



Be Relational...then Be Intellectual

September 2023

Dear Friend of Justice For All,

In my May letter (www.jfaweb.org/may-2023), I shared the story of my conversation with Stacey at Palomar College. It began with her saying abortion should be legal through all nine months of pregnancy because of bodily rights, and it ended with her saying, "I've never thought about whether the fetus is a person before. I'll have to think about that." This conversation illustrates a simple approach: *Be relational, then be intellectual*. What began as a principle we applied to the question of rape is now a principle we apply to every question related to pregnancy and abortion. You can see another great model of the basics of this approach in last month's Impact Report by Kristina Massa entitled, "Answering the Hard Cases" (www.jfaweb.org/aug-2023).

I want to share a bit of the history of how this concept became so central to our teaching at JFA. A good starting point is a scene seven minutes into the documentary *Unborn in the USA* (2007), which was filmed about 19 years ago at Focus on the Family Institute (photo below). After watching that scene, a writer from *Nerve Magazine* (an edgy online magazine that is *not* recommended reading) said,

The guy is making perfect sense...He's an articulate, intelligent, calm presence. Suddenly, a chill creeps up your spine: I hope there are people on the pro-choice side who are equally perceptive and balanced.

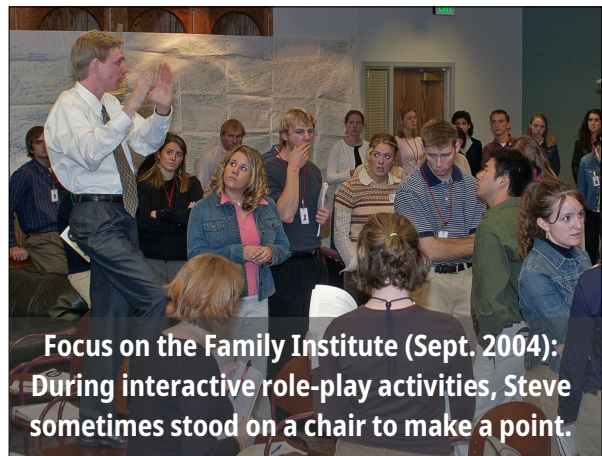
I was the featured speaker in that scene, and here's essentially what I was teaching: When talking about the topic of rape, we need to show sympathy for the rape victim and show emotional sensitivity to the heaviness of the topic of rape and the horror of that evil act. We need to do these things first, before making intellectual arguments. I regularly tell audiences that part of my job is to help them recover their common sense as a guide for how to respond to difficult questions like the question of abortion in the



Recent and Upcoming Events

- 5/22-24 Outreach – UCLA
- 6/1 Presentation – SFLA Leaders (Online)
- 6/23 Workshops for SFLA Leaders (DC)
- 6/24 Outreach – Balboa Park (San Diego, CA)
- 7/5-8/9 Love3 Course for SFLA Leaders (Online)
- 8/28-30 Outreach – Boise State University
- 9/18-20 Outreach – University of Northern CO
- 10/12-26 Love3 Course – Register! (Online)

See www.jfaweb.org/calendar for more.



Focus on the Family Institute (Sept. 2004): During interactive role-play activities, Steve sometimes stood on a chair to make a point.

case of rape. We should be the strongest advocates for women whose basic rights have been trampled. In fact, the same concern for human rights that animates us to stand up for unborn children also animates us to stand up for all women everywhere and for their very real bodily right to be free from rape.

Being relational first and then giving intellectually credible answers to hard questions is practically wise: *it works*. It's the best way to help people be open to our perspective. There's a more fundamental reason to use this approach, though: *it's the right thing to do*. Because all human beings have intrinsic value, we *should* stand up for them and show concern for them.

At first, we emphasized "being relational and then being intellectual" mostly on the topic of rape. Some of our trainers, notably Tammy Cook, have argued for years, though, that this approach is valuable on a much broader spectrum of questions related to pregnancy and abortion. In 2018 I put some of this approach into words in a series called "It's Her Body" (jfaweb.org/body). I made the case that the relational concerns that are on the minds of people discussing the question of rape are *just as present* when a woman's body is mentioned. I pointed out that many pro-choice advocates perceive or feel our advocacy against abortion to be a *violation* of a woman's body. If they hear our advocacy this way, the fear and horror they feel for other violations of a woman's body will obstruct hearing our case for the unborn's value.

To meet this challenge, I claimed that for any bodily rights argument, we should also use the approach of "be relational and then be intellectual." First, point out that women have real bodily rights, generally speaking, and those rights have been trampled throughout history up to the present day in horrific acts including rape, domestic violence, and slavery. Then clarify how far those bodily rights extend and how it changes things when we consider that since those bodily rights are fundamental, they must have begun when the human being began, at fertilization. If the unborn also has bodily rights, their bodily rights should be respected as well. *Be relational, then be intellectual.*

The more we as a community have reflected on these things, we've realized that this is a good practice to follow with *every* pro-choice argument. Show sensitivity to the emotional heaviness caused by the suffering in these circumstances, then continue in that relational sensitivity as you offer intellectual clarifications.

Here's an example: If someone says, "some women are too poor," I begin with relational and emotional sensitivity: "That's a good point. Some women are very poor, and I can't fully understand what it's like to be poor and pregnant. I'm glad you've brought this up, and I don't have a simple answer." When it seems helpful, I can then clarify that because poverty isn't a good justification for killing a toddler whose mom is poor, this justification for abortion only works if something else is also true, that the unborn is *not* a human being. This clarifies that we all need to focus on this central question. We agree poverty is incredibly difficult, and we agree we need to care for poor women. What constitutes good "care" will depend on our answer to the question, "How many people are in the room?" If there's only one person present when a woman is pregnant, and abortion kills no one, then abortion should be legal. But if abortion kills a real human being, it would be odd to offer abortion as a solution to poverty. Our approach is the same for most other justifications for abortion, including "the child will suffer," "a woman's life will be overturned by caring for a child," and "the world is overpopulated such that people can't get enough to eat." We show concern for the suffering involved ("be relational") and then clarify the truth that these situations don't justify killing human beings, including the unborn (be intellectual).



Steve Wagner, Executive Director