

The Use of Graphic Visuals in Pro-Life Work

Frequent Objections of Concerned Christians

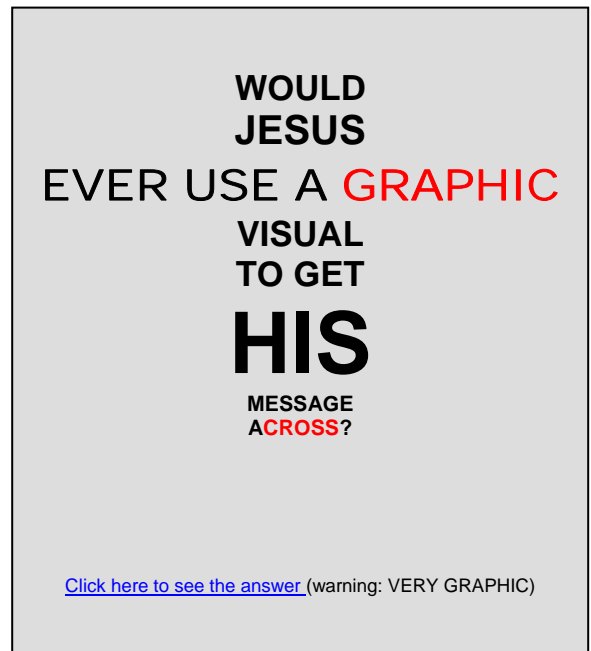
1. *Jesus would never use graphic images to communicate His message.*

Crucifixion was one of the most graphic and public of executions in the Roman Empire. Galatians 3:1 teaches that Jesus used the cross to “placard” himself, literally, “make a public display...”¹, and through the cross, to triumph over His enemies. (Colossians 2.15).

The violence done to Jesus’ face, head, and body began with His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was beaten in the face and head at least three times, and flogged (whipped), **before** his crucifixion (Matt. 26.67-68; 27.26-37; Mark 14.65; Luke 22.63; John 18.22; 19.1-3).

The combined effect of these violent acts, all within a 9 hour period of time, left Jesus so terribly disfigured that those who previously knew Him may not have recognized Him. The prophet Isaiah predicted (53.3-5) that Jesus’ appearance on the cross would be so shocking that it would cause men to “hide their face.”

The central message of Jesus’ humiliation and crucifixion was His willing sacrifice for mankind’s sin (I Corinthians 15.3). The medium for communicating this Good News—the brutal beatings and a Roman crucifix—were horrific and traumatizing to those who witnessed it and wrote about it. Had film or digital cameras been part of the culture, actual photos of His beaten visage would no doubt have been used as evidence for the event.



Would Jesus ever use a graphic image to convey His message? Answer: He already has. [Click here to see a graphic representation of Jesus on the cross](#) – **Warning** – very graphic.

2. *Using graphic abortion images may hinder non-Christians from coming to the gospel.*

We live in a visual learning culture. Consider Mel Gibson’s portrayal of Jesus’ crucifixion in his movie production, *The Passion of the Christ*.

Most Christians would agree that greed is sinful. Yet most of us, Christian or not, would be offended to see a picture of our greed. Upon seeing it, if we refused to repent, would it be the photo or our greed that hinders us from repentance? Could a picture of our sin ever be the real cause for refusing to embrace forgiveness in Christ?

¹ Greek word is προεγράφη.

Jesus told a parable about a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus (Luke 16.19-31). In this word picture, both men die, but the greed of the rich man prevented him from joining Lazarus in heaven. Did Jesus' parable (illustration) hinder greedy people from coming to Him? From the response of one such greedy person, it might be argued that it did (Luke 18.23). Or was it instead his greed that **actually** caused this young rich ruler to stumble?

In the same way, a person who has previously participated in abortion or whose lifestyle might benefit from future participation might refuse to repent upon seeing a realistic picture of abortion sin. Should this possibility steer Christians away from respectfully using pictures to help someone who might instead repent if they were to understand the truth about abortion?

