



Dear Family and Friends,

Things were getting out of hand. Voices were raised and the crowd was visibly upset. Gathered in front of Justice For All's display at the University of Georgia – Athens (UGA) were several pro-life men, most notably Matthew and Isaac, engaging one pro-choice woman, “Jamie.” I joined the debate hoping to turn it into a gracious dialogue.

I started by addressing a question to Matthew. As I was beginning to understand his point of view on abortion, he was interrupted by Jamie, the only other girl joining in the conversation with me. Soon after she started talking, she was interrupted by Isaac. We weren't getting any closer to having a productive conversation, so I laid some ground rules.

Me: Excuse me, but I don't feel like we're getting anywhere with this discussion. I propose that we take time to listen to each other and try to understand where everyone is coming from. If someone else is speaking and you have something you'd like to say, please raise your hand and that will signify that you get to speak next. Now, I hold to “ladies first,” so I'm going to let Jamie speak next.

Jamie: Well, I think that women are just in really difficult situations. We don't know what any given woman is going through or why she needs an abortion...

Matthew and Isaac: But wait! There's a baby in that situation...

At this point, Jamie was looking very angry. Trying to avoid further outbursts, I decided to help the pro-lifers out a little bit by teaching them the concept of common ground.

Me [*raising my hand*]: Hey guys, I think Jamie is actually saying something about which we can all agree...if I understood her correctly, she is concerned about women who are facing a really difficult situation. I think we all are concerned for women in difficult circumstances. Is that right?

Matthew and Isaac: Yes. Definitely!

Me: I'm glad we agree on that. I find that making note of the things we agree on is particularly helpful.

The dynamic of the conversation then changed. Prior to introducing the concepts of listening and finding common ground, students were yelling their views and grouped together like a mob. After adding structure and kindness, the group formed into a circle and all involved started respectfully raising their hands when they had something to say.

Even though things were going well, I was becoming concerned for Jamie. She was still highly emotional and when I would aim to lovingly point out the flaws of her pro-choice position, she would admit that I was right, but then still cling with a passion to her views. I could sense that something was underneath the surface that she was not sharing.



This is a photo of the conversation at UGA. You can't see Jamie, but she is standing right next to me.



The conversation carried on for about 45 more minutes. I heard the views of those who had joined our conversation. Eventually it was obvious that everyone had said what he or she had to say. As people were starting to repeat themselves, I raised my hand again.

Me: I've appreciated all of you sharing your views. Can I see a show of hands on who understands what Matthew believes?

All hands rose.

Me: Who understands what Jamie believes?

All hands rose for a second time. I continued asking this question about every person who had shared his view, and each time, there was a complete consensus that everyone was at least beginning to understand what the others believed. I then kindly ended the conversation.

Me: Now that we understand each other, I think it would be more productive to end the group discussion here, instead of each of us repeating our stances on abortion. I think no one at this point is open to changing his or her mind in front of a group. I'm more than happy to talk to each of you one-on-one.

The group disbanded, and I took this opportunity to pull Jamie aside. I shared with her that I appreciated her sharing her view when nearly everyone had disagreed with her. She thanked me, but she was still noticeably hurting. I was becoming more and more convinced that Jamie had a personal connection with abortion.

Me: Do you know anyone who has had an abortion?

With that question, Jamie fell into my arms weeping. I held her until she gained her composure. Jamie then confirmed that she herself had an abortion in her past.

Jamie [*pointing at a photo of the aftermath of abortion*]: That photo condemns me to hell.

Me: Jamie, abortion is not the unforgiveable sin. Jesus is just as willing and able to forgive the sin of abortion as He would be any other sin. There is grace and healing in Jesus. I'm not trying to take away your guilt [*because I did believe what Jamie did was wrong*], but I want you to know that redemption for your past mistakes is completely open to you.

Jamie: I just don't know why I feel this way, because I don't think abortion is wrong.

Me: [*very gently*] You don't have to answer this question out loud, but I want to give you something to think about. Are you sure abortion isn't wrong, or are you just telling yourself that to justify your actions?

At this Jamie simply nodded her head. We talked for a few more minutes and I made sure to get her contact information so that I could connect her with resources for healing from her abortion. Once I got back from Georgia, I did email Jamie. Her message back to me showed me why I do this work with Justice For All. She said,

“Thank you for this. I have been thinking a lot since we met, and I want you to know that that has been good for me. I've actually discussed the matter with my parents for the first time in several years, and it was a healing occasion for all of us. Thank you for your help.”

I am confident that God is at work. He is at work in Jamie's life, my life, and your life. Thank you for supporting me in my work with Justice For All. Your prayers and financial support make stories like this possible. I hope you have a very merry Christmas!

Love in Jesus, 

