



30 DAYS WITH SAVE THE STORKS

Reimagining PRO-LIFE



COMMUNITY GUIDE

FIVE WEEKS OF TEACHING AND DISCUSSION NOTES FOR LEADERS OF GROUPS



WELCOME TO *Reimagining* **PRO-LIFE**

Welcome to *Reimagining Pro-Life: 30 Days with Save the Storks!* Whether you're a pastor, teacher, or a small group leader, your community will grow closer to God and each other over these thirty days. We hope that it will inspire your group to live differently and make a real impact on the needs of your own neighbors.

As we begin, we want you to know that Save the Storks' posture on the tragedy of abortion may be different than those you've encountered. Some people believe the pro-life movement is primarily characterized by protests, shaming women, political action, and anger. But we are reimagining a movement that is characterized by compassion, education, and holistic care.

God is calling the Church to be a place where women and men are empowered to choose life, and also find healing from the pain of abortion without judgment. Yet studies show that more than 1 in 3 women who have had an abortion were regularly attending church when they made their decision. The same research shows that the majority of women felt that church was *not a safe place* to talk about their unplanned pregnancies. Over half of women in the study said no one at church knew about their abortion.

We can change these norms by intentionally cultivating a space where hope and help overshadow fear and doubt. We are the body of Christ. Let's live like it!



HOW TO

USE THIS COMMUNITY GUIDE

We've partnered with HEARTWORK to create this resource to help you disciple and serve your church and community. Use this *Reimagining Pro-Life* Leader Guide in conjunction with:

Reimagining Pro-Life: 30 Days with Save the Storks Daily Devotional (find on the [YouVersion Bible App](#), as a PDF at www.savethestorks.com/reimagine or [in print](#)). If you'd like to order physical copies in bulk for your church or group, please contact us at reimagine@savethestorks.com.

The HEART and WORK sections you'll see in the 30 daily devotionals are meant to engage both heart and hands in compassionate action. With over a decade of experience in connecting churches with some of the most dire needs in our world, HEARTWORK themes will educate and inspire your group!

Included in this digital Leader Guide:

- **Foundations for Reimagining Pro-Life.** An overview for you and your whole group. Why integrating teaching and discipleship with the pro-life message matters for your community.
- **5 Group Meeting Outlines.** Introduction, Letting Go, Identity, Compassion and Faith with Action. These teaching notes, mixed with conversation starters are meant to be used in a small group setting, once per week for five weeks. Each week will include:
 - At a glance summary of weekly theme
 - Discussion questions from previous week of daily devotionals
 - Teaching sections to **read aloud** to your group
 - Discussion questions mixed throughout
 - Empathy challenge for upcoming week
- **Inspiring Videos.** You'll find a video suggestion within each week's discussion guide. Videos can be found at the *Reimagining Pro-Life* website: www.savethestorks.com/reimagine
- **"Empathy Challenge" Printables.** A weekly challenge (fasting something) is offered to the group each week. Print as a card, flier, poster, or use the design for emails or social media.

Are you interested in reimagining the pro-life message with your church, family, friends or volunteer group? Here's how to get started!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOUNDATIONS FOR REIMAGINING PRO-LIFE

Why This Matters	6
A Problem in our World	7
Value for Life	7
How to Engage this Issue	8
Hope for Healing	9

WEEKLY CONTENT: Teaching Notes, Weekly

Week 1 Introduction	10
Week 2 Letting Go	15
Week 3 Identity	19
Week 4 Compassion	23
Week 5 Faith in Action	27

START YOUR OWN

REIMAGINING PRO-LIFE COMMUNITY GROUP

- Read Foundations for Reimagining Pro-Life
- Establish a once per week meeting schedule for 5 weeks
- Invite participants to download the YouVersion Bible app and subscribe to *Reimagining Pro-Life: 30 Days with Save the Storks*

We want to hear from you! Please share stories of transformation with us on social media with the hashtag #savethestorks or by emailing us at reimagine@savethestorks.com.

.....

Note: Throughout these thirty days, be aware that there will likely be women or men in your midst who are suffering from the pain of abortion. Remind them that they are loved and that God wants to free them from any grief or shame that may be impacting them today. Maybe they believed that they didn't have a choice or this was their best option. Maybe they were pressured and continue to grieve. Remind them that grace, forgiveness, and freedom apply as much to them as to anyone in the room.

FOUNDATIONS

for Reimagining Pro-Life

Use this section as a refresher on the issue of abortion, to educate newcomers to the pro-life movement, and to inspire conversation throughout your Reimagining Pro-Life journey.

WHY

THIS MATTERS

While the topic of abortion is very simple in some ways (wrong is wrong and right is right — right?), it is also extraordinarily challenging. There are many political and societal narratives surrounding abortion that create confusion, distaste, and can ultimately lead to unloving rhetoric or indifference. Life is complex, but love in action is always the way of God and his people.

There are many churches that feel there is no need for conversation around abortion. Or they don't have the tools and are not equipped to discuss the topic. But there is an ache in our communities that exists. *Reimagining Pro-Life* is a tool designed to bring clarity, truth, and healing to several pain points on the issue of abortion for your congregation or family. Using this content will bring:

- **Healing.** Statistically, there are women and men in your church who have had an abortion and haven't told anyone. There are wounds that the Holy Spirit wants to heal.
 - Nearly one in four women in the United States will have an abortion in their lifetime.*
 - Over one-third of women who chose abortion were regularly attending church at the time.**
 - Over half of women who had an abortion say they would not recommend discussing an unplanned pregnancy with someone at church.**
- **Insight on how to feel and talk about abortion without “becoming political”.** The information we hear on the news is divisive. Equip your church with compassionate verbiage, clarity, and confidence in discussing the pro-life message.
- **Hope.** This issue is not too big or complex for us when we are empowered by the Holy Spirit! We need to be intentional, hopeful, and filled with compassion.
- **Culture-shaping wisdom.** The wisdom of the world is a strong current, shaping the meta-narratives our congregations are swimming in. Let's help shape culture with beliefs and practices that champion life.
- **Support your local pregnancy resource centers (PRC).** Looking for a way to serve locally? This series can be used as a resource to kick-start understanding the pro-life mission and inviting your church to get involved. Practicing generosity and compassion in your church will overflow into all facets of your community. Go to www.heartbeatinternational.com or www.care-net.org to find your local PRC.

Note: This devotional is about genuine discipleship, not fundraising for Save the Storks. Please feel free to direct donations to a trusted local pregnancy resource center. It will be a gift that can quite literally save lives.

*<https://www.guttmacher.org/news-release/2017/abortion-common-experience-us-women-despite-dramatic-declines-rates>

**<https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Care-Net-Final-Presentation-Report-Revised.pdf>

It's easy to think abortion is a problem "out there," that doesn't affect our day to day lives. Sadly, statistics show this is far from true. Let's learn more about the scope and reach of abortion in our country.

Abortion Statistics in the United States

- Sixty million abortions have been performed in our country since legalization in 1973.
- Statistically, one in four women in America will have an abortion in their lives.
- 73% felt some level of pressure from others to make that choice.
- 70% of women who had abortions surveyed identified as Christians.

Abortion Statistics in the Church

- Four in ten women were regularly attending church at the time they chose to abort.
- 52% of Christian women who have had abortions haven't told anyone.
- Half of church-going, post-abortive women believe that the sermons they hear on forgiveness don't apply to them.
- While abortion rates have been steadily declining in recent years, there are still over 1,700 abortions each day in the United States.

