

– THE PROGRACE MOVEMENT

# ProGrace: A New Christian Response To Abortion

– ANGIE WESZELY, CEO & CO-FOUNDER



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**Do you ever feel tension when the issue of abortion is brought up? Have you wrestled with how to articulate your thoughts and views in a way that is congruent with your faith? And have you worried that if you try to engage in discussion, you will be misunderstood – so you just don't talk about it?**

– ANGIE WESZELY, CEO & CO-FOUNDER



— A GRACE CENTERED APPROACH

**If you have, you are not alone.** And I thank you for having the courage to pick up this e-book. I have wrestled with all these things, so I chose to avoid the pro-life/pro-choice conversation for most of my life. That all changed when I began leading a Christian pregnancy organization. I saw our work as being non-divisive and offering important support, but that isn't how many others around me saw it. Suddenly, I was experiencing these tensions every day in a multitude of ways. It wasn't just that my friends, acquaintances, and community leaders had negative stereotypes of our work; the more painful thing for me to process was the growing realization that some of the stereotypes were true.

Now, after 15 years of this journey, I am excited to share with you an approach that has brought me and many others to freedom. I lead an organization called ProGrace, and we believe that when Christians embrace a grace-centered response to abortion, we will create supportive communities where both women and children can thrive, bringing a third option to the polarizing divide, and reflecting more of God's heart in this issue.

That's why we equip Christians with a grace-centered approach to abortion through theology, language, and outreach models that value the woman and child equally.

**We do this through:**

**EQUIP** - An online learning community of pregnancy organizations

**TRANSFORM** - An online course for churches and individuals

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## — A GRACE CENTERED APPROACH



**Creating a third option that values the woman and child equally all starts with being willing to have our own paradigm shifted** to let go of some mental models we may have held for a long time without even really knowing why. And that is why we will stop and ask God to open our eyes and hearts as we first look at theology.

### **Let's pray together.**

Father, we thank you for Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:17, when he asks you this: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit[f] of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." We ask the same as we walk through these ideas. Help us know you better and know your heart for all who experience unintended pregnancy and abortion.

— PART ONE

# Understanding God's Heart Through Theology

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**In order to be able to reflect more of God's heart,** we need to understand what Scripture reveals to us about His character.

As we wrestle with our current response to abortion, we will be holding it up to these two theological truths:

1. God's Design of Pregnancy
2. God's Path for Transformation

# We’re going to look at a verse that many of us have heard over and over as the **foundation** of the Christian position on abortion.

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Let’s look at this with an open mind, asking the Spirit to show us the full meaning of this Scripture, and who this verse applies to in the context of unintended pregnancy:

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book.

– Psalm 139:14-16



— GOD'S DESIGN OF PREGNANCY

Before we move on, take a minute to ask God:

**What is the full meaning of this Scripture?**

**Who does this verse apply to in the context of unintended pregnancy and abortion?**

I had heard this verse taught many times while I was growing up in the church. Every time it was used to talk about God's value for a child before he or she is born. I still remember the day I was walking through the hall of the pregnancy organization where I worked and the still, small voice whispered to me, "You know that passage in Psalm 139? It's about women, too."

With that thought, my eyes were opened to one of the tensions I had been experiencing: I was leading an organization that served pregnant women, and yet when I watched how our staff interacted with women, it seemed they were primarily concerned with the child being born. I would hear real needs being expressed by women that our program team wasn't addressing. Not because our staff were intentionally trying to marginalize women, but **because we were stuck in this mental model that God values the child - at the expense of the woman.**





— GOD'S DESIGN OF PREGNANCY

But this is the first place where God asks us to realize that He is bigger and more compassionate than we can even comprehend. Because what Psalm 139 teaches is that God sees the woman and the child. All the days ordained for the woman and the child are written in His book. He transcends the polarizing arguments that elevate the needs of one over the other by pointing us to His heart for both.

**Let's take a minute to reflect on this:** How creative is God?

How many ways could He have created human life? He could have chosen any way he wanted. So why did He create pregnancy, where a woman and child are intertwined for 9 months? Because of this, anything that happens to one of them impacts the other. It's worth stopping for a minute to really ponder the mystery of pregnancy, because there isn't really anything else like it, where two lives are so interdependent.

In designing pregnancy this way, God has made it impossible for us to think we can help one while bypassing the other. It won't work. It's why the pro-life/pro-choice stalemate won't ever work, because each side focuses primarily on the needs of one over the other.