The apostle Paul wrote that the cross will hinder some people from coming to the gospel (1 Cor. 1.23; Gal. 5.11). If this is true, should we cease to include it in sharing the Gospel?

The consequences of unwanted pregnancy are easily pictured by those it will affect. Abortion often appears to be the "least evil" alternative unless the real consequences of abortion are made visible to those at risk.

When used respectfully to confront sin, graphic visuals can be a powerful tool to convince the viewer of the bad news (Rom 3.23) and open a door in the heart of the viewer for the good news.

God used the cross, a graphic visual, to focus attention on the problem of sin, and the good news of salvation embodied in His Son. Graphic visuals of abortion, when properly used, focus the viewers' attention on the sin and consequences of abortion, and present countless opportunities to also share the good news of salvation in Christ. ([Click here to view the Justice For All Exhibit](#)—**warning**—some of the photos in the Exhibit are extremely graphic.)

3. Using graphic images will traumatize, offend, even drive away, both Christian and non-Christian women from seeking healing they need from a previous abortion.

For most, scheduling a dental visit means the pain or cost of **not** seeing the dentist will be greater than the pain and cost anticipated during the dental appointment. The lesser of the two pains wins out almost every time.

Healing from abortion will not usually begin until the emotional pain caused by an abortion becomes greater than the perceived benefits of that abortion. Only 1 in 4 women report feelings of regret over their abortion.²

Without a dramatic change of moral and emotional equilibrium in these women, healing will not begin. Respectfully presented, abortion images have, through the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16.8), the capability of initiating such a moral and emotional change.

Worse yet, without meaningful intervention, both Christian and non-Christian women who have previously experienced abortion are actually **more likely** to experience a subsequent abortion. The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI) reports that 47% of the nearly 3,600 abortions performed daily in the U.S. are performed on women who have already had at least one previous abortion.³

² "Psychological Responses of Women After First-Trimester Abortion," Brenda Major, PhD et al, *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 2000;57:777-784.

³ http://www.agi-usa.org/pubs/fb_induced_abortion.html

The short term trauma of seeing the painful truth about abortion is preferable to the long term trauma produced by additional abortion sin, not to mention the possible loss of reconciliation to God through Christ.

Seeing and understanding sin as God views it has one of two effects upon us: [we either move further away](#) from Him, [or we move closer through the cross of Christ](#). (1 John 1.8-9) Showing abortion from God's perspective—for the sinful behavior it actually is—will produce both responses.

There is no doubt that some of the abortion-experienced students on campus choose not to engage the Exhibit directly. Yet after a decade of experience we have found that sensitively showing abortion visuals to abortion-experienced persons creates numerous opportunities to minister grace and healing to the many students, staff and faculty who openly share their experiences of past abortion because of the presence of the Exhibit.

In this the Justice For All Exhibit program very much needs and relies upon abortion-experienced persons who having also experienced comfort in Christ, are willing to share that comfort with others in need of the same comfort (2 Corinthians 1.3-5).

4. Using graphic images will frighten children who might see them. Jesus taught His disciples never to harm a child.

The Justice For All (JFA) Exhibit is never intentionally placed where elementary-aged children will see it. That does not mean young children will never see it. When permitted, warning signs are placed at some distance from the Exhibit to give advance warning to parents or adults who may have small children in tow.

When UCLA students saw the JFA Exhibit for the first time, they made and wrote numerous statements on the [Free Speech Boards about their right not to be disturbed by abortion pictures](#). To our amazement, fifth graders from a nearby elementary school on a UCLA field trip made an unscheduled stop at the JFA Exhibit. Their teacher's request to [allow the 5th graders permission to write their thoughts on the Free Speech boards](#) resulted in numerous expressions of [compassion for unborn children harmed by abortion](#). (e.g., "RIP" and "Adoption" in heart shapes)

Should not students old enough to help conceive a child and experience an abortion also have the benefit of knowing the truth about abortion and its effects? [What would be the cost vs. benefit of withholding such critical information from them?](#)

Jesus taught his disciples never to do anything that might cause a innocent person, especially children, to sin. (Matt. 18.6) By that he did not mean we should avoid teaching our children to be able to recognize sin, but rather properly instruct them so that they might avoid participating in sin.