It is devastating to consider how many women are going through the trauma of abortion alone. The power of Jesus is more than enough to bring healing. But, often when the Church remains silent on the issue, silence becomes the unspoken norm. And when silence prevails, when the truth is never shared in the sacred space of forgiveness and redemption, the healing of the Lord is delayed.

Acts 3:19

*Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out,
that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

Every time a woman acknowledges the pain and loss of her abortion and receives healing, she becomes a minister to the healing power of God. Her voice helps shape culture as a whole to be more empathetic to the value of life!

As Christ-followers, we believe there is a greater reality to the issue of abortion than what the secular world can understand. We believe ALL life is inherently valuable.

Genesis 1:26

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;"

Every life reflects the image of God. Intentionally ending the life of a child, even in the earliest stages, has spiritual, emotional, and mental repercussions that are harmful to all women — regardless of whether they do their best to believe there is no life within them. As Mother Teresa put it, *"It is a poverty to decide that a child must die so that you may live as you wish."*

It is a poverty — a state of insufficiency — for a woman to believe that ending her relationship with her child is her best option. The world often views a Christian, pro-life stance as anti-woman. But this is a devastating misunderstanding.

Abortion harms everyone involved.

As followers of the Creator of life, we believe that women, men, doctors, and clinic employees are all at risk for shame and grief—whether it be immediately or during the months and years to come—when choosing to abort a child.

Like the end of any life, abortion pains people. Grief will arise, even when it is unidentified and everyone tries to convince each other that it's not a big deal. Unidentified grief can impact us in so many ways.

Let's use this month to pray for miracles. For the right people to be in the room, for revelation, confession, and most importantly, redemption.

Matthew 5:4

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

HOW TO ENGAGE

THE ISSUE

So, what do we do? Do we fight to change the abortion laws in our country? Maybe you are amongst the women and men who are equipped to engage policy change with wisdom and compassion. But relegating the issue to be only a political issue means that most people are only engaged with the pro-life world once every few years.

Or maybe, like many believers, you don't feel compelled or equipped to engage in policy changes. Either way, we must seriously consider the statistics above and ask ourselves . . .

What could our society look like for vulnerable women if the Christians in their lives would embody the incredible grace of God, as well as truth, in order to support them?

In a recent study, judgment and condemnation were cited as the top two reactions women received or expected from a local church regarding their unplanned pregnancies.

Judgment is a problem that we as the Church can address without a single law changing.

We can make space for our own sisters and brothers, daughters and sons, coworkers and friends, to feel safe when confiding in us about their unplanned pregnancies. When we simply commit to being a safe friend to our neighbors and those in our spheres of influence, we are fighting the good fight.

We can show the extravagant love of our Father when we help those who find themselves vulnerable and struggling.

As Andrew Breitbart says, "Politics is downstream from culture." **The issue of abortion, while certainly exacerbated by the current political climate, is not owned by lawmakers.** Rather, it is being lived out by vulnerable women and men caught in cycles of fear, deception, or shame, whose hearts forget the beauty and joy that life can bring. These issues are not far from any of our own, and as followers of Jesus, we must speak up and serve the vulnerable with gentleness and compassion.

The emotional weight of a woman facing an unplanned pregnancy cannot be overstated, and her life is as valuable as her child's. Love, compassion, and mercy — combined with the truth of God's word — move us to believe that it is not in the best interest of a mother to end the life of her unborn baby. We believe hope is infinite when she learns to hope in God, and there are many practical options available in order to support her during and after her pregnancy. When the Body of Christ steps up to love well, both adoption and community-supported motherhood are possible!

We also deeply value fathers, grandparents, and siblings. With more than sixty million abortions in our nation in the past generation, there are hundreds of millions of people in our neighborhoods, families and churches who have suffered the grief, shame and loss that accompanies abortion. The emotional and spiritual chain reactions in our society are truly immeasurable. Still, infinitely more so is God's healing power! **That's why it matters for you to take on this challenge.**

We hope you'll see that *Reimagining Pro-Life: 30 Days with Save the Storks* isn't about adding another thing to your list of concerns. It's about pausing your normal hustle and freeing yourself and others from apathy, judgment, shame and loss. We hope that the desire to serve will connect your group with a local pregnancy resource center. It is essential that we are intentional as a church, reaching out with Christ-like hands to our communities.

Reimagining Pro-Life: *Introduction*

WEEK ONE

Thank you for being here!

We are partnering with Save the Storks in our daily devotionals and teaching over the next thirty days. We'll be learning more about the reality of abortion and practicing compassion in creative ways. The goal is to lean into a major issue in our world from a radically spiritual perspective.

Save the Storks community

We're joining other churches of various denominations around the country, as we learn how to care for the most vulnerable, the unborn and their mothers, with compassion, education, and holistic care. Not only will we grow in understanding, but we'll also trust God to enact real changes in our own lives, families, churches and nation.



Daily Devotional

You can find the daily devotionals on the [YouVersion Bible App](#) or at www.savethestorks.com/reimagine (PDF or in print). Each week there will be a very engaging challenge or a fast, as well as a key verse to focus on during our prayer times.

30 Days with Save the Storks is an invitation to simplify. We'll let go of some of our norms, but carry a distinct and inspiring purpose over the coming month. It's about each of us asking God: "How can I participate in Your Kingdom — right here, right now? How can I use my talents, resources, and/or opportunities to bring Your mercy and Your justice to the world?"

- Day 1 of the devotional explains a desire of Save the Storks is to "change the conversation around the pro-life movement." Instead of engaging the current debate, the goal is to "reimagine pro-life". Does that sound appealing to you? Why?
- What are you hoping for in this group?
- Do you know anyone you want to invite to be a part of this thirty day journey with us?

THE CONVERSATION

Why should we spend a month focusing on abortion? If you were able to read Foundations for Reimagining Pro-Life, remember it outlines several reasons to give our energy to this concern in the world.

- **Healing.** Statistically, there are women and men in our church who have had an abortion and haven't told anyone. There are wounds that the Holy Spirit wants to heal.
 - Nearly one in four women in the United States will have an abortion in their lifetime.*

- Over one-third of women who have chosen abortion were regularly attending church at the time.**
- Over half of post-abortive women say they would not recommend discussing an unplanned pregnancy with someone at church.**
- **Insight on how to feel and talk about abortion without “becoming political”.** The information we hear on the news is divisive. Can we equip believers in our city with compassionate verbiage, clarity, and confidence in discussing the pro-life message?
- **Hope.** This issue is not too big or complex for us when we are empowered by the Holy Spirit! We need to be intentional, hopeful, and filled with compassion.
- **Culture-shaping wisdom.** The wisdom of the world is a strong current, shaping the meta-narratives our congregations are swimming in. Let’s help shape culture with beliefs and practices that champion life.
- **Support our local pregnancy resource centers (PRC).** Looking for a way to serve locally? Practicing generosity and compassion in our church can literally save lives.

Which one do you resonate most with?

While the topic of abortion is very simple in some ways (wrong is wrong and right is right — right?), it is also extraordinarily challenging. There are many political and societal narratives surrounding abortion that create confusion, distaste, and can ultimately lead to unloving rhetoric or indifference. This issue is complex, but love in action is always the way of God and his people.

- Have you ever felt tempted to slip into unloving judgement or apathy about the issue of abortion?
- Does your/our church have a clear path that a woman considering an abortion would be able to find for support if she's feeling pressured to choose abortion?

Recent studies show that we could eliminate almost one-third of abortions in the United States just by eliminating abortions among churchgoers. By making the church a safe and loving place for women in unplanned pregnancies, we can do so much.

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

As Christ-followers, we believe there is a greater reality to the issue of abortion than what the secular world can understand. We must ask ourselves: Do I truly believe ALL life is inherently valuable?

