IAW.html?gclid=CjwKEAiAvPGxBRCH3YCgpdBcmYSJABqHRVwZeoV-6sEC60UOdW0yAoaVJBNO7dOoQROWVkdVwWR6BoC-1bw_wcB).

<sup>5</sup> Ertelt, “57,762,169 Abortions in America Since *Roe vs. Wade* in 1973.”

<sup>6</sup> Michelle Charlesworth and Jennifer Matarese, “41% of NYC pregnancies end in abortion,” Jan. 9, 2011, *ABC7 News*. Available at: <http://abc7ny.com/archive/7883827/>.

The Guttmacher Institute, which is a research affiliate of Planned Parenthood, has recorded and categorized the various reasons people given for why they get an abortion.

- 25% say it's because they're not ready for a child (or another child); the timing is wrong.
- 23% can't afford a baby now.
- 19% are done with their childbearing or childrearing years.
- 8% don't want to be a single mother, or have relationship problems.
- 7% feel too young or immature.<sup>7</sup>

One could say that the common thread among these answers is selfishness. And technically speaking, one would be right (if we're being honest). But there's another thread that weaves through them, and that weighs much more heavily in the moment, and that's *fear*. What will my family say? What will people think? How can I raise a child? Especially with someone I don't really want to be with? What if the baby has a disability? What will happen to my education? What about my career? How can I afford this? What will people say at church?

I spent some time talking to Sara Loy, the Executive Director of Boston Center for Pregnancy Choices this week, and as she shared from her experience personally and in working with hundreds of women, most people in crisis aren't asking themselves, 'is this a child or not?' Most are saying to themselves, 'I can't have a child yet'—not realizing that *they already have one*. As John Ensor describes it, "A woman in an unplanned pregnancy is truly frightened and feels that her very life is ending—not physically, but emotionally and spiritually. Her life as she has projected it appears threatened by the baby. Abortion in her mind is a desperate act to save her own life. This may not be true. But it feels true."<sup>8</sup>

The situation is dominated by fear. And it's often followed, at some point, with shame and regret. A shame that women, even in churches like this, can carry and keep to themselves for decades.<sup>9</sup> What would people say if they knew? Will people judge me if they found out?

The sorrow of abortion runs deep, often on both sides. "Why, O LORD, do you stand afar off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?"

The common experience in both postures of lament is a *sense of God's distance*. For those who are horrified by the abortion crisis, this sense of God's distance is a matter of frustration and sorrow. For those caught in middle of a crisis, that distance is a matter of confusion and fear.

And yet there are other players in this crisis, who perpetuate it and profit from it, for whom this sense of God's absence is something to be exploited and taken advantage of. And that's what we see in vv. 2-11, which I believe reveals to us the root of abortion.

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<sup>7</sup> Lawrence B. Finer, Lori F. Frohwirth, Lindsay A. Dauphinee, Susheela Singh, and Ann M. Moore, "Reasons U.S. Women Have Abortions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives," *Perspectives on Sexual Reproduction and Reproductive Health* 37, no. 3 (2005). n. p. Available at: <http://www.guttmacher.org/tables/370305/3711005t3.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> John Ensor, *Answering the Call*. Updated Ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 2012), 4.

<sup>9</sup> See David Reardon, *Aborted Women, Silent No More* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1997), xi.

## The Root of Abortion (10:2-11)

What makes abortion possible, for those who receive it, but more so for those who advocate and fund it and perform it, is *a renouncing and suppressing of God*. Putting him out of the picture so that we can do what we want. Look at vv. 2-4:

In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor; let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised. For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain *curse and renounces the LORD*. In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, "*There is no God.*"

This is the root of the abortion industry. The only way you can advocate for and participate in the termination of the most vulnerable members of the human race is if you ignore or reject God. Once God is out of the picture, we don't have to answer to anyone but ourselves. We can assign value to life according to our own desires, for the sake of our own greed for gain. And we can carry on for years, assuring ourselves, 'Who is there to stop us? Who will be there to judge us?' This is the kind of brazen self-confidence we see in vv. 5-6:

His ways prosper at all times; your judgments are on high, out of his sight; as for all his foes, he puffs at them. He says in his heart, "I shall not be moved; throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity."