**God loves and values BOTH the woman and the child - equally -- and calls us to work for the dignity and welfare of both. This is the "why" behind the ProGrace approach.**

## The “**how**” behind the ProGrace approach is God's path for transformation – which is always His grace.

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This is best illustrated by a story in John 8. If you have a Bible app that has sound, I highly recommend that you open it to John 8:2-11 and listen to it while closing your eyes. This allows us to visualize the scene being described in this passage.

This is a real story where Jesus interacts with people just like He would interact with us today. And as we close our eyes, ask the Spirit to reveal truth to us, and listen to it as a story, God reveals much. You can listen to it one, two, or three times before we move on.

Take a few minutes to think about what God highlighted to you as you listened to the story. You can read the following passage and jot down any of your thoughts.

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## — GOD'S PATH FOR TRANSFORMATION

*John 8:2-11 New International Version (NIV)*

*At dawn Jesus appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.*

*But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.*

*At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"*

*"No one, sir," she said.*

*"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."*

**I love envisioning this story! Every time I do, I see even more interesting dynamics and details.**

**Lots of things stand out to me, but the main one is always the chronology –or the order– of how Jesus responds.**

## 1. He addressed the sin of the religious leaders first.

Let's sit with the reality of this for a second in the context of the abortion issue. Christians have been so vocal about the sin of abortion and in highlighting the sin of women, men, abortion providers, etc. If Jesus were here, what sin would He address first? Based on this passage, I believe He would offer some insight into how believers and churches also play a part in the current realities around abortion.

For example, a recent Lifeway study<sup>1</sup> found that while **four out of ten women who choose abortion are regular churchgoers. And only 7% of women talk to anyone at a church before making this decision.** The primary reasons they cite are fear of judgment and no visible support at the church for single moms.

That statistic feels so heavy to me. More than that, it lights a fire in me to change it! Because when the Church is acting like the Church, we can move from judgement and lack of support into grace and lots of support. In fact, we are perfectly positioned to do so. It starts with Jesus lovingly pointing out this reality to us.

<sup>1</sup> [Study of Women who have had an Abortion and Their Views on Church](#)

## 2. He defused the life and death situation before addressing her.

In part two, we will hear the emotional reality for women facing unintended pregnancy. Even though today it isn't physical life and death like it was for the woman in John 8, it feels like that, emotionally, for women. Jesus offers us a model of bringing calm, wisdom, and protection into this conversation.

Women still bear the brunt of the shame for an unintended pregnancy, even though they don't get pregnant alone. Similarly, the woman in this story wasn't committing adultery alone, but was singled out and pushed before Jesus. He saw this. John even tells us the whole incident was done to trap Him.

But **His priority was to protect her life and stand between her and the condemning crowd.**

## 3. His first words to her are "Neither do I condemn you."

In my experience, Christians consistently get this backwards when it comes to unintended pregnancy and abortion. In fact, people often ask me, "But what about grace and truth?" What they usually mean is: "don't we have a responsibility to point out to a pregnant woman that she sinned by having sex outside of marriage?"

John 1:17 tells us that "the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." The law of God is perfect and holy. It just doesn't have any power to make us holy, but the grace and truth that come through Jesus Christ can.

**We have confused the idea of sharing "grace and truth" with using the law to point out sin.**

When we think of grace and truth standing on the other side of the law in this passage, we realize that there are so many truths we can share with people facing an unintended pregnancy or after an abortion. We can start with the truths of God's love and grace, the wonderful plans He has for their life, how He set up the Church to be a family for people who all need His grace.

There are SO many truths to share! And, most importantly, these are truths that can set us free.

#### 4. Lastly, he talks to the woman about the transformed life.

The Pharisees wanted him to do this first and they wanted him to do it in a condemning way, not a transformative way. Not only does Jesus save her physical life, He encounters her in the fullness of His grace and truth, so that she can live a transformed life.

This is the Biblical model for how any of us change. We have to experience grace first, which is how we know we matter enough to God for Jesus to pay for our sin and adopt us into his family. It's only after that we can start acting like we're part of His family.

I didn't grow up in a church that taught this. It's taken me decades to unlearn the law they taught me and to really understand the new covenant of grace.