Genesis 1:26

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;”

Every life reflects the image of God. We care about this issue because abortion is prolific. Willingly ending the life of a child, even in the earliest stages, has spiritual, emotional, and mental repercussions that are harmful to all women — regardless of whether they do their best to believe there is no life within them. As Mother Teresa put it,

“It is a poverty to decide that a child must die so that you may live as you wish.”

It is a poverty — a state of insufficiency — for society to believe that abortion helps women. The world often views a Christian, pro-life stance as anti-woman. But this is a devastating misunderstanding.

The pro-choice stance argues that abortion helps women thrive and that keeping her child will bar her from success.

How do you think pro-life beliefs can offer a better path to thriving for a woman facing an unexpected pregnancy? Jesus empowered women more than any public leader before Him. Dorothy Sayers said,

“Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man – there never has been such another.”

Perhaps the most compelling argument for abortion is that the life and choice of a woman matters. *Yes, it absolutely does!* No one knows and lives that better than Jesus. He is our example. As we reimagine the pro-life movement together, let’s remember that the pro-life message helps meet women where they are (like Jesus did) and offers them practical and real support to her immediate needs (like Jesus did), then offers her a better life (like Jesus did).

It is unfair that in an unhealthy relationship that ends in a pregnancy, the woman can easily be left alone with a life-changing responsibility.

And it is unfair that in an unhealthy relationship with her unborn child, a woman can be led to believe that her life is more valuable than her child’s equally important life.

The pro-choice rhetoric may rightly empower women to prioritize their future goals, but fails to empower women to parent, or to empower the life of their unborn child.

We all have some form of power in our lives and have the opportunity to use it for good, to protect the vulnerable, or to use it to take care of ourselves and close our eyes to those who can’t protect themselves. Because we are created in the image of God, there is underlying grief whenever we choose to use our power only in our own self-interest, since we are acting against our Father God’s nature.

- We hope and pray that the vulnerable women in our community would be empowered to recognize their own value and in turn, value the vulnerable lives of their unborn children. How could *your* power (prayers, influence, resources) be used to serve this cause?

PEOPLE OVER POLICY

The pro-life movement is often identified with policy change and protesting. But many people who are pro-life may not feel compelled to engage in those expressions, but still want to hold to their pro-life values and share that message in their community.

- How do you think the pro-life movement in our culture is viewed (by those within the church and those outside of the church) in our community?
- Is the pro-life movement primarily associated with protesting?
- Have you ever felt that it’s challenging to identify as someone with pro-life values without being viewed suspiciously?

While policy change is important, we have to remember that people are infinitely more important. A perspective that prioritizes policy change at the expense of compassion for our neighbors simply does not represent the values that Jesus shows us in his life.

In a recent Care Net study, women who had an abortion and were asked what reactions they received or expected from a local church regarding their unplanned pregnancies. Sadly, *judgment* and *condemnation* were cited as the top two reactions they identified with the Christ-followers in their lives.

Judgment is a problem that we as the Church can address without a single law changing.

- How might judgment play out in a church or community in ways that could keep a woman silent when she's wrestling with a pregnancy decision?

Let's seriously consider the statistics below and ask ourselves some difficult questions.

Abortion Statistics in the United States

- Over Sixty million abortions have been performed in our country since legalization in 1973.
- Statistically, one in four women in America will have an abortion in their lives.
- 73% felt some level of pressure from others to make that choice.
- While abortion rates have been steadily declining in recent years, there are still over 1,700 abortions each day in the United States.

Abortion Statistics in the Church

- 70% of women surveyed who had abortions identified as Christians.
- 43% were regularly attending a church at the time of their choice to abort.
- 52% of Christian women who have had abortions haven't told anyone.
- Half of church-going, post-abortive women believe that the sermons they hear on forgiveness don't apply to them.

SO WE ASK..What could our society look like for vulnerable women if the Christians in their lives would embody the incredible grace of God, as well as truth, in order to support them?

The issue of abortion is complex and can seem overwhelming at times. But we are the Church! Our God and Father is a miracle worker!

Isaiah 58:10 says, *“and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.”*

When we make space for our own sisters and brothers, daughters and sons, coworkers and friends, to feel safe when confiding in us about their unplanned pregnancies, we are satisfying a need. Those who are hungry and thirsty, both spiritually (and often physically) are all around us, and we can spend ourselves on their behalf. Our energy, resources, time and love are well spent when we engage with the heart of God and act like He does – loving, forgiving, truth-telling and redeeming.

The emotional weight a woman with an unplanned pregnancy carries cannot be overstated, and her life is as valuable as her child's. The truth of God's word — love, compassion and mercy — move us to believe that *it is simply not in the best interest of a mother to end the life of her unborn baby.*

We believe hope is infinite when she learns to hope in God, and there are many, many practical options available in order to support her during and after her pregnancy. Light can rise in the darkness! When the Body of Christ steps up to love well, both adoption and community-supported motherhood are options filled with hope, light and life.

- What are a few of the options available in our city and church to support women who may be vulnerable to abortion?
- Would anyone like to share any stories of hope, rescue, or redemption around this topic?

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS DEVO + GROUP

Each week we will...

- Focus on a new topic (Letting Go, Identity, Compassion, and Faith with Action)
- Discuss a bit of the daily devotional reading
- Read and discuss some additional encouragement, Scripture and teaching
- Watch an inspiring video together
- Be invited to participate in an empathy challenge over the next week

This coming week we will be reading Days 2-8 of the Reimagining Pro-Life daily devotional.

We'll be covering topics like Living Water, stepping outside of our comfort zone, and letting go of shame.

Let's pray and prepare our hearts for the seeds God is going to plant in our hearts.

PRAY TOGETHER

Let's finish with our challenge for the week!

EMPATHY *Challenge* WEEK 1

LETTING GO FOCUS VERSE /// John 4:13-14 /// *Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

The empathy challenge invitation for this week is to **go seven days replacing all of your normal beverages with water**. Let go of soda and tea, juice and milk — even coffee. In satisfying your physical thirst through water alone, your actions will take on great spiritual significance.

Our first empathy challenge invites you to let go of the crutch of uppers, downers, sugar addictions, and comfort drinks. Satisfy yourself in Jesus alone. He is the Living Water. You can choose to fast all beverages besides water for one week while still eating as you normally would. If you're feeling physically and spiritually empowered to fast non-water beverages *and* food — go for it! Maybe try it even for just one day.

As you fast, ask God to open your heart to the struggles that women with unplanned pregnancies face today. Limited access to proper healthcare or supportive relationships, shame over being in this situation, anxiety over how to provide for a child, pressure from culture and even from loved ones to have an abortion — these burdens plague women and men who are tempted to believe the lie that their lives could be ruined by an unplanned child. The problems are real, but the power of the Spirit to bring hope is just as real. Pray for hope, insight and compassion.

CLOSING PRAYER



Reimagine: *Letting Go*

WEEK TWO

PRAYER

- **John 4:13-14** /// *Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*
- Pray about the application of this verse and for your time together.

LETTING GO

"Letting go" is our first topic. It may seem like an odd start to a pro-life devotional. But this is an intentional starting point.

There is something important about starting a challenging devotional experience with a *willingness* to let go. For some, pausing the normal hustle, even for five minutes a night to read the devotional is a great start. Letting go of unforgiveness will catapult some into health and renewal. For others, letting go of the need for "success" or letting go of the iron grip on comfort, certainty, or security will give them the freedom to step into serving others wholeheartedly.

