

# Abortion

**Summary:** *As Christians, we have a better story to tell about the start of life: one where every life is equally precious and made in the image of God, regardless of whether we are big or small, male or female, or disabled or able-bodied.*

## Key points - a clash of worldviews

- Abortion is a deeply sensitive topic, invoking deep emotional responses. Women might choose to have an abortion for a variety of reasons: some of these include fear, shame and vulnerability. We want to provide comfort and hope for women who are suffering. If Christians are to be characterised by their love, we want to love women even more than abortion advocates do!

**But the worldview of those advocating for abortion clashes with a Christian worldview around several key concepts.**

- Abortion advocates argue that until it is born, a baby is just a 'fetus' and not a 'person': it doesn't have rights, and in early stages of pregnancy, it cannot feel pain.
  - But the Bible says that God 'knits us together in our mother's womb': life begins at conception. A baby is fully human whether it is inside or outside the womb, and has God-given worth and dignity: a child does not become human at an arbitrary point shortly before or after birth.
  - The Bible also says that children are not just fetuses: they are a blessing from God and will enhance the lives of and bring joy to their parents.
  - Abortion advocates argue that it is a woman's right to do what she wants with her own body: it is called a reproductive 'right', and they adopt the slogan 'my body, my choice'.
  - The Bible recognises the inherent value and rights of a mother, but it also says that in any abortion, there are two lives involved, and two sets of rights: the mother's and the baby's: both are equal before God, and abortion would involve the taking of a child's life.
- Abortion advocates argue that mothers have the right to an abortion if a child possesses certain characteristics which they view as undesirable, such as a disability. Disability has been interpreted widely, including Down's Syndrome, club foot and cleft palate.
  - But the Bible says that we are all made "in the image of God", regardless of who we are. Our humanity is not determined by our capacity to do certain tasks or by any physical traits: it is inherent. Christians also believe that God has a special heart for the weakest and the most vulnerable.
  - Our world now recognises the value of the disabled and wants to support them in society: it has not yet done this for the disabled who are inside the womb.
- Abortion advocates argue that abortion is a straightforward medical operation, and that it is the only option for many women.
  - But the Bible says that our lives and our bodies are not wholly our own. We are more than simply material beings. Christians believe that our bodies are gifts from God, and that life is ultimately his to take.
  - This impacts our view of all of life: we are not to stop caring when a child is born, but believe in human flourishing at every stage of life, whether it be through supporting fostering and adoption services, supporting those with disabilities or who are in poverty, or advocating on behalf of the elderly.

## Politics

- Abortion is legal across the UK up to 24 weeks, as a result of the Abortion Act 1967. There are 5 permissible grounds for an abortion and every abortion should be authorised by two doctors, acting in good faith. After 24 weeks, abortion is permissible in limited circumstances, such as risk to the mother's life, or a child being born with a disability.
- In 2019, Westminster imposed abortion laws on Northern Ireland, although it should have been a devolved matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly, which wasn't sitting at the time. Abortion is now available in Northern Ireland up to 12 weeks for any reason. After 12 weeks, the law there is similar to the rest of the UK.
- Under the Abortion Act and the Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations, unless an abortion is necessary to save a woman's life, doctors have the right of conscientious objection.
- Attempts to pass modest, 'pro-life' legislation have repeatedly failed, such as reducing the number of weeks at which an abortion is allowed to take place. Even an amendment in 2015 to clarify that sex-selective abortion is definitely illegal (there is some doubt in UK law) failed to pass after pro-abortion MPs rallied against it.
- During the covid-19 pandemic, at-home abortions were permitted for women who had been pregnant for less than 10 weeks. This involved women being allowed to take two drugs outside of a supervised medical environment. After the pandemic, this policy was made permanent.
- In 2023, a national buffer zone law was passed in England and Wales to ensure that abortion facilities have exclusion zones in place, making it an offence to influence, obstruct or harass a woman seeking an abortion within 150 metres of an abortion clinic. Peaceful vigils are not allowed within an exclusion zone, and the police have even arrested people for silent prayer within zones.
- Some MPs (predominantly Labour) are pushing to remove abortion from criminal law entirely. This is called the 'decriminalisation of abortion'. This would not mean that abortion would be legal for any reason after 24 weeks: instead, the Bills being put forward typically seek to ensure that women who have an abortion after 24 weeks would not be prosecuted. This would remove legal safeguards for preborn babies.