If you have had a similar experience, I offer these Scriptures as further study:

– Romans 5-8

– 1 John

I don't think any of us can ever exhaust our understanding of the beautiful, radical, freeing grace of Jesus. **And the more we embrace His grace for ourselves, the more we will naturally extend it to anyone in suffering or in need.** Needing grace is common to the human condition, and Jesus gives it lavishly.

— PART TWO

# Understanding A Woman's Reality

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Most of our work is facilitated in both the U.S. and Canada, and the reality is similar in both countries. By age 45, **1 in 4 women will have an abortion**,<sup>12</sup> and nearly half of all unintended pregnancies end in abortion.<sup>3</sup>

Let's stop and think about this reality for a minute.

<sup>1</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29048970/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22036474/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/induced-abortion-united-states>

**25% of U.S. and Canadian women will experience abortion. And nearly half of all unintended pregnancies end in abortion.**

**It prompts us to ask the question, “Why?” What is happening for a woman when she experiences an unintended pregnancy that causes her to see abortion as her only or best option?**

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**For ten years, we have been conducting qualitative research with women facing unintended pregnancy.**

**The results are consistent year after year, whether women decide to parent, place for adoption, or have an abortion.**

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– THIS NARRATIVE IS FROM THAT RESEARCH:

*After I had taken the pregnancy test, I just felt sick. I started to cry. I didn't know what to say or what to do. All I could feel was worry, regret, shame, guilt. I felt so ashamed. Being pregnant meant that I was irresponsible. I had a feeling deep down that I'd just ruined my life.*

*My friend asked me how I let this happen and I felt so stupid. It feels like everyone is saying that you're stupid and reckless and you can't do this. It's like they're saying to me, "I don't want you, nobody wants you."*

*You know, of course, I was thinking a lot about finances, my job, my life. This decision isn't about what's happening in this one year. It's not even about what's happening for 18 years. It's for your whole life, supporting another person.*

*I felt so alone. No one was there for me. Going through this, you get so isolated. There is this sense of who is going to help me? And what am I going to do? I needed help but there was no one to help me, no one I felt like I could talk to.*

## **What do you hear in their responses? Panic, isolation – and over it all, shame.**

In her 2012 TED talk<sup>1</sup>, Brene Brown, a researcher on shame and vulnerability, makes a big distinction between guilt and shame:

– Guilt = Behavior, "I made a mistake"

– Shame = Identity, "I am a mistake"

And research consistently confirms that shame is highly correlated with all types of destructive behaviors.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_listening\\_to\\_shame?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_listening_to_shame?language=en)



— UNDERSTANDING A WOMAN'S REALITY

**The way shame looks for a woman facing an unintended pregnancy is that she thinks, "My life as I know it is over, because I'm no longer myself, I've just become 'that girl.'"**

She believes she either needs to have an abortion for her very identity to survive, or resigns herself to accept the new identity and struggle as a single mom.

Neither of these options are God's heart for a woman, or her child – He wants both of them to thrive. So, **how can we break the power of this shame?**

— ANGIE WESZELY, CEO & CO-FOUNDER

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## — UNDERSTANDING A WOMAN'S REALITY

Brene Brown goes on to say that shame grows exponentially through secrecy and judgment, but if you douse it with empathy, it can't survive. Christians who truly understand God's grace are in a perfect place to demonstrate this empathy. We're all in the same place of needing His grace, not only to forgive us, but to lead us into transformation.

So, how can grace bring transformation for women facing unintended pregnancy?

### **Let's look at this narrative from women after encountering acceptance and support:**

*When I first went to the pregnancy organization in our town, I got to go back and talk with a counselor, Shannon. She was really open to anything I had to say and didn't judge me at all. It made me feel a lot better. She started asking me questions and I just started crying. Instead of being like, "what do you want to do?" because that's what everyone was asking me, she said, "what do you need?"*

*When you talk to your partner, you have to include how they are feeling. When you talk to your mom, you have to deal with all her disappointment. But I felt like Shannon was going to be supportive either way. She did not push me. She just tried to help me understand everything. I don't know, I just felt like they didn't look down on me. No one there did.*

*After that day, I went to talk to my Aunt Linda. I told her and she hugged me and that helped a lot. She said she understood. It made it easier to calm down and attempt to relax and let the stress go away for a little while. To know that there was a support system was very important.*

*So somewhere along the line between talking to Shannon and talking to Aunt Linda, everything started falling into place. I mean, it was still hard because I knew that even though I'm a nurturing person, I did not feel cut out to handle all of it. You need support, sharing, help. You need somebody to listen.*

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## — UNDERSTANDING A WOMAN'S REALITY

*They helped me so much. It shows that there are good people out there. It felt empowering. It felt like I probably had more people in my corner than I realized. Sometimes you don't realize the impact that gestures have. Simple acts of diapers and a blanket and "see you next time" said to me that everything was going to be okay. And that's the big need. That was enough. It told me that God is in other people.*

As we hear in these stories, when we extend grace, it starts the process of healing and a feeling of belonging—it breaks the power of shame and starts to change a woman's view of herself.

