

# Walking alongside women with unplanned pregnancies

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For almost five years, I have walked alongside women experiencing unplanned pregnancies while they struggle to make the decision to continue the pregnancy or have an abortion.

Recently, I sat down with women who were in this situation and heard their stories. Each woman ultimately chose to have her baby, but all struggled with how they were treated by their churches.

When faced with shame, judgment and possible ridicule from other believers, it's not surprising more than 4 in 10 women who have had an abortion were part of a local church when they terminated their pregnancies.

I've witnessed firsthand how unmarried pregnant women are ostracized by some churches and how that response not only breaks their spirit, but tells other women their church is not a safe place for them to seek help if they have an unplanned pregnancy. If we as believers truly value life—both the mother's and the unborn baby's—we have to change this.

Working with women in difficult situations has been central to my ministry calling. My experience in social work, youth ministry and leading a women's health care nonprofit, combined with personal stories of women I interviewed for this article, have guided me to five ways the church, and believers in general, can support better women who are experiencing an unplanned pregnancy.

# **1. Begin with grace**

The first step is to approach any woman in this situation with grace, compassion and love the same way Jesus would have. She already is scared, ashamed, embarrassed and expecting people's judgment. So, we must meet her with understanding and hope.

If the first thing we do is rebuke her for having premarital or extramarital sex, the enemy will use that shame to push her closer to abortion. She needs to know she is still loved and valued by God, and her baby is not a sin. The circumstances are not ideal, but it's not an unredeemable mistake.

# **2. Meet her where she is**

Women who are trying to make a decision about their pregnancy often feel they need to hurry and figure out how to "fix this." They need time and a safe place to process their feelings and thoughts. This may mean she admits to you she is thinking about abortion.

We must be careful not to overreact, because that may cause her to shut down and no longer see you as a safe person to talk to. Instead, meet her where she is. Express your care and support for her. Let her know you understand she is in an overwhelming situation and that you want to help her slow down and think through all her options. It's important to give her space to express openly what she feels.

# **3. Don't push**

Women in this position likely already are feeling pressure. They are trying to weigh what they think is best along with what the father of the baby might be pushing them to do. Once you add in the expectations of their friends and family, the last thing she needs is another person imposing

their opinion and adding more pressure to an already overwhelming situation.

Depending on the relationship, she may ask you what you would do. In that case, you can answer her honestly. But trying to push her toward the decision you think she should make can backfire and make her feel more alone, isolated and overwhelmed. You want to assure her you're in her corner and are there to support her.

## **4. Help her find support**

This is a difficult situation to walk through, and these are hard conversations to have. Thankfully, there are Christian pregnancy resource centers and clinics all over the country with staff and volunteers equipped to help.

When a woman comes to you for support with her unplanned pregnancy, helping her get an appointment at one of these centers or clinics will get her connected to the support she needs. She will be able to get a pregnancy test and ultrasound and sit down with a trained advocate to help talk through her options and inform her about all the resources available to her if she chooses to parent or place for adoption.

Although we always hope women choose life for their babies, many of these organizations also have post-abortive spiritual support if she does decide to have an abortion.

## **5. Commit to be her community**

I asked the women I interviewed, "What is something you wish people understood about your journey as a single mom?"

One woman shared: "I'm the only one taking care of me and my child. It's

just me. We had to deal with food insecurity. I was in a toxic relationship. I didn't have stable housing, and I didn't have anyone to look up to so I would know how to do this right."

When a woman in your life or your church has unplanned pregnancies, supporting her doesn't end when she decides to carry her pregnancy. Many women need our continued support; they need community. This is even more important if she doesn't have support from her family.

Providing this level of support also can be messy and hard. It requires sacrifice and commitment, but it's part of what it means to be the body of Christ. We are supposed to take care of one another. We need to come alongside these mothers and become their extended families.

## **A note to church leaders**

Many women I have talked to through the years have been torn between carrying their pregnancy and having an abortion, because they fear how they will be treated at church. As leaders, we must create a space for repentance and healing, but remember, these young women need our community.

Making women "sit down" and restricting them from serving in the church while they are pregnant only makes them feel isolated and alone. One young woman told me she felt like she was being punished or put in "time out" and that church leadership sent the message her baby was a sin.

Psalm 139:12 says, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb" (NIV). This is true for every pregnancy, whether the mother intended it or not. God has given this life, and we should honor that, regardless how it may have been conceived.

This same young woman expressed she "felt lost" during those months of

not being allowed to use her gifts to serve in ministry. I could hear the pain in her voice as she told the story several years later.

We must find a better way to help women walk through unplanned pregnancies. That way should exhibit the redemption we all have access to as the result of what Jesus did on the cross.

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## Resources

### Centers and clinics

[CareNet](#) (National Network of Resource Centers)

[Eden Clinic](#) (Oklahoma)

[Human Coalition](#) (Texas and East Coast)

[Pregnancy Center of the Coastal Bend](#) (Texas coast)

[The Source for Women](#) (Texas)

### Education

[How Do We Love the Unborn and Their Mother](#) (Gospel Coalition Podcast)

[Sanctity of Human Life Primer](#) (Published by Austin Stone)

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