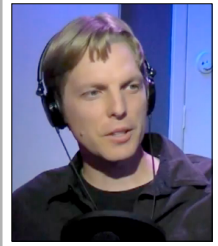


Let
~~“Don’t Make Them Feel Guilty.”~~
Unexpected Help for the Hurting



STEPHEN WAGNER’S MONTHLY UPDATE

OCTOBER 15, 2011

Dear Friend,

Her eyes began to well up with tears. She shared that she had chosen abortion twice. But then she asked me to help her understand Christ’s forgiveness. I gave her my perspective, but I also connected her to a mature Christian woman who had also chosen abortion in her past. They talked for a long time, and the hurting immediately found a measure of healing in Christ.

This conversation took place years ago at the Justice For All Exhibit. But imagine that the conversation had gone differently:

Woman: I feel really bad about what I did.

Steve: Don’t feel bad. There were a lot of things troubling you at the time.

The woman might have ignored my counsel, but now with an added burden of feeling dismissed. Or she might have followed my counsel, but it would have been that much harder for her to come to Christ.

It’s common in the pro-life movement to hear this advice regarding post-abortive women and men: **“Don’t make them feel guilty.”**

The advice seems correct on its face. The sentiment that’s usually behind this statement is helpful, but it can be easily misunderstood. Consider the two possible meanings of “Don’t make them feel guilty.”

1. Help them avoid feeling bad about their decision to have an abortion.
2. Avoid looking down your nose with an air of moral superiority.

Let’s consider each of these. Should we help them avoid feeling bad *at all*? No. If the person chose an abortion, feeling bad about it is essential to coming to Christ for forgiveness. Among other things, feeling bad is precisely what this person needs.

Greg Koukl’s statement about the gospel is relevant here:

*The Gospel is offensive enough. Don’t add any more offense to it. But we should not remove the offense inherent in the Gospel, either.**

#127: How Should Pro-Lifers Interact With Post-Abortive W
by LifeReport

My colleague Rebecca Haschke and I recently discussed the topic of this letter with Josh Brahm on Life Report. You can watch the thirty-minute episode here: <http://prolifepodcast.net/2011/08/127-how-should-pro-lifers-interact-with-post-abortive-women>.



We could say something similar regarding the person who's participated in abortion:

The truth about the wrongness of abortion (guilt) is offensive enough. Don't add any more offense to it. But we should not remove the offense inherent in the truth about the wrongness of abortion (guilt), either.

Practically speaking, this means we follow #2 above: *Avoid looking down your nose with an air of moral superiority.* As my colleague Tammy Cook says, "We shouldn't treat abortion as the unforgiveable sin, and we shouldn't even treat it as 'so much worse than anything I have done.'" Instead, we turn the mirror on ourselves and reflect on our own fallen state. This will naturally produce the empathy that will prove helpful to the person who has participated in abortion.

I have done many serious wrongs, and I am guilty. So the approach I'm suggesting we use with those who have chosen abortion is also a good approach for my friends to use with me. **Let me feel that guilt.** Then, point me to Christ, who brings me to God spotless through His free gift of forgiveness.

If I am not connected to the wrongness of what I've done, you might ask questions to help me connect. Conversely, if I am beating myself silly because my healthy sense of guilt has morphed into a mechanism for self-centered inaction or depression, you as my friend should attempt to help me correct that by reminding me that being too focused on guilt says something about my acceptance of Christ's forgiveness. (I'm mapping a general approach here. I'm not giving instructions for *what* to say *when*.)

How does this affect my conversation with someone who has experienced abortion? I don't point the finger at women and men who have made decisions to participate in abortion, as if I have done no wrong. I have done many serious wrongs. *My guilt is offensive enough. Don't add any more offense to it. But please don't remove the offense inherent in my guilt, either.*

Your financial gifts and prayers are helping me equip our growing team of staff and volunteers to bring hope and healing to those in search of forgiveness.

With thanks for your partnership,

Stephen

* Greg has made this statement regularly in his radio broadcasts and writing. See my 8/26/2011 post at hbmm.net for a link to one example.

"But I Don't Know Anyone Who Has Had an Abortion."

Christians often say this. Two thoughts:

First, shouldn't it worry us if we don't know *anyone* who has experienced this sin? Even if women and men with abortion in their past are few (they aren't – Guttmacher estimates that 1 in 3 women will have an abortion by the age of 45), they are some of those most in need of Christ's forgiveness.

This statement is similar to another I hear often from Christians, such as the students at Focus on the Family's Leadership Institute: "I have never really talked to anyone who disagrees with me." Of course, this is before they join us on campus and talk to lots of people who disagree with them! So, Justice For All helps us find people who disagree with us and people who are bound up in guilt because of the sin of abortion.

Second, we shouldn't take the fact that we have never heard one of our friends say she has had an abortion as good evidence that none ever has. Abortion, like any serious sin, is not the sort of thing you bring up in casual conversation. Think of the average conversation at a party. Pretty shallow, right? Given the fact that we rarely discuss weighty issues of the soul, how much less should we expect that our friends are telling us about their reproductive history?

Here's my suggestion: Discuss abortion. You can use your interest in my work as a springboard to ask people what they think. You can ask people what they think of this letter. Or, see my April 2011 letter (www.ifaweb.org/steve/SWnews_2011_Apr.pdf) for suggestions on how to use www.ifaweb.org to start dialogue. If you focus on asking questions with the humility I've discussed in this letter, then I predict your friends will soon feel ready to share a personal experience. In this context, this is sure to be helpful to your friend.

Texas Tour!

Our family plans to spend most of November and early December in Texas for the purpose of raising support. If you live in Texas, would you consider hosting our family and arranging for Stephen and Rebecca to speak to your small group, Sunday School class, church service, or a group of friends gathered in your home? Contact us to discuss: commongroundwc@gmail.com. Thanks!!