Though Reimagining Pro-Life is not an abortion recovery class, there may be some who need to let go of the pain from an abortion story in their past. This is an invitation – to lay down the burden once and for all. And for every one of us, it's an invitation to reimagine the pro-life movement with empathy.

Whatever we are hanging onto, it may be keeping us from being able to reach out and touch a need that is right in front of us. If we want to know God better through knowing the vulnerable, making a bit of wiggle room in our lives is a good place to begin.

THE PAST WEEK

- How did you do with the water challenge?
- How does fasting help our hearts connect to a need in our world (like women with unexpected pregnancies)?
- Describe a time when it was hard to choose water over a "quick-fix" in sugar, caffeine, or something comforting or relaxing. How did God use those moments to speak something specific to you?
- Day 2: How do we offer living water (water that NEVER runs dry) for abortion vulnerable women who feel a lack of resources and hope?
- Day 3 talks about fight or flight mechanism kicking in for some around this issue of abortion. Some turn to protest while others may want to run from such a complex issue. Do you resonate with either of these responses?

- Day 6 in the daily devotional talks about pulling the weeds of “the worries of this life” from Matthew 13:22. What are a few of the worries that you noted that can lead to self-interest over community?
- Maybe you’re drawn to the topic of abortion because you can relate to the struggle. Or maybe you’re passionate about pro-life because you cannot imagine considering an abortion. Day 6 challenged us to reach out to someone outside of our comfort zone this week. How did that go? How can we find more empathy for those struggling with circumstances that lead to abortion?
- Day 7 talks about letting go of shame so we can be free to spend ourselves for others. Have you ever noticed how shame can make you feel disqualified to serve in the very roles that God may want to use you in?
- How has your life intersected with abortion or the pro-life message?

A BIT MORE ON LETTING GO

Our culture tells us that happiness is found in reaching the top, in our individual self-actualization, and in our own comfort or security. There’s always someone just ahead of us on the ladder of success who seems to “have it all.” The problem is this: If we are consumed by our quest for “more,” we walk right into the trap of self-focus. This lifelong pursuit often comes from a place of scarcity, which is the belief that there’s ‘never quite enough,’ that there’s a short supply . . . and so we better hustle hard to get what we need. *Scarcity makes us anxious*. But the early Church seemed to live differently.

Acts 20:35

In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the LORD Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’

- Do we truly believe that it is better to give than to receive? Can you think of any examples in church, public or family life?
- What does “climbing up the ladder” mean in your life right now? Image? Survival? Career? Influence? Comfort?
- What could “looking down that ladder and helping someone else up” look like in your life?

Let’s watch a video of Victoria Robinson as she describes her journey of experiencing the scarcity mentality and anxiety that led to an abortion.

VIDEO

Victoria’s Story in Day 6

Victoria said that “nobody cared”. In her experience, no one in her path valued her child’s life in a way that compelled her to change course. Sadly, shame can so easily lead to isolation.

- What are ways we can show women like Victoria that we care?

SPEND YOURSELF

All throughout Scripture, knowing God and caring for the marginalized are interconnected. From the Old Testament, to the life of Jesus, to the reputation of the early Church, caring for the vulnerable is a manifestation of our relationship with the Lord.

Jeremiah 22:16

*He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well.
Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the LORD.*

James 1:27

*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans
and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

Spending ourselves for others is the antidote to the disease of self-focus in our world.

Isaiah 58:10

*And if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.*

The very areas of our lives that are filled with darkness can be illuminated with God's brilliant light when we start learning to satisfy the needs of others, rather than just our own.

- Have you ever considered God's invitation to serve others as an invitation to be like Him rather than a command to "be good"? Could we re-frame service to the vulnerable in our community as an opportunity to feel *free* to be like our Father, rather than feeling pressure to "do a good deed"?

Let's remember Jesus' astounding response to a woman in John 4:6–14.

John 4:10

*Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink,
you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."*

He asked her to trust Him with her heart and to let go of a life she knew. He offered to be her Living Water, meeting her deepest needs. Jesus offered truth, balanced beautifully with grace, and offered to quench her thirst once and for all.

Like the woman at the well, we are — everyone here and every woman, man and child — unimaginably seen, loved and forgiven by Jesus. Whether her circumstances were a result of her seeking life in her own strength that led to failed marriages and pain, or she was a victim of a cultural system that took advantage of and used her, the response of Jesus is still to see, love and invite her.

**The answer isn't to hustle our own way in the world. It's to come to the well of eternal,
living water that heals and satisfies our deepest needs.**

Our imagination is sometimes limited by the sin of others rather than the possibilities with our eternal Father. We have a history. For generations, unhealthy cultural norms have devalued women. In a pendulum swing, current unhealthy cultural norms value the self-actualization of a woman OVER the life of her child. In a faithless context, we 'lose' our individual value when we give our life for another.

But we follow a God who gave His life for us. Jesus became vulnerable. He dignifies the vulnerable. He gave His life for the vulnerable, letting go of His own ambition and serving all, even the undeserving. He is the example of redemption that we are to follow. We find true life when we are correctly connected to our individual identity in God, *and* we make sacrifices for the lives of others to find their individual identity in God.

In all things, may we follow our Lord into the challenging places in our world, pray for redemption, and act in compassionate love.

- How is the issue of abortion in our culture like a tangled knot?
- What are some ways we could untangle the cultural knot and return to the simplicity of serving vulnerable women in our own communities?
- Day 8 of the devotional lists a few ways to serve, have you ever participated in a prayer group that focused on life, or volunteered at or donated to a pregnancy resource center? Does anyone know great outlets in our community to serve?

Let's finish with our challenge for the week!

EMPATHY Challenge

WEEK 2

IDENTITY FOCUS VERSE /// Psalm 139:13–14 /// *For you formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.*

This week's empathy challenge is to take a break from media. In your daily reading, you'll be learning about your identity, and taking more time to look into each other's eyes and God's word to see who we are. Take this as far as you want to, but may we humbly suggest avoiding . . .

1. **Social media** — *Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter* — you name it
2. **TV** — *shows on cable or streamed, movies, and even the daily news*
3. **Video games** — *phone, computer, or console*

Yep — all week. Much of how we view the issue of abortion can come from the media. In many ways, the media has normalized abortion. Culture tells us a pregnancy is just another personal choice we make, like what college to attend, what job to take, or whether to have aesthetic surgery. Some have become numb to the reality of abortion because of this societal influence. So it's important we take a break from newscasters, from others' posts, from politicians and online articles.

Media can be a helpful tool — so long as it is always tested against the word of God. Your identity comes from God. And the way you see others should be inspired by our Heavenly Father. **Taking a break from media that informs and consumes us will help us all to filter popular culture out and to welcome the Holy Spirit in.** Plus, just think of all the time you'll have to invest in other ways!

CLOSING PRAYER



Reimagine: Identity

WEEK THREE

INTRO PRAYER

- Psalm 139:13–14 // For you formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.
- Pray about the application of this verse and for your time together.

THE PAST WEEK

- How did the media challenge go for you?
- What did you notice about how media use shapes your identity and emotions?
- Day 9 mentions the risk we take whenever we love anyone. What unique risks does a woman facing an unplanned pregnancy face in choosing to love and care for her child?
- On Day 10, what ideas did you come up with to support adoptions in our city?
- Day 12 talks about the importance of the images and input that we invite into our minds regularly. How did fasting media or other screentime free up mental space to gather images from God instead?
- How can we continue to foster images that help us to see every human being as a creation of God?
- Day 14 reminds us of the constant and creative transformation God is working in our lives. As a result, we can tap into the creativity of Heaven. Have you had any creative ideas on how to support women in our city who are navigating an unexpected pregnancy?