And to make sure that we don't meet adversity, that no one gets in the way, we unleash an arsenal of deception in our speech. Verse 7: "His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue are mischief and iniquity." This is the central tactic that enables the abortion industry to do what it does. We don't call the baby a baby; we call it a "product of conception" or a "clump of cells." That's deceptive speech, meant to steer you away from the truth so that you can be taken advantage of, or take advantage of your child. Or we tell you that abortion is about women's health, but we leave out the fact that statistically speaking, 50% of children aborted are women. What about their health? Their central tactic is deception.

Now that's a bold charge—that politicians and doctors and executives are willfully tampering with the truth. It's possible that some of them are self-deceived, that they really believe the lie that they've been touting. But willful deception is also a documented fact. The lie that a fetus isn't yet a person, when every medical textbook states clearly that human life begins at conception.<sup>10</sup> The lie perpetuated until recently that without Planned Parenthood, women would lose access to mammograms, when in fact Planned Parenthood has never done mammograms.<sup>11</sup> The lie that only 3% of their business is abortion, when in fact they receive "at least a third of its clinic income—and more than 10 percent of all its revenue, government funding included—from its abortion procedures."<sup>12</sup> The lie that some clinics weren't seeking to make a profit off

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., "Life Begins at Fertilization," <http://www.princeton.edu/~prolife/articles/embryoquotes2.html>.

<sup>11</sup> See Bill Morris, "Planned Parenthood Honcho: I Really Didn't Say Everything I Said," *Washington Free Beacon*, Sept. 29, 2015. Available at: <http://freebeacon.com/issues/planned-parenthood-honcho-i-really-didnt-say-everything-i-said/>.

<sup>12</sup> See Rachel Larimore, "The Most Meaningless Abortion Statistic Ever," *Slate*, May 27, 2013. Available at: [http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx\\_factor/2013/05/07/3\\_percent\\_of\\_planned\\_parenthood\\_s\\_services\\_are\\_abortion\\_but\\_what\\_about.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2013/05/07/3_percent_of_planned_parenthood_s_services_are_abortion_but_what_about.html).

“donated” fetal tissue, when there is now video evidence showing them haggling over prices.<sup>13</sup> The lie that the videos exposing their illegal and gruesome practices were “highly edited” and should therefore be ignored, when in fact they have been authenticated by a third party forensics group that frequently works with Fortune 500 companies.<sup>14</sup>

I don't know what other word to call that than deception. And they're persuasive. 70% of New Englanders believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases.<sup>15</sup> But the most troubling part is that this deception is employed for the explicit goal of taking advantage of the weak and vulnerable. Listen to vv. 8-10 with the abortion industry in mind:

He sits in ambush in the villages; in hiding places he murders the innocent. His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless;<sup>9</sup> he lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket; he lurks that he may seize the poor; he seizes the poor when he draws him into his net.<sup>10</sup> The helpless are crushed, sink down, and fall by his might.<sup>11</sup> He says in his heart, "God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it."

God have mercy. God have mercy.

Mercy, in fact, will be their only hope. Because the fact is God *does* see. He *will* act. And that's what we see in vv. 12-18—the Lord's response to injustice. His response to abortion.

### **The LORD's Response to Abortion (10:12-18)**

In v. 12 the psalmist transitions from describing the wicked to raising his voice on behalf of the oppressed.

Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted.<sup>13</sup> Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, "You will not call to account"?<sup>14</sup> But you do see, for you note mischief and vexation, that you may take it into your hands; to you the helpless commits himself; you have been the helper of the fatherless.<sup>15</sup> Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer; call his wickedness to account till you find none. (10:12-15)

God will act on behalf of the unborn. He hears their silent cries and he will bring justice on those who harm and kill them.

This is a sobering reality, and one that our nation has suppressed for far too long. As a culture we have convinced ourselves what v. 13 is talking about—“Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, ‘You will not call to account?’” We don't believe there will be a reckoning in the end. We don't believe that God will actually judge sin. And the church is not immune from

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<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.centerformedicalprogress.org/cmp/investigative-footage/>.

<sup>14</sup> Austin Ruse, “Independent forensics team: Center for Medical Progress videos are authentic,” *Breitbart*, Sept. 29, 2015. Available at: <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/09/29/independent-forensics-team-center-medical-progress-videos-authentic/>.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Lipka, “5 Abortion Facts,” *Pew Research Center*, June 11, 2015. Available at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/11/5-facts-about-abortion/>.

this. 37% of women obtaining abortions identify as Protestant, and 28% as Catholic.<sup>16</sup> We don't believe what our own Scriptures say—what our God says—about the value of life.