## Glossary

**ABORTION** - The intentional taking of a baby's life in the womb. It is sometimes called a 'termination'. Within the UK abortions can be 'surgical abortions' (involving an operation to remove the baby from the womb) or 'DIY abortions' (in which a woman takes two abortion pills at home and passes the baby out of the womb in the early stages of pregnancy).

**ZYGOTE** - This is the first stage of a new organism. A single cell structure, formed by the union of sperm and egg, that will divide to form an embryo.

**EMBRYO** - The term used to describe an unborn baby during the first eight weeks after conception.

**FETUS** - The term used to describe an unborn baby after the first eight weeks after conception.

**FETAL SENTIENCE** - A preborn baby's ability to feel pain in the womb. Studies suggest this may occur as soon as 12 weeks, well under the 24 week limit for abortions.

**VIABILITY** - The point at which a child is capable of life outside the womb. Although babies have been known to survive from 22 weeks, abortion remains legal up to 24 weeks

**CRISIS PREGNANCY** - An unplanned or undesired pregnancy.

**DECRIMINALISATION OF ABORTION** - A move to remove abortion from criminal law entirely, ensuring that women would not be prosecuted, even if they procured an abortion after 24 weeks. This would not make abortion legal after 24 weeks, but it would remove most legal safeguards for preborn babies.

**ABORTION ON DEMAND** - Laws by which a woman would be able to simply ask for an abortion, without having to give a reason or fulfil criteria.

## Key Bible Passages

**Genesis 1:27:** "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

**Exodus 20:13:** "You shall not murder."

**Exodus 21:22-25:** "If people are fighting and hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise."

**1 Samuel 2:6:** "The Lord brings death and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and raises up."

**Psalms 8:4-5:** "What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honour."

**Psalms 127:3:** "Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him."

**Psalms 139:13-14:** "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

**Proverbs 31:8-9:** "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

**Job 10:8-11:** "Your hands shaped me and made me. Will you now turn and destroy me? Remember that you moulded me like clay. Will you now turn me to dust again? Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese, clothe me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews?"

**Jeremiah 1:5:** "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

**Matthew 19:14:** Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

**Luke 1:41:** "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit."

## For Further Research

[care.org.uk/cause/abortion](https://care.org.uk/cause/abortion)

[weareopen.org.uk](https://weareopen.org.uk)

[righttolife.org.uk](https://righttolife.org.uk)

[kendradahl.com](https://kendradahl.com)

Megan Best: Fearfully and wonderfully made, 2012

Ben and Valentina Cadoux-Hudson and Chris Richards: Thinking about abortion, 2021

Marvin Olasky and Leah Saves: The story of abortion in America, 2023

Nancy Pearcey: Love Thy Body, 2018

Vaughan Roberts and Lizzie Ling: Abortion, 2020

John Wyatt: Matters of life and death (2nd ed.) 2012

## Quotes

"No woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother." - **Margaret Sanger**

"I don't often engage in debates over abortion rights, for the same reason I don't sit down to share a meal at any table where I am on the menu. My body is not a theory or a talking point, and neither is yours." - **Hannah Matthews**

"Killing a disabled infant is not morally equivalent to killing a person. Very often it is not wrong at all." - **Peter Singer**

"The single biggest factor in women's liberation was our newly found ability to impose our will on our biology...The nearly 200,000 aborted babies in the UK every year are the lesser evil, no matter how you define life...You must be prepared to kill." - **Antonia Senior**