A BIT MORE ON IDENTITY

The way you view yourself is an important aspect of your life and your relationship with God.

As Christians, we are defined by love. Whether we feel it or not, that is our reality and we should be trying to live it. Our deepest identity is the image and reflection of God. And God is love.

1 John 4:8

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

John 13:35

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

We are crafted in love.

Genesis 1:27a, 30a — *So God created mankind in his own image. . . .
And God looked upon all that He had made, and indeed, it was very good.*

Some of us are taught that our original identity is *sinner*. Yes, of course we all sin and fall short, but that's not where God began our story. In the garden of Eden, He called us "very good." Even after sin entered the world and so thoroughly messed things up, Jesus came for us. It's important to remember that even in our sin, we are deeply loved.

If we can't receive love ourselves, it will be very hard to love others through their sin.

In this topic of unplanned pregnancy, how we define ourselves and others matters. In Luke 15, Jesus is accused by the religious perfectionists as 'welcoming sinners' which implies that a sinner should be avoided, disregarded or ostracized. But Jesus calls these people "lost." He goes to great lengths to pursue, spend time with, and even allow Himself to be betrayed by these lost ones. This gives us a good frame of reference for how Jesus feels about those who don't yet know Him or are living in brokenness of all shapes and sizes.

Sin may deceive us for a time, but once we repent of our sins and believe in Christ, we are no longer *defined* as sinners, and we are empowered to love those trapped in sin. Transformed by the blood of Christ, we are adopted as children of God, we're free to live in the goodness God originally intended, and our sin is actually forgotten (Psalm 103:12)!

Too often, we let ourselves be defined by the whispers of the enemy, by what others say about us . . . whether it is our puffed-up successes, our failures, or our past. We can even be defined by cultural roles (*I'm 'just a mom'* or *I'm 'just a volunteer'*), and so we forget the special and unique person God has created us to be! God says you are His (John 17:24), which means you are unconditionally loved and empowered to be a force of love in this world!

The whispers we first heard in the Garden of Eden, however, continue today. "Did God really say...?" (Genesis 3:1) Loneliness, isolation, unhealthy relationships, and the expectations of others can become a pressure that a woman who is considering abortion cannot bear.

Believing the whispers of the enemy...

Your partner will leave you if you keep this baby.

You can't do all that you want to if you're burdened by a child.

You won't be a good enough parent to this child.

You won't be able to work or parent your other children if you have another baby.

... these beliefs, at the core, are fears. They are very real fears that lead to abortion.

- Can you relate with the whispers that would tempt a vulnerable mother to feel pressured into an abortion?
- Are the thoughts you have about yourself in line with what God says about you? If not, where do those thoughts come from?
- Where do you hear the temptation "Did God really say...?" from the enemy? Do those thoughts empower you to join in the commission God has given you in the world or hide in shame?
- Have you ever felt that the brokenness of sin in your life or in the lives of those around you leaves you hopeless or cynical?

We are created for love.

Psalm 139:16–17

Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!

Because God made us, uniquely and beautifully, we have a purpose that includes good work. We are wired with the supernatural power to fulfill the commandment to love God and love others!

VIDEO

Ashley's mom story in Day 7 / Discuss

- Ashley reminds us that every life has a purpose. Helping women to allow their child to live out that purpose is a big part of reimagining the pro-life movement together. How does your own life story reveal God's purpose?

Young kids don't need to know exactly what they're going to be when they grow up to understand that they have a purpose. They simply need to learn how to love well: God, themselves, and others. Those skills will prepare them to be men and women of integrity, ready for whatever God has in their futures! Similarly, even if we haven't found our sweet spot in a ministry, career, or passion just yet, we can still learn to see others and love well. God is able to use us right where we are and throughout every point in our entire journey.

- Who does God say that you are? (Maybe each member of the group can recall one Bible verse or promise the Lord has given them about their identity.)

Let us be led by love, not by judgment.

As Christians, we are defined by love, but as the Church, we have not always carried that reputation, particularly with the issue of abortion. Judgment hinders everyone's willingness to engage in genuine, Spirit-led, creative conversation about this reality.

By letting go of our focus on the speck in another's eye (Matthew 7:3-5), we trust God alone to reveal and redeem the very real sin in our lives and the lives of others. In this way, we are moving in the direction of love. **We operate in our true identity. We operate in the influence God has for us, reflecting His image well.**

- What are some factors that work against our true identity as children of God and can cause a woman to feel pressured into abortion... (*fear of suffering, comparing to others on the ladder of success, pride/extreme independence, shame in unhealthy relationships, isolation, past failures, negative influences in society or friendships*)
- We all face many of these same challenges to our identity, and they can keep us from serving and leading in the Kingdom of God. Would anyone like to share how these same factors we listed have kept you from fully living into your identity as a child of God?

We should never be afraid to tell the truth about sin. We, like Jesus, should grieve sin, which harms life on this earth. We should speak the truth. But we, unlike Jesus, are not perfect (Romans 3:23). And so we must turn away from our own sins before we can lovingly help others to let go of their own. *It is so sad that the stereotype of a pro-lifer can be someone who is angry, judgmental, and overly simplistic.*

When Jesus entered the lives of people who would have been defined as "sinners", He entered into the lives of actual individuals with nuanced lives. He didn't see an "issue" to tackle. Rather, the truth He brought was always in love, always illuminating a way out, and always acknowledging the uniqueness of their situation. When we give in to the temptation to make abortion an "issue" to tackle, we may easily misunderstand or fail to acknowledge the tenderness of actual humans. This is what feels like judgment to a watching world.

We fight the negative stereotype of a pro-lifer when we offer ourselves to the Lord in humility, asking Him to give us His eyes to see all people made in His beautiful image.

Let's finish with our challenge for the coming week!

EMPATHY Challenge WEEK 3

COMPASSION FOCUS VERSE /// Matthew 18:4-5 /// *Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.*

This week's POWERFUL WORDS challenge represents several different aspects of our Reimagining Pro-Life journey together.

Consider a period of silence to pray for and champion the voiceless babies in the wombs of uncertain mothers who are making choices each and every day. This doesn't need to be a public display. Like a private fast (see Matthew 6:16-18 for a bit of wisdom from Jesus), it's something that can be powerful between you and the Lord.

Take a break from all negative speech.

Ephesians 4:29 /// *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.*

GIVE GRACE with our language. We're going to focus on powerful, gracious, and healing words by fasting all kinds of words that can be destructive. This includes things like . . .

Complaining.

About the weather, about traffic, about your body . . .

You know what you're tempted to complain about most! (*Grumbling is just the less-articulate cousin of complaining and will try to sneak up on you too.*)

Bitterness.

Unforgiveness always tries to overflow. Sometimes those sour words are just begging to be spit out.

Gossip.

Information that is not yours to share. Even the right information shared with the wrong people is wrong.

Criticism.

Yes, even when it's true. Let's correct others by giving grace with our words this week.

Let's practice LETTING GO of these words for a week. Let's practice finding our IDENTITY in love and inviting the COMPASSION of Jesus to fill this empty space in ways we may have never imagined. **We won't do this perfectly, but let's make an effort to do it wholeheartedly.** As we grow in understanding and compassion for those in our community who have chosen or are considering abortion, it is vital that we learn to guard our words and to give grace.

CLOSING PRAYER

Reimagine: *Compassion*

WEEK FOUR

INTRO PRAYER

- Matthew 18:4-5 // Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.
- Pray about the application of this verse and for your time together.