5. Jesus never preached against abortion nor did his disciples.

Is abortion the murder of an innocent human being? If the answer is yes, then Jesus and his disciples both spoke out against abortion because they spoke out against murder.⁴

Abortion, the murder of unwanted, unborn children, is merely a subset of the larger set of the murder of unwanted humans of all ages.

⁴ See Matthew 5.21; 19.18; Romans 13.19; James 2.11.

Jesus did not specifically speak out against killing newborn children, but the absence of a direct prohibition against that subset of murder does not invalidate his general prohibition against harming innocent persons.

The person who says “Jesus never preached against abortion” has either intentionally or unintentionally deemed unborn children to be either less valuable or less than fully human.

[If the unborn at every stage of their development and growth are full members of the human community](#), **unwanted** unborn humans should not be selectively eliminated from the Scriptural prohibitions against murdering humans.

6. Focusing on abortion will distract Christians from the principle message and preaching of the gospel.

The principle message of the gospel is summed up in I Corinthians 15.3-4 as:

- 1) the penalty of sin, and
- 2) the value of Christ’s substitutionary death for sin, and
- 3) the evidence of both, provided by His resurrection, eye-witnessed by hundreds of people.

Thus verbally preaching the gospel should include a witness against sin and a message of the efficacy of Christ’s death for sin, both proven by His resurrection.

The problem is that most Americans, even Christians, don’t really believe that abortion is all that sinful. They see it as the lesser of two evils, with unwanted pregnancy being the greater evil.

Consider the facts:

A longitudinal study by the Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI), the research arm of Planned Parenthood, suggests that nearly 1.3 million unborn children are killed by abortion annually in the U.S. (i.e., about 3,400 every day – 24/7).⁵

The AGI report indicates that nearly 9 out of 10 abortions are performed on unborn children less than 12 weeks in age.⁶

Gallup Polling consistently suggests that 2 out of 3 Americans believe that killing an unborn child during the first 12 weeks of their life should be legal.⁷ According to polls of Protestant and Catholic Christians in Wichita, KS, 2 out of 3 say they believe abortion should be legal for those who do not want a child with special physical and/or emotional needs.⁸

The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI) consistently finds that abortion practice among Catholics is nearly indistinguishable from the rate within the overall population.⁹ The rate of abortion among professing Evangelicals is only marginally better.

⁵ The Justice Department reports that of the total number of murders committed in 2001 (13,752), 220 were perpetrated against children one year old or younger.

⁶ http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_induced_abortion.html

⁷ “Public Opinion About Abortion -- An In-Depth Review,” by Lydia Saad
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/specialReports/pollSummaries/sr020122v.asp>.

⁸ “The Church and Abortion,” Heartland Life Network, 1995.

⁹ <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/2814096.html>.

Christians and non-Christians alike are morally confused about abortion, and are participating in the sin of abortion at rates often indistinguishable from the general population. People don't generally seek forgiveness for an action they believe to be moral, or believe to be at worst morally neutral.

How will Christians and non-Christians alike ever become convinced of the sinfulness of abortion and repent of abortion sin?

Churches are one possibility. Yet AGI polling suggests that Christians sitting under the teaching of evangelical and Catholic pastors are acting only marginally different than those who do not profess Christ.

Far from detracting from the gospel, a ministry focused upon reaching people with the truth about the sin of abortion seems quite in line with sound gospel presentations – especially when the forgiveness available through Christ is made known.