"If the anti-abortion movement took a tenth of the energy they put into noisy theatrics and devoted it to improving the lives of children who have been born into lives of poverty, violence, and neglect, they could make a world shine." - **Michael Jay Tucker**

"Do not murder a child by abortion, nor kill it at birth." - **The Didache**

"You shall not slay the child by procuring abortion; nor, again, shall you destroy it after it is born." - **The Epistle of Barnabas**

"I've noticed that everyone who is for abortion has already been born." - **Ronald Reagan**

"Jesus has been with us in the darkness of the womb as he will be with us in the darkness of the tomb." - **Gilbert Meilander**

"Jesus was Himself at one point an unborn child. If there were any questions before His arrival about the sanctity of human life, those questions were answered 2000 years ago." - **Matt Walsh**

"It is a poverty to decide that a child must die so that you may live as you wish." - **Mother Teresa**

"Liberals often say, 'If you're against abortion, don't have one. If you're against assisted suicide, don't do it. But don't impose your views on others.' At first, that might sound fair. But what progressives fail to understand is that every social practice rests on certain assumptions of what the world is like—a worldview. When a society accepts the practice, it absorbs the worldview that justifies it." - **Nancy Pearcey**

"Instead of asking women to bully their bodies with toxic chemicals (contraceptives), violent acts (abortion), and invasive laboratory-based fertility treatments so they fit into a career path designed essentially for single men, we should design career paths that are supportive for parents - both mothers and fathers." - **Nancy Pearcey**

"Pregnancy is itself a symbol of deep hospitality. It is the giving of one's body to the life of another. It is a sharing of all that we have, our cell structure, our blood stream, our food, our oxygen. It is saying 'welcome' with every breath, and every heartbeat. And for many mothers that welcome is given irrespective of the demands made on one's own comfort, health or ease of life. For the demands of this hospitality are greater than almost any of our own. And the growing fetus is made to know that here is love, here are warm lodgings, here is a place of safety...This is one of the reasons why the decision for abortion is such a painful and heavy one." - **Elaine Storkey**

## Key Stats

- **Numbers of abortions:**
  - Since the 1967 Abortion Act, more than 10 million abortions have taken place. The number of yearly abortions in England, Scotland and Wales has almost tripled since 1969, the first full year that abortion was legal.
  - Research showed that in Northern Ireland, where abortion was only introduced in 2019, more than 100,000 people are alive today who otherwise would not have been had the Abortion Act been adopted there in 1967.
  - Around 1 in 4 pregnancies (excluding miscarriages) currently end in abortion. The total number of abortions for residents of England and Wales in January to June 2022 (the most recent data) was 123,219. This was an increase of 17% from the same period in 2021.
  - 67% of abortions occur up to and including 7 weeks. 93% of abortions occur up to and including 12 weeks, and 98% up to and including 17 weeks. These last two thresholds are relevant due to debates around fetal sentience.
- **Science around abortion**
  - Babies born at 22 weeks have been known to survive, yet the time limit for an abortion remains at 24 weeks.
  - Abortion remains legal up to birth in cases of serious physical or mental abnormalities or if the baby would be seriously handicapped. 'Seriously handicapped' has been loosely interpreted to include abortions for Down's Syndrome, cleft lip and club foot.
  - The time at which a preborn baby can feel pain is a highly contested ground. Although Planned Parenthood has sometimes claimed that it may be as late as 28 weeks (after the point of viability!), they are an outlier. Many studies fall in the region of estimating 18-20 weeks, and some studies even speculate that preborn babies can experience pain from 12 weeks onward.
  - The UK has the joint most liberal abortion laws in all of Europe (together with the Netherlands) and is an outlier in its abortion time limit. The vast majority of European countries limit abortions to taking place within the first 10-14 weeks other than in exceptional circumstances: France's limit is 14 weeks, Germany's is 12 weeks, Italy's is 12 weeks, and Spain's is 14 weeks.
- **Reasons for abortion**
  - Around half of women getting abortions claim they were using contraception during the month they got pregnant.
  - Nearly all abortions (over 98%) have taken place on the grounds that the pregnancy is within the first 24 weeks, and the woman's physical or mental health would be negatively impacted if she carried on with the pregnancy.
  - Around 2500-3000 abortions each year occur on the grounds of physical or mental abnormalities. More than 90% of pregnancies that screen positive for Down's Syndrome are aborted.
  - Very few (0.03%, or roughly 80 per year) occur on the grounds of risks to the mother's life.
  - A 2022 UK study indicated that childcare costs contributed to the decision to have an abortion in around 60% of cases. 17% of women declared that it was the main factor for their decision.
  - A study in America (admittedly not the same context as the UK) showed that 64% of post-abortive women said they felt "pressured by others" to have an abortion. 54% said they "were not sure about the decision at the time." 78% said they felt "guilt" afterwards and 56% reported feeling "sadness and loss".
- **Polling statistics from Savanta ComRes**
  - Just 1% of the general population supported the introduction of abortion up to birth. Instead, 60% of the population and 70% of women believe that the current 24-week gestational limit for abortion should be reduced.
  - 79% of the general population and 84% of women agreed that women who want to