We don't really believe that God will judge sin, because we don't really believe that sin is that bad. And we don't believe sin is that bad, because we don't believe that God is that holy, that his majesty is unparalleled, his perfection unattainable, his purity untouchable.

But holy and just he is. Verses 16-18:

The LORD is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land. O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.

And so what hope is there in the face of abortion? What hope is there for women in crisis, who feel like their lives are falling apart around them? What hope is there for a blind and brutal industry that makes a profit from bloodguilt? What hope is there if we've already had an abortion—is there any cleansing and healing for us?

There is only one solution for healing and hope in the face of abortion—it's the gospel of Jesus Christ.

John Ensor writes, "Abortion, and the bloodguilt it invokes, must be dealt with. It needs to be called out by name, confessed by name, and brought under a gospel that declares that there is no forgiveness for the shedding of innocent blood except by the shedding of innocent blood, that is, by the blood of Christ."<sup>17</sup>

Understand that the king who will judge sin in the end, the king who reigns forever and ever, is the one who established his reign on earth *by taking our place on the cross*. He does see, he notes mischief and vexation, *that he might take it into his hands* (Ps. 10:14). Jesus did not come to earth as a distant observer, like a supervisor showing up on the job site to check on our progress but not lift a hammer to help. Jesus came to step into our human experience and to take that experience on himself—to stand in our place, to taste for himself the full range of human brokenness and to take on himself the full weight of human sin, that he might reconcile us with his Father.

Know that the fear you feel when your life seems to be falling apart—Jesus knows that fear. When he prayed in the garden, his soul was burdened and sorrowful to the point of death, knowing what was about to take place—that the cup of God's wrath, full weight of his holy anger against all human sin, the very weight of hell itself—was about to be poured out on him. When you are crippled in fear over the consequences over your actions, know that Jesus knows your fear—literally. He took it on himself and made it his fear.

The tears you shed in shame and loneliness, know that Jesus has tasted the bitter salt and his heart breaks with you. He weeps over your sin and he weeps with you in your sorrow.

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<sup>16</sup> "Induced Abortions in the United States," *Guttmacher Institute*, July 2014. Available at: [http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb\\_induced\\_abortion.html](http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_induced_abortion.html).

<sup>17</sup> Ensor, 110.

The betrayal and abandonment you feel from those who reject you because you've had an abortion, or because you were unwilling to have one—Jesus knows your rejection. It became his rejection as he was abandoned by his closest friends, even as his Father turned his back on him on the cross.

Jesus shares in our lament. Think about it—one of the last things that came from his mouth on the cross was a lament—“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” He took up Israel's lament and our lament, so that he could become the answer to that lament. The answer to all the brokenness and sin in this world. He was forsaken that we might be forgiven. His blood was poured out, that our bloodguilt might be cleansed. He rose from the dead, and he's coming again, and when he does, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

### **Our Response to Abortion**

So how do we respond to all of this? More than anything else, we must continue to hold onto and hold out the life-changing truth of the gospel. If God's response to abortion (and all brokenness and sin) is to send his Son to live, die, and rise in our place, then our response is to cling to Christ, and offer his mercy and grace to everyone else. Abortion is not the unforgiveable sin. There is hope and healing in the cross of Christ. “Only the innocent blood of Christ, proclaimed and believed, can cleanse away the bloodguilt of abortion.”<sup>18</sup>

But are there specific, practical things we can do in response to the abortion crisis, as the gospel fuels and directs us? Absolutely. And I'd like to suggest four, all of which flow out of a reverence for God. If the root problem is to ignore or renounce God, then our essential response must be to acknowledge his holiness and honor his vision for life. There are four ways we can and should do that.

First, *commit to honoring life personally*. Commit, right now before God, that whatever the circumstance or situation in your life, abortion is not an option. Not for you, not for your spouse, not for your teenage daughter. If churchgoers stopped receiving abortions, the rate would drop by 65% next year. Decide now, as a family, that grace is going to reign in your relationships with your kids. Do your children know, that if they were to come to you and tell you that they or their girlfriend were pregnant, that though you would be sad and disappointed, you would love them and come alongside them? That, yes, there are consequences for sin, but God's grace is sufficient. If they don't know that, tell them! For the sake of these children, your grandchildren, tell them! Commit to honoring life personally.

Second, *honor life persuasively*. Understand the issue and be able to talk about it with friends and colleagues in a compelling way. You don't have to be a jerk about it. But equip yourself to advocate for life.

