

Interrupted

JOANNA WAGNER'S MONTHLY UPDATE



FEBRUARY 2016

Dear Friend,

By the middle of my conversation with “Trevor,” a pro-choice student at the University of Oklahoma (OU), I began to understand the crux of our disagreement on abortion. While Trevor agreed that the unborn is living and of the human species, he did not seem to understand that the unborn is a whole organism. Because of this, he had a hard time seeing the unborn as an equal member of the human community. Having built rapport with Trevor, I began to make my case using a question. It went something like this:

Joanna: Trevor, if 1) you are a whole organism now, and 2) nothing except for a proper environment and adequate nutrition has been added to you since fertilization, then 3) wouldn't you have had to be a whole organism at fertilization as well?*

Suddenly, a pro-life student, “Eric,” whom I had never met, came out of nowhere and barged into the conversation, shouting,

Eric: We shouldn't even be asking that question! Abortion is murder! God created every human being, and it's completely wrong to kill anyone. [He was clearly flabbergasted that Trevor would even consider whether or not abortion is an acceptable option.]

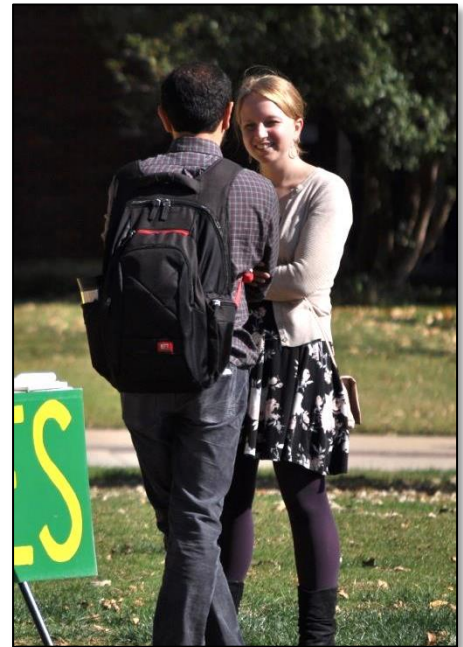
Taken aback by Eric's alarming entrance, I tried to remain calm and listened for a few seconds as he stated his convictions very loudly to both Trevor and me. Politely, Trevor asked Eric's name and then said:

Trevor: Eric, I appreciate you sharing your opinion, but Joanna and I were having a very productive conversation before you arrived. I'm actually not religious, so your claims aren't really persuasive to me.

At this point, Trevor and Eric began to talk over each other, and I saw all my work with Trevor over the last half hour completely unraveling before my eyes. I was able to mediate a calm interchange between the two of them briefly, but then Trevor excused himself from the conversation. I only had a few seconds to get his email address from him before he left.

Dejected, and more than a little annoyed with Eric, I tried to decide what to do. I didn't want to let my anger get the best of me. After all, I understood where Eric was coming from, and I agreed with much of what he had said. Like Eric, I also believe that abortion kills human beings, and I agree that it's wrong to kill those human beings, since they are created by God in His image. In fact, I could also relate to his feeling of exasperation at the fact that we even have to ask the kind of question that I was asking Trevor. I wish every person in our society would see as clearly as Eric does that the unborn are valuable human beings.

In an effort to make the best of the broken pieces of my conversation with Trevor, I asked Eric to join me on a nearby bench. I intentionally learned about his story and why he cares about this issue in the first place. I decided to simply treat him in the same way we train our volunteers to treat all people we meet on campus – by seeking to



Talking with “Trevor” at JFA's November 2015 outreach at the University of Oklahoma ... before we were interrupted



JUSTICE FOR ALL - TRAINING THOUSANDS TO MAKE ABORTION UNTHINKABLE FOR MILLIONS, ONE PERSON AT A TIME.

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understand why they react the way they do, by asking questions, and by genuinely listening.

I learned a lot about Eric in that conversation. Most importantly, I learned that his convictions came from a journey out of brokenness and into the joy of discovering his value through a personal relationship with his Savior, Jesus Christ. While Eric had expressed his message to Trevor in a way I found terribly counterproductive, I could see that Eric indeed had a profound message to share.

In an effort to help, I asked Eric a simple question:

Joanna: Eric, how did Jesus share his message of hope with people who disagreed with him?

Eric: Hmm... Good question. What are your thoughts on that?

Joanna: Well, from what I've seen in Scripture, Jesus often asked a lot of questions, and he told many stories too. It seems to me that in most cases the Bible doesn't give us a picture of Jesus shouting at people, but quite often using parables, word-pictures, and questions that would help those in his audience to reconsider their assumptions.

Eric: You're right. I've never really considered that.

Joanna: Eric, I think you have a very important message to share, but I think the way you were going about it with Trevor didn't help him *hear* that message. I work for an organization that trains people to listen, ask good questions, and build common ground so that we can represent Christ well in our conversations. I've seen those skills make a huge difference.

Eric: Wow. I think I can learn a lot from you.

After that, I was able to share a little bit more about Justice For All's training material with Eric, and I gave him a copy of the first chapter of JFA's *Interactive Guide*, which we give to all of our seminar participants. He was very interested in the material I shared and even took notes during our conversation. I was then able to introduce him to Jasmin, a fellow student from OU, who is a trained JFA mentor. After speaking for awhile, Jasmin and Eric set up a time to go through our training material in more depth.

While I was initially very frustrated that Eric interrupted my conversation with Trevor, I ended up being thankful for the opportunity it gave me to share a different approach with him. Eric was passionate, and when I met him he'd allowed his passion to work itself up into what at least appeared to be hot anger. But I honestly don't think he realized the negative impact of his approach, perhaps until our conversation on that bench.

Eric's struggle is one of two I frequently see among people who are pro-life. Like Eric, some are unloving in their approach (even though many of them mean well). But unlike Eric, others are simply silent about the injustice of abortion. I want to help you and your pro-life friends to be neither unloving *nor* silent. If you would like to create conversations in your sphere of influence that can change hearts and minds, check out our Learn at Home Program (www.jfaweb.org/learn-at-home) or email me (joanna.wagner@jfaweb.org). I'll be happy to send you resources to get you started or set up a time for us to talk personally.

Peace and joy, *Joanna*

* For more on this specific line of reasoning, or for information about the biology of fetal development in general, see my April 2013 newsletter at www.jfaweb.org/joanna-wagner-newsletter-archive, visit www.jfaweb.org/what-is-the-unborn, or send me an email (joanna.wagner@jfaweb.org).



This OU student's Bernie Sanders shirt gave me a perfect opportunity to ask him about his perspective on social issues, including abortion.