How will someone who has no real comprehension of the ugliness of abortion sin have any regard for the good news of forgiveness in Christ? Instead of detracting from the message and method of preaching the Gospel, [sharing the truth about abortion and the good news in Christ turns out in theory and in practice to be a life-changing combination!](#)

7. All the children aborted are going to heaven—they are better off because of abortion. Otherwise they might grow up, die and be lost from heaven.

Would anyone making the same claim about one year old children or toddlers be given a hearing?

8. Using graphic visuals is a judgmental approach that Christ would never use. Christians should instead share the truth in love.

Followers of Christ are indeed exhorted not to judge in word or deed (Matthew 7.1). We are instead to forgive, and to experience grace and forgiveness (Luke 6.37; Matthew 6.14-15).

When respectfully done, visually depicting the truth about abortion is neither a proclamation of guilt nor an assurance of forgiveness. Like all of God's Word, Truth about sin is merely a tutorial that helps lead souls to Christ.

For example, most would not see Jesus' challenge to the woman at the well (i.e., that she was a "woman of men") as either judgmental or forgiving. It was the truth about her past that she was required to acknowledge AND agree to BEFORE she could receive "living water."

Recall images and/or presentations that you may have seen used to portray man's inhumanity to man under the Nazi regime, the Cambodian Killing Fields, the civil war in Rwanda, or the killing of Africans in American slavery.

Why would we teach or behave differently about the immorality of killing unwanted, unborn children?

9. Using graphic visuals on campus will harm the work of community-based pregnancy resource center(s) (PRC's).

a. *"It will give PRC's a black eye."*

Inasmuch as the actions of one part the body of Christ will impact all the other parts, this is a reasonable concern.

Yet unless using graphic visuals is sinful behavior in and of itself, the only harm that could arise would be if those using abortion visuals were to do so in a disrespectful or incompetent manner. Then the problem lies not with the use of graphic visual but rather with the attitudes, abilities and/or actions of those using them.

- b. *"It will result in women not coming to the PRC who would have otherwise sought out the PRC for unwanted pregnancy assistance."*

The concern here is that seeing pictures of abortion will make abortion-vulnerable men and women less likely to seek alternatives to abortion, i.e., they will be more disposed to seek abortion.

This is akin to asserting that seeing pictures of civilian war casualties will make people at risk to causing civilian war casualties more likely to kill civilians during an armed conflict.

The one thing that even the most strident supporters of abortion agree upon is that the pictures of abortion make everyone less favorable to having an abortion themselves. (They just don't want to take the right of abortion away from anyone else.)

Though this fear is frequently voiced it is important to note that in over 250 presentations of the Justice For All Exhibit to more than 60 major university campuses totaling 1.75 million students, we have not received one documented or undocumented example of this concern being experienced.

In contrast, thousands have said that because they saw abortion, [they were measurably less likely to have one themselves](#).

- c. *"Bringing the JFA Exhibit to our community's campus will make it more difficult for our PRC to work successfully on the campus."*

Unfortunately few students know about the work of their community PRC. Even more unfortunately, few PRC's have the resources and/or vision to invest in staffing and programming to do regular campus work.

But if a PRC is active or aspire to be active on a local campus, the first question to ask is "What work is the PRC doing on campus?"

Depending upon their answer, it is important to understand what harm do they believe will result in JFA's approach? Usually the above objections will be voiced and need to be addressed.

To date, of the few PRC's that JFA has found active on a university campus, only one has declined to partner in a JFA campus outreach. In contrast, dozens of PRC's have jumped at the opportunity to join JFA in trying to reach out to students on their regional campus.¹⁰

¹⁰ [Click here to see PRC letters of reference.](#)

Conclusion.

The decision to withhold the visual or verbal truth about abortion from those most vulnerable to experience one benefits only those with relatively more power than the population being victimized—unwanted, unborn children, and ends up immeasurably wounding each of their families.

At-risk unborn children cannot speak for themselves; join in praying for advocates to speak on their behalf (Isaiah 6.8).

*Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.
Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked. Psalm 82.3-4*