THE PAST WEEK

- How did the week of fasting negative speech go? What was most challenging?
 - Most fulfilling?
 - Fasting negative speech doesn't mean avoiding the truth. How did you practice speaking truth with more love this week?
 - Day 15 teaches us that compassion means co-suffering! Did reading this strike you as interesting or odd? How did it impact your view of compassion?
 - Day 16 refers to suffering as a normal part of the Christian life. The "good stuff" isn't just our own comfort. It includes compassion (co-suffering with others)! How does this look in your life?
 - Day 17 talks about the risk we take when we love, the risk a woman with an unplanned pregnancy faces in choosing life. What "risk" did you take this week to serve another?
- Day 18 reminds us that we are invited by God to do what he does. Sometimes that means loving others even when it hurts. How has this Reimagining Pro-Life journey been painful for you? What makes it worth caring about?
 - Day 19 encouraged us to love and care for strangers, not just those we know. Were you able to send a bit of love to a local PRC this week? How did that go?
 - Day 21 challenged us to fill the space from fasting negative speech with the Word of God, and to share that with others by having a prayer meeting.

A BIT MORE ON COMPASSION

The truth is, most people truly want to be compassionate! But **true compassion is a miracle**, it's not possible in our limited human nature. In our humanity, we do not willingly walk into suffering. Our humanity tries to have a go at compassion without actually doing the co-suffering part. It's like wanting to live for Christ without dying. Or to love without vulnerability.

- Can you think of an example of someone trying to show compassion, but without co-suffering?
- Why do you think true compassion is impossible in our own human strength?

The good news is, we are not alone! God has modeled comfort and compassion for us!

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

“In any trouble!” There is no situation outside of the realm of God’s comfort and compassion. He is not afraid of our suffering. He’s not too lofty to step right into it. And he is never unsure of what to do. And when we stick with Him, we have the opportunity to receive and give that same compassion, to suffer with another, but with the strength of our Creator moving in and through us.

Romans 8:16-17

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

The amount of suffering that Jesus endured, not only on the cross, but also in leaving Heaven is incredible. He came to be among people who did not understand Him, who weren’t living in the freedom that He understood, and who didn’t always welcome His gracious wisdom. This is suffering we may begin to understand if we have tried to engage with family or community who don’t know the Lord.

Jesus was co-suffering, having compassion on people *all the time, just by being here in a human body.*

- With this understanding of Jesus in mind, how are we called to “co-suffer” with Him by simply being with others? What does this look like in your life?

As we study the life of Jesus, we realize there is more to compassion than just feeling bad for someone. His heart AND actions moved for people in need.

- Read Matthew 9:35-36, 14:14, and 15:32 together.
- How does this challenge you to live and love in your community?
- Read Matthew 20:29–34 together. How would a scenario like that play out in our church or city streets?

Matthew 20:34 — *Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.*

The crowd regarded the men as ‘lesser-than,’ but Jesus’ actions reveal the true heart of God.

- How did the crowd respond when they heard the blind men shouting to Jesus? Silencing a need is a common way for people to respond. Where have you seen this tendency in or around your life?
- What was Jesus’ response whenever He saw the vulnerable, the poor, the hurting, the outcast, and the lonely? What can we learn from His approach?

Some may feel overwhelmed by the issue of abortion.

Some may disdain how politically charged it has become.

But we, as the Church, can also view the conversation around abortion as an opportunity.

Abortion-minded women and the unborn are in desperate need of Christ's hope and help. James 1:27 says that true religion is caring for the orphan and the widow. We have an opportunity to show the world what pure, true, real, *biblical* Christianity is like by caring for mothers and babies threatened by abortion.

This is no easy task. In our convenience-oriented world, we may want to 'fix it or flee.' But the compassion that we reflect from God is so much bigger and stronger. It is God-inspired, miraculous compassion in action that can cut through the noise, the politics, the fear, the uncertainty and show love to one woman at a time.

- Can we commit, in our own lives and churches, to remove the layers of politics and protest? To trust the Lord for miraculous perspective, breakthrough and grace?
- Has this group offered you an opportunity to co-suffer and engage in the discussion around abortion with compassion?

VIDEO

Victoria's Story Day 22

- What can we learn from the woman who invited Victoria to serve at her local pregnancy center?
- How did Victoria co-suffering with other women who were facing unplanned pregnancy bring healing to her own wounded heart?

Living out impossible compassion by the Spirit of God is the normal Christian life. It's what set the early Church apart from their surrounding culture.

- Will we be known as a generation of Christ-followers who are impossibly compassionate with our hurting neighbors?
- In this issue of abortion, how can we normalize compassion over judgement in our community?

Let's finish with our challenge for the coming week!

EMPATHY Challenge WEEK 4

FAITH WITH ACTION FOCUS VERSE /// Isaiah 58:10 /// *If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.*

"Faith With Action " is what we'll be focusing on this week. If we are all charged with spending ourselves for others, with "taking up our cross and following Jesus," (Matt. 16:24) then we all have something to sacrifice and someone to serve. Like the boy with the fish and loaves in John 6:9 . . .

Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?

. . . you have something very ordinary in your hands that God can take and turn into a miracle! Start your week by reflecting on this question: **What's in my hands?**

This week of Reimagining Pro-Life may require more of you than any of the others. The empathy challenge is to *carry the burdens of a woman facing an unplanned pregnancy*. It sounds weird, but here's the idea. **The burden of anxiety, loneliness, stress, voicelessness, vulnerability, hopelessness, need and fear — those burdens are HEAVY.**

So this week, gather a group of stones, rocks, or bricks — make sure they're big enough for you to be able to write on them, too! Together, they should be heavy enough to feel like a burden. Prayerfully name each burden. Write with a sharpie directly onto the rocks the burdens from the list above, or your own creative list of burdens you can imagine based on what you've learned over this month. Put the rocks into a bag, purse, backpack. Then, carry those burdens with you. Carry *their* burdens with you. Prepare for the conversations that you'll have with peers, coworkers, friends, or even strangers at the grocery store. Use this challenge as a way to increase your and others' awareness of the burdens that women with unplanned pregnancies carry.

CLOSING PRAYER



Reimagine: Faith in Action

WEEK FIVE

INTRO PRAYER

- **Isaiah 58:10** /// *If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.*
- Pray about the application of this verse and for your time together.

THE PAST WEEK

- How did the week of carrying burdens go?
- What words did you write on your stones?
- Did you have opportunities to share your empathy challenge with anyone? How did that go?
- Day 24: Were you able to talk with a believer you trust about Galatians 6? How did that encourage you to not become weary in doing good?
- Day 25 asks, 'Have you dropped your net?' Of course this usually doesn't mean quitting your job, like it did for the 12 disciples for a season. But how do you practice regularly giving all of your income, ambition and security to Jesus? (You may want to reference the list of commands from the Gospels you made on Day 25.)
- Have you ever prayed outside of an abortion clinic? Not to make a statement or be an activist, but just to quietly pray?
- Day 26: What is in your hands? What time, talent or treasure do you have in your hands? It could be the simplest thing, but how may God want to turn it into a miracle for someone? Does anyone have a story of this happening in your life?
- Day 27 quotes a song, "Though hope is frail, it's hard to kill." Do you have more hope for those considering abortion than you did a few weeks ago?
- Day 28 talks about the difference between 'closing doors' and 'opening doors' in the pro-life movement. Do you resonate with that metaphor? (Read the quote in Day 28 for a refresher.)
- Are there any doors in your life right now that are open to vulnerable women who may be considering abortion?