continue with their pregnancies, but are under financial pressure to have an abortion, should be given more support.

- 93% of women agreed that a woman considering abortion should have a legal right to independent counselling from a source that has no financial interest in her decision.
- 89% of the general population and 91% of women agreed that sex-selective abortion should be explicitly banned by the law.
- 79% of the general population supported the introduction of a five-day cooling-off period to ensure that a women considering an abortion has had enough time to consider all of the options available to her.
- 76% of the general population agreed that doctors should be required by law to verify in person that a patient seeking an abortion is not under pressure from a third party to undergo the abortion.

## Stories

**Heidi Crowter** has Down's Syndrome, and has been campaigning on behalf of babies with Down's Syndrome since 2016. She herself has attended mainstream schools, obtained a qualification in hairdressing (and worked in a hair salon), and lived on her own before getting married in 2020. She is the first person with Down's Syndrome to take the government to court, claiming that the 1967 Abortion Act was discriminatory against people with disabilities, and arguing that it made her feel less valued by society, saying: "[The law] makes me feel that I shouldn't be here. That I should be extinct. I know that's not true, but that's how it makes me feel." Although she lost the case, she is still campaigning for full equality, giving the advice: "Look at the ability not the disability."

**Katie** had grown up believing in Jesus, but had been subject to sexual abuse from the age of 3. Growing up feeling out of control, she had sex before marriage and became pregnant. Her parents were told that she had brought shame on them and upon the church by their pastor. She felt that God was ashamed of her too. She said: "I still carried the guilt and shame. I tried so many times to leave it at the foot of the cross and walk away in freedom but people always managed to pick it up and give it back to me." She gave birth to a baby boy. A couple of years later, she became pregnant again: terrified of facing people and her pastor again, she chose an abortion, despite believing it was wrong. She wrote later: "I desperately searched for answers but all I could see were judgmental faces and voices. I was too scared to think about leaving church because if I wasn't wanted at my home church, who else would want me? If I'd searched just a little bit longer, I would have seen the open arms and the smiling face of a loving Father who wanted to bring comfort and healing to his daughter; to let her know that she was still loved and cherished. My decision would have been so different if I'd seen the face of Jesus instead of the people from church."

