

The catchphrase, “Up, up, and away!” is usually associated with Superman, the super hero who can leap tall buildings in a single bound. However, in this story it is not the Man of Steel, but an unlikely hero who soars over tall buildings to save the day.

I saw Claire and Abby laughing at comments on the Free Speech Board. I started a conversation with them and found out that they were uncomfortable with abortion, but they believed it should stay legal. So, I asked them to clarify their positions.

“Well, it’s *her* body, so it’s *her* choice,” Claire said.

“Do you believe the baby also has a body, but has no choice?” I asked.

“Yeah, I guess. I know it sounds bad, but it’s *her* body, so it’s *her* choice, right? I mean, what about rape?”

“OK,” I said, “I think I understand what you are saying, but let me make sure. Abby, let’s say that someone kidnaps you and then surgically connects your kidneys to someone else’s failing kidneys. After you are rescued, you have a choice to make. Abby, do you believe you have the moral right to disconnect from this stranger who needs to use your body to survive?”

“Yes,” said Abby.

“So, is your view that this story is like pregnancy? Are you saying that no one should be forced to use her body against her will, to include supporting the life of another human being like in the case of pregnancy?”

“Yes,” they both said.

“I agree with you that your body is yours and that no one should force you to do something with it. This is a very high value that we all share. I want to support that right. However, I do not think it is always the highest moral principle that

applies in a given situation. There may be times when another moral principle takes a higher priority than your bodily autonomy.

“Ladies, I heard you say earlier that you are not personally comfortable with abortion. I also do not believe that the story we just told about Abby and her kidneys is really analogous to pregnancy. Do you have time for me to share a different story that might be helpful in putting bodily rights into perspective?”

“Sure,” they said.

“Did y’all ever see the Disney Pixar movie *UP*?”

“Oh, yes, we loved that movie.”

For those who have not seen it, here is the relevant part of the story. Carl, an elderly widower, had promised his wife that they would go to Paradise Falls in South America. Even though she is gone now, he decides to keep that promise. He ties thousands of balloons to his house and lifts off for adventure. Once Carl is hundreds of feet in the air, he hears a knock at the door.

He opens the door to find Russell, an eight-year-old Wilderness Explorer, clinging to the front porch. “Please let me in,” Russell says. “No,” Carl says, and he shuts the door. Of course, upon a moment’s reflection, he lets Russell come in. After reminding Claire and Abby of this scene, I asked them a question.

“Can Carl kick Russell off the porch to his death?”

“Of course not!” they said.

“So, Carl must use *his* house to shelter Russell and use *his* food to keep Russell alive until someone else can take over Russell’s care. This sounds a lot like pregnancy. What if someone had tied Russell up and put him on Carl’s porch? That would be a lot like rape, but would it change



Carl's moral obligation?"

"No, it wouldn't."

I went on to ask Claire and Abby if they believed parents had a moral obligation to feed and house their children, to provide them with basic care. They agreed with this and admitted that *UP* actually illustrated that point.

"I never heard it explained like that before. That's really helpful to me," Claire said.

"I agree. Thanks a lot," Abby said.

Modern Day Parables

Jesus addressed misunderstandings about moral questions in his day using a similar strategy. He would tell stories, which we call parables, to test people's moral intuitions and help them see God's moral principles.

For example, the Jewish culture of Jesus's day valued resting on the Sabbath. After all, it was one of the Ten Commandments: "Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). But Jesus put this value in its proper place by telling a story: "Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?" (Luke 14:5).

The story taught that helping those in need was of higher importance than resting on the Sabbath. Both principles were true, but many Jewish leaders of the day had misprioritized them.

After Jesus told a parable, the disciples would often say, "Explain the parable to us." So, let's explain *UP*.

The Moral Compass

God programmed the moral compass in each one of us, and it starts out pointing north. Our moral intuition is an accurate guide for telling us what is basically right or wrong until it gets messed up by our culture or by our own selfishness. The messages of our culture can act like metal objects near our moral compass which in-



terfere with its reading, causing us to go in the wrong direction.

Sometimes, moral principles come into conflict, and we must decide which principle comes first. If we allow our culture to influence our compass, then a message like "my body, my choice" can influence us to choose the wrong heading. Here is a test: Can you place these moral principles in their proper order?

- You should not be forced to use your body to do something against your will.
- You should provide food and shelter to another human being who is completely dependent upon you for those things.

The second principle is higher than the first when they are competing for application. In our culture we highly value autonomy, freedom, and choice; but your right to your own body is not absolute. It is subject to other moral principles. This is the lesson of the parable *UP*.

Claire and Abby's moral compasses still wanted to point north, but our culture was interfering with them. With a little help from Russell—not Superman—Claire and Abby were able to readjust their compasses and fly off in the right direction. Up, up, and away!



The Justice For All training department has been working hard to respond to the toughest pro-choice argument which goes, "Even if the unborn are human, a woman can have an abortion because she has the right to refuse the use of her body to anyone who needs to use it, especially in the case of rape."

My colleague Steve Wagner recently posted an article online titled "De Facto Guardian," which is likely the best available response to this bodily rights argument. You can read it at www.jfaweb.org/DFG.

Special thanks to Tim Brahm in our office for giving us the idea of clarifying bodily rights by using *UP*. It's been a great teaching tool.