A BIT MORE ON FAITH WITH ACTION

Faith in Jesus is action-oriented – it's an invitation to **let go**, to die to ourselves, and to find a new **identity** in Christ. It is a call to live in miraculous **compassion**. These are daily decisions. Many times each day we all have choices to make: What or *who* will we follow? Where will we invest our lives? If we aren't intentional about following Jesus, we will inevitably spiral into our own small story.

There's a bigger story we are invited into — a Kingdom that has always been expanding, a Kingdom that's right here and right now, a Kingdom that will only continue to grow.

When the disciples decided to walk with Jesus, their lives were changed from fishermen — who probably had a pretty “normal” plan for their lives — to bold evangelists, fishers of men, who were willing to suffer with the Lord, and for the Lord.

He calls us to live WITH Him and to live LIKE Him.

Reading the Bible, praying, or going to church are all vital parts of following. That’s living WITH Jesus. Living WITH (in relationship with) Jesus should lead us to live LIKE Jesus.

And living LIKE Jesus always involves reaching out to those who are in need, to those who are weak and vulnerable in our society, and to those without hope. It’s spending ourselves, giving of our resources. If we are not actively spending our lives on behalf of others, are we really following Jesus?

It’s simple, but not always easy. Actually, in our own strength it’s impossible. But the Holy Spirit gives us more than we need to follow Jesus.

- Does following Jesus always mean that we must make sacrifices?
- We have been on a month-long journey of intentionally letting go, wrestling with identity and learning to co-suffer in new ways... How has your faith been stirred up and practiced over the past thirty days?

VIDEO

Ashley Story Day 17

- How did Ashley’s “yes to God” end up surprising her?

So often, we minimize the call to follow Jesus to simply reading the Bible, praying, or going to church. We would like to just add these nice habits to our normal life. But truly, our lives are best lived when we allow Jesus to reorder our ‘normal’ world – our work and family life.

Scripture is clear on the invitation to follow Him in reaching out to those who are vulnerable, to those who are looked down upon by society, and to those without hope. Here’s the secret: That’s where the real joy is. **Follow him into picking up a cross and laying your life down, and you will also be following Him into a life raised out of darkness and into the light.**

ANointed FOR THE MISSION

In making us co-heirs with Christ, adopted into God’s family, we are each anointed for the mission of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:18) To be anointed means to be set apart, to be authorized and equipped for a task of spiritual importance.*

He has created us to bring His love and His hope to those who need it. Luke 4 shows us the anointing Jesus was taking up here on this earth.

Luke 4:18–19

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,
to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

This is the work we're following Him into! And He has given us His Spirit to empower us and to give us the strength and direction that we need to live out our mission.

- He has given us His Spirit so that we can be witnesses to those who do not know Him. How am I stewarding that in my life today?
- He empowers us so that we can help to free the oppressed, and we have the Holy Spirit with us as we reach our hands out to the needy. Do I walk in a miraculous gift of freedom as I share love and compassion with others? If not, what do I need to pray about to get there?
- Jesus relied fully on the Holy Spirit. He filled up with prayer and solitude, He poured out, and He filled up again. He didn't burn out. What does that rhythm look like in your life?
- How have the practices of the past thirty days made your heart notice and respond to the needs around you and in our world?

WHAT'S IN YOUR HANDS?

John 6:1-14

...There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?...

Remember, the boy in John 6 gave what was in his hands to Jesus, and it was miraculously multiplied to feed the people. All he did was . . .

1. Carry simple, ordinary things in his hands.
2. Stay close to Jesus.

Jesus isn't asking you to change the world. He's asking you to work with Him, to give Him what is in your hands, and He will multiply it for the good of others and for his glory.

He takes our ordinary things and turns them into miracles! He wants to use your talents, dreams, hopes, and career (which are all things He gives you anyway) to show His love to you and to others.

Don't allow yourself to become paralyzed by the magnitude or the complexities of abortion. Instead, focus on the heart of God and allow Him to lead you to the one person or group of people whose lives you can serve.

There is no scarcity of time, talent, and resources. In a culture bent on excess, it may feel like there is, but the truth is, **we are the Body of Christ.** In Him, we have more than enough.

He will save lives in the womb, serve desperate parents facing an unplanned pregnancy, bring life to those longing for family, rescue women out of abusive situations, give the gift of grace to shamed ones, comfort grieving parents in hospital rooms, and bring the lost into His Kingdom.

God wants us to be a part of it. There's really no better place to be.

CLOSING PRAYER

FINAL EMPATHY *Challenge* /// SIT, SEE, STAY

Touching the needs around us is not an easy task. It costs something. There is an element of suffering involved in caring about the vulnerable among us. There are some who may feel that a quick prayer is enough to give to our hurting friends, family or neighbors because only God can fix their situation. God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28), but we can miss out participating with Him in redemption when we prioritize our own comfort over empathy.

It takes courage to engage in the complexities of the pro-life movement. Here's something that can help.

See, Sit, Stay is a model to consider when faced with suffering that feels unapproachable, unfixable, or unbearable. The next time a need presents itself in the life of someone you know or you are made aware of, take it seriously and engage in a new way. Remember, **letting go, being defined by love, and having compassion are miracles!**

True compassion . . .

SITS with the person in their pain, willing to pause their own hustle and bustle to look the person in the eye. True compassion doesn't need to run off and fix a situation that only God can fix. It is strong enough to light a candle, sit in solidarity, and actively wait when waiting is the work to be done. **Micah 7:7-8** /// *"Though I sit in the darkness, the Lord will be my light."*

SEES a hurting person, not just as a victim, but from a whole/eternal perspective. True compassion recognizes God-given value – in a beloved prodigal, a survivor, a warrior, not defined by their pain, but moving through it. By God's grace, it honors people in their struggle. **Genesis 16:13** /// *Hagar said, "You are the God who sees me."*

STAYS present by sacrificially serving, giving Spirit-filled encouragement and loving action that lifts burdens. True compassion trusts in God's solutions to come through even when everything in you wants to run away or fall asleep to the pain. **Matthew 26:38** /// *Jesus says "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."*

- Which of these (SIT, SEE, STAY) gives you the most trouble?
- Which one comes most naturally to you?
- What are some examples of SIT/SEE/STAY compassion that we could show toward women in our community who may be considering abortion?

Pray about each step, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead you across the narrow path of not shutting your heart down, but not slipping into co-dependence.

Ask for accountability from a trusted friend or counselor in walking out compassion without deploying fight, flight, or freeze mechanisms.

Learn about local resources to point people to when their need requires something you are not equipped to offer.

The situations leading to a potential abortion can be complex, and the solution may be just as nuanced. But there is no situation outside of the Father's reach. He is an expert at untangling the knots, finding the wound, repairing and restoring the damage of sin. Our role is not to fix it, or to flee, but to pause, to pay attention to the needs, and to bring the presence of the Lord into the situation, just by being present yourself. Listen to the Spirit and respond humbly and carefully.

Together, let's be the hands and feet of Jesus, helping to bring others out of dark corners of shame, vulnerability, or injustice and into the future our God of hope has for them. May we learn to see, sit and stay with women who are facing an unplanned pregnancy in the same way Jesus does.

OPTIONAL

Printouts

EMPATHY

Challenge

WEEK 1

LETTING GO FOCUS VERSE /// John 4:13-14 /// *Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

The empathy challenge invitation for this week is to **go seven days replacing all of your normal beverages with water**. Let go of soda and tea, juice and milk — even coffee. In satisfying your physical thirst through water alone, your actions will take on great spiritual significance.