**When we extend support, it helps women see possibilities and start to dream - it breaks the power of fear, allowing a woman to envision a new future for herself and her child.**

All of this leads to transformation.

This grace response is unlike anything else which is currently being offered in our culture. Women have told us they feel judgment everywhere: from their families, their friends, and even the organizations they go to for medical and practical help. But a woman who was welcomed into a church that had embraced the ProGrace approach said this:

*"They treated me like an actual person, not just a teen mom. And that meant the world to me."*

To which we answer back, "Yes, of course! Because this is how Jesus treats all of us, with dignity and value. This is what He is like." And when we demonstrate His compassion in this way, people can't help but be drawn to Him.

— PART THREE

# Understanding A Vision For The Future

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Thank you for going on this journey through understanding more of God's heart through theology and understanding a woman's reality. And based on all we've discussed, let's close with this question (and I hope you will let yourself dream a bit!).

**Spend a few minutes wondering and dreaming about what you think could happen if Christians engaged in this issue with a grace response.** Nothing is too big or too small as we let our minds and spirits wonder on this.

## Can you imagine....

**As we apply grace to this issue, we see transformation in our own life first, and our views on how to address abortion begin to change.**

**It starts with us, reading this e-book!**

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**As we, as individuals and leaders in our churches, change, our churches are also transformed.**

**We think and talk differently and begin to have new conversations inside our church. We let it be known that we will extend grace and support, whatever decision a woman makes.**



— UNDERSTANDING A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

We consistently see that when a church begins to embrace and communicate a grace-centered response, women and men who have experienced unintended pregnancy and abortion open up about their experience - sometimes for the very first time. We can make our churches safe by extending the same grace Jesus extends to all of us.

Grace also paves the way for us to have new conversations outside the church with people **at all different points** on their beliefs about abortion. In fact, when I share about Pro Grace, the Gospel often flows naturally into the conversation. That's because this is all based on the Gospel – the good news that God extends grace first – then keeps extending grace, day after day, so we can become more like Him.

When we are out in the community, having these conversations, our churches then become known as a safe place for women facing unintended pregnancy or after an abortion. When that happens, we can bring restoration to this issue and individuals impacted, as we create communities where women and children are thriving.

Because that paints a picture of a different option than abortion or overwhelming struggle as a mom: a picture of hope. This is what women need to see if we are ever going to truly make a difference and see fewer women choosing abortion. We have to create for them a pathway where both they and their children can thrive.



– UNDERSTANDING A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

This is the driving passion behind this ebook and behind the ProGrace online course we offer: [Transform the Christian Response to Abortion.](#)

If you have found freedom through this ebook, I think you would love going through this experiential online course with a few friends, or with your small group.

In this online course, we:

- Have a deeper experience with the theology behind the Christian response to abortion
- Hear more of the woman's reality and how we can support her
- Look at the example of how Jesus interacted with people
- Learn new words to use to communicate God's heart
- Give practical tools for having new conversations

Thank you for going on this journey. You are why I believe we can have a new Christian response to abortion. I have big dreams. Who knows what God can do through you and others who are committed to unleashing His radical grace into an issue that has been broken and in a stalemate for so long. I'm praying for you!

# Thank you for being on this journey with US.

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**There are three ways you can continue to engage in a new response in the abortion divide:**

**1. Go deeper through a course.**

We have two online course options that dive deeper into the ProGrace approach and how to apply it in your community. You will find information on those opportunities [here](#).

**2. Get social.**

There are multiple ways to stay in conversations with us. Dive into our [podcast](#), check out our [blog](#), or follow and share our social media content via [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), or [Instagram](#).

**3. Invest in the future.**

One of the best ways to offer more opportunities for others to engage in a new conversation around abortion is to financially support our movement.

Again, we're grateful for your interest and support in this important work