**Helen** became pregnant at 17, having been with her boyfriend for many years. She felt alone and that she couldn't talk to her mother. Her boyfriend told her to do what she liked, and then left her. She never heard from him again. She went to have an abortion on her own, tried to forget all about it, and did not tell anyone about it for more than a decade. She went back to church and came to know Jesus. But as she did, she started to come to terms with the fact that she really had had an abortion. She said: "I started to grieve the child I did not have. The child I used to make myself believe didn't exist because it wasn't born. Yet I had names for it. A boy's name and a girl's one. Jack or Sophie. So they did exist." She felt a deep sense of guilt, and shame, and that she had taken away her child's life. When she talked with her friends at church, to her surprise, she was met with love and grace, and she came to understand that God had forgiven her. But she still couldn't forgive herself. She eventually went on an OPEN (post-abortion) healing retreat. She said of her time there: "I never realised how powerful some of the emotions attached to having an abortion were and how much it really had impacted my life over the years. How my insecurities and who I am as a person has been shaped by that experience. The weekend was painful in places. No lies. It was really painful, to remember, to talk about it, to process, and yet there was time for it. And a time to do that in such a loving and gracious atmosphere without condemnation." She finally felt able to forgive herself, and felt free, forgiven and hopeful, for the first time in years.

## Pastoral Issues

- **People who have had or may be considering an abortion**
  - Highlight at the start of your talk that this will be a very sensitive subject for many: some may actually want to step outside the room because it is too painful (and that is okay).
  - A number of testimonies from women who have had an abortion comment on how they felt pressured by friends and family, and how they felt judged by those around them, sometimes, sadly, from people within the church.
  - Whilst we must preach clearly what God's word says on life-issues, we must aspire to be gentle and loving in tone, recognising the deep hurt that many women feel in this area.
  - It is very likely there will be people within our congregations who have had an abortion. Some of them will be processing deep feelings of guilt, shame and regret.
  - But we also know that "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus", and that, no matter what we have done, if we come to him in repentance, the Father loves us, forgives us, and welcomes us as precious sons and daughters.
  - Highlight that Christian ministries exist to help women who are trying to process the pain they feel over having had an abortion (in many cases, years later), such as 'Open' ([www.weareopen.org.uk](http://www.weareopen.org.uk)). Many women have found these ministries and retreats to be a time of processing and healing.
- **People who are unsure how to speak to non-Christians about abortion**
  - Speaking about abortion with non-Christians can lead to an unhelpful framing of debate of being either for the mother or for the child (pro-choice vs pro-life). As Christians we care equally about both, and we need to show that in the way we speak.
  - Again, any conversations must be had sensitively, non-judgmentally and gently: to judge your tone, imagine that the person you are speaking to has had an abortion (or is close to someone who has). Try to listen, more than you speak, particularly if the person talks about personal matters.
  - It may be helpful to gently show some of the contradictions in thinking from pro-abortion advocates: to ask, for instance, whether a physically/mentally handicapped child outside the womb at 36 weeks is a person, and then to gently point out that a physically/mentally handicapped child inside the womb at 36 weeks has no protection from abortion; when do they think the child becomes a 'person'?
  - If someone is truly pro-choice, it might be helpful to highlight that many women currently have abortions when they don't actually want to have them, whether through pressure from those around them (or society at large), pressure around work, or financial reasons. This is an area where we can work together to reform the law, as many women aren't able to make the choice they want, to have the baby.
- **People who have experienced miscarriage**
  - The topic of abortion can also be deeply painful for those who have experienced baby loss in other ways, such as a miscarriage.
  - These women may also feel a sense of guilt that they weren't able to carry their baby to full-term. It is important to say that they are not to blame, that God has seen their pain, and that he has "collected all their tears in his bottle". They, and their babies, are fully loved by God.
  - It is now possible for all women who have experienced a miscarriage - or any other form of baby loss prior to 24 weeks, including abortion - to obtain a certificate from the Government to recognise their baby loss. The co-chairs of the Pregnancy Loss Review have said that they "hope that the introduction of a national certificate of baby loss will give bereaved parents the official recognition that their babies did exist and that their babies lives, however brief, really do matter."
  - Again, Christian ministries do exist for women who are dealing with the grief of miscarriage. 'Open', for example, also runs post-miscarriage healing retreat days.