One of the simplest ways to do that is remember the acronym, SLED. At the heart of the abortion debate is the question of whether an unborn child is human. Everything hangs on that determination. SLED helps us reason persuasively with others that there is no logical reason to view a baby in the womb as less human:

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<sup>18</sup> Ensor, 29.

- **Size:** True, embryos are smaller than newborns and adults, but why is that relevant? Do we really want to say that large people are more human than small ones? . . .
- **Level of development:** True, embryos and fetuses are less developed than the adults they'll one day become. But again, why is this relevant? Four-year-old girls are less developed than fourteen-year-old ones. Should older children have more rights than their younger siblings? . . .
- **Environment:** Where you are has no bearing on who you are. Does your value change when you cross the street or roll over in bed? If not, how can a journey of eight inches down the birth-canal suddenly change the essential nature of the unborn from nonhuman to human? . . .
- **Degree of Dependency:** If viability makes us human, then all those who depend on insulin or kidney medication are not valuable and we may kill them.<sup>19</sup>

We need to honor life persuasively.

Third, *honor life practically*. “Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). Love your neighbors, single moms, couples or women in crisis pregnancies, in tangible ways. Be a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on. Provide clothing, childcare, friendship, support. The church must be known not just for being pro-birth, but pro-life. That means that Christians should be setting the pace in supporting crisis pregnancy works like Boston Center for Pregnancy Choices. It means that Christians should be setting the pace in adoption and foster care. It means that we can no longer move to the other side of the road as we see someone in crisis, but like Jesus, we must be willing to make their crisis our crisis, loving others at great cost to self. Think of Pastor Bruce’s sermon on the parable of the Good Samaritan last week. Who can you come alongside in love?

Finally, *honor life politically*. Politics will not save the world. And yet, as long as we have a voice, we must use it on behalf of the vulnerable and advocate for those who cannot advocate for themselves. Whether from a posture of political marginalization, like Martin Luther King Jr., whose passion for Christ drove him to stand against institutionalized racism in America. Or from a posture of political power, like William Wilberforce in England, who labored for 42 years in Parliament to abolish slavery. His passion and resolve set a pace and a pattern that we should take up in this issue today: “Never, never will we desist till we . . . extinguish every trace of this bloody traffic, of which our posterity, looking back to the history of these enlightened times, will scarce believe that it has been suffered to exist so long a disgrace and dishonor to this country.”<sup>20</sup> That’s my prayer for us in this day and this issue, that when I sit down with my grandkids, they’ll say, ‘Did people really believe that back then, Grandpa?’ Would God change hearts so much that abortion becomes a memory, a page in the history books, in *this* generation.

May we honor life in reverence to God, holding onto and holding out the gospel of life. “The LORD is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land. O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more” (Ps. 10:16-18).

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<sup>19</sup> This summary of the SLED argument developed by Scott Klusendorf is found in Ensor, 49-50.

<sup>20</sup> As cited in Ensor, 104.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### *Questions for Study and Understanding*

1. As many as 70 of the Psalms involve *lament*—honest expressions of frustration and complaint, raised to God in prayer. Why do you think this language is so uncommon in the church’s experience and music today?
2. In v. 1, the psalmist laments God’s apparent absence in “times of trouble.” How does he describe these “times of trouble” in vv. 2-11?
3. Based on what the psalmist emphasizes and repeats, what seems to be the central problem underneath the actions of the wicked?
4. What parallels do you see between the description of trouble in vv. 2-11 and the abortion industry today?
5. How would you summarize the Lord’s response to the trouble (see vv. 12-18)?

### *Questions for Reflection and Application*

6. How does the Lord’s response to injustice (vv.12-18) apply to the abortion crisis today?
7. How does the good news of Jesus shape our response the abortion crisis in general, and how we ministry to people caught in that crisis in particular?
8. Discuss the four specific applications offered at the conclusion of the sermon:
  - a. What needs to happen in order to make or reinforce a commitment to *honor life personally* (i.e. the commitment not to terminate our own pregnancy, or that of our spouse or child)?
  - b. How equipped do you feel at *honoring life persuasively* (i.e. understanding the issue and being able to discuss it persuasively with friends, family, and colleagues)?
  - c. What are some tangible ways you can come along others in your life or community to *honor life practically* (e.g. care for pregnant mothers or single moms, help with crisis pregnancy centers)?
  - d. What can we do to *honor life politically*, especially in light of recent media attention thanks to the recent undercover videos at Planned Parenthood?