Our first empathy challenge invites you to let go of the crutch of uppers, downers, sugar addictions, and comfort drinks. Satisfy yourself in Jesus alone. He is the Living Water. You can choose to fast all beverages besides water for one week while still eating as you normally would. If you're feeling physically and spiritually empowered to fast non-water beverages *and* food — go for it! Maybe try it even for just one day.

As you fast, ask God to open your heart to the struggles that women with unplanned pregnancies face today. Limited access to proper healthcare or supportive relationships, shame over being in this situation, anxiety over how to provide for a child, pressure from culture and even from loved ones to have an abortion — these burdens plague women and men who are tempted to believe the lie that their lives could be ruined by an unplanned child. The problems are real, but the power of the Spirit to bring hope is just as real. Pray for hope, insight and compassion.

EMPATHY

Challenge

WEEK 2

IDENTITY FOCUS VERSE /// Psalm 139:13-14 /// *For you formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.*

This week's empathy challenge is to take a break from media. In your daily reading, you'll be learning about your identity, and taking more time to look into each other's eyes and God's word to see who we are. Take this as far as you want to, but may we humbly suggest avoiding . . .

1. **Social media** — *Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter — you name it*
2. **TV** — *shows on cable or streamed, movies, and even the daily news*
3. **Video games** — *phone, computer, or console*

Yep — all week. Much of how we view the issue of abortion can come from the media. In many ways, the media has normalized abortion. Culture tells us a pregnancy is just another personal choice we make, like what college to attend, what job to take, or whether to have aesthetic surgery. Some have become numb to the reality of abortion because of this societal influence. So it's important we take a break from newscasters, from others' posts, from politicians and online articles.

Media can be a helpful tool — so long as it is always tested against the word of God. Your identity comes from God. And the way you see others should be inspired by our Heavenly Father. **Taking a break from media that informs and consumes us will help us all to filter popular culture out and to welcome the Holy Spirit in.** Plus, just think of all the time you'll have to invest in other ways!

EMPATHY Challenge

WEEK 3

COMPASSION FOCUS VERSE /// **Matthew 18:4-5 ///** *Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.*

This week's POWERFUL WORDS challenge represents several different aspects of our Reimagining Pro-Life journey together.

Consider a period of silence to pray for and champion the voiceless babies in the wombs of uncertain mothers who are making choices each and every day. This doesn't need to be a public display. Like a private fast (see Matthew 6:16-18 for a bit of wisdom from Jesus), it's something that can be powerful between you and the Lord.

Take a break from all negative speech.

Ephesians 4:29 /// *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.*

GIVE GRACE with our language. We're going to focus on powerful, gracious, and healing words by fasting all kinds of words that can be destructive. This includes things like . . .

Complaining.

About the weather, about traffic, about your body . . . You know what you're tempted to complain about most! (*Grumbling is just the less-articulate cousin of complaining and will try to sneak up on you too.*)

Bitterness.

Unforgiveness always tries to overflow. Sometimes those sour words are just begging to be spit out.

Criticism.

Yes, even when it's true. Let's correct others by giving grace with our words this week.

Gossip.

Information that is not yours to share. Even the right information shared with the wrong people is wrong.

Let's practice LETTING GO of these words for a week. Let's practice finding our IDENTITY in love and inviting the COMPASSION of Jesus to fill this empty space in ways we may have never imagined. **We won't do this perfectly, but let's make an effort to do it wholeheartedly.** As we grow in understanding and compassion for those in our community who have chosen or are considering abortion, it is vital that we learn to guard our words and to give grace.

EMPATHY

Challenge

WEEK 4

FAITH WITH ACTION FOCUS VERSE /// Isaiah 58:10 /// *If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.*

“Faith With Action “ is what we’ll be focusing on this week. If we are all charged with spending ourselves for others, with “taking up our cross and following Jesus,” (Matt. 16:24) then we all have something to sacrifice and someone to serve. Like the boy with the fish and loaves in John 6:9 . . .

Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?

. . . you have something very ordinary in your hands that God can take and turn into a miracle! Start your week by reflecting on this question: ***What’s in my hands?***

This final week of Reimagining Pro-Life may require more of you than any of the others. The empathy challenge is to *carry the burdens of a woman facing an unplanned pregnancy*. It sounds weird, but here’s the idea. **The burden of anxiety, loneliness, stress, voicelessness, vulnerability, hopelessness, need and fear — those burdens are HEAVY.**

So this week, gather a group of stones, rocks, or bricks — make sure they’re big enough for you to be able to write on them, too! Together, they should be heavy enough to feel like a burden. Prayerfully name each burden. Write with a sharpie directly onto the rocks the burdens from the list above, or your own creative list of burdens you can imagine based on what you’ve learned over this month. Put the rocks into a bag, purse, backpack. Then, carry those burdens with you. Carry *their* burdens with you. Prepare for the conversations that you’ll have with peers, coworkers, friends, or even strangers at the grocery store. Use this challenge as a way to increase your and others’ awareness of the burdens that women with unplanned pregnancies carry.

FINAL EMPATHY Challenge /// SIT, SEE, STAY

WEEK 5

Touching the needs around us is not an easy task. It costs something. There is an element of suffering involved in caring about the vulnerable among us. There are some who may feel that a quick prayer is enough to give to our hurting friends, family or neighbors because only God can fix their situation. God *is* working all things for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28), but we can miss out participating with Him in redemption when we prioritize our own comfort over empathy.

It takes courage to engage in the complexities of the pro-life movement. Here's something that can help.

See, Sit, Stay is a model to consider when faced with suffering that feels unapproachable, unfixable, or unbearable. The next time a need presents itself in the life of someone you know or you are made aware of, take it seriously and engage in a new way. Remember, **letting go, being defined by love, and having compassion are miracles!**

True compassion . . .

SITS with the person in their pain, willing to pause their own hustle and bustle to look the person in the eye. True compassion doesn't need to run off and fix a situation that only God can fix. It is strong enough to light a candle, sit in solidarity, and actively wait when waiting is the work to be done. **Micah 7:7-8** /// *"Though I sit in the darkness, the Lord will be my light."*

SEES a hurting person, not just as a victim, but from a whole/eternal perspective. True compassion recognizes God-given value – in a beloved prodigal, a survivor, a warrior, not defined by their pain, but moving through it. By God's grace, it honors people in their struggle. **Genesis 16:13** /// *Hagar said, "You are the God who sees me."*

STAYS present by sacrificially serving, giving Spirit-filled encouragement and loving action that lifts burdens. True compassion trusts in God's solutions to come through even when everything in you wants to run away or fall asleep to the pain. **Matthew 26:38** /// *Jesus says "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."*

- Which of these (SIT, SEE, STAY) gives you the most trouble?
- Which one comes most naturally to you?
- What are some examples of SIT/SEE/STAY compassion that we could show toward women in our community who may be considering abortion?

Pray about each step, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead you across the narrow path of not shutting your heart down, but not slipping into co-dependence.

Ask for accountability from a trusted friend or counselor in walking out compassion without deploying fight, flight, or freeze mechanisms.

Learn about local resources to point people to when their need requires something you are not equipped to offer.

The situations leading to a potential abortion can be complex, and the solution may be just as nuanced. But there is no situation outside of the Father's reach. He is an expert at untangling the knots, finding the wound, repairing and restoring the damage of sin. Our role is not to fix it, or to flee, but to pause, to pay attention to the needs, and to bring the presence of the Lord into the situation, just by being present yourself. Listen to the Spirit and respond humbly and carefully.

Together, let's be the hands and feet of Jesus, helping to bring others out of dark corners of shame, vulnerability, or injustice and into the future our God of hope has for them. May we learn to see, sit and stay with women who are facing an unplanned pregnancy in the same way Jesus does.