

I have written this opening line over one hundred times and a catchy sentence just doesn't seem fitting. So, I'll just begin by saying under the guise of complete freedom I will be brutally, completely and lovingly honest. The past few months have brought forth many emotions I never knew could completely cripple and render me useless. Watching the undercover videos filmed by the Center for Medical Progress has brought to the surface my own sins, the guilt thereof and the resentment I've suppressed for many years. I have told myself to leave all of those things at God's feet, but in reality I carry them around everywhere I go. Every time I hear a name, see a face or look into my own children's eyes I remember. I remember what I've done. I remember what I should not have done. I feel the shame and wonder how my wife can still love me and tell me "everything's going to be alright." I get up and preach every Sunday on our need for forgiveness: to forgive others and to forgive ourselves. The hypocrisy stabs me every Saturday night as I run through my lessons for the next day. How can I encourage people do something I've had such a great struggle with? This past week I believe I have come to terms with these feelings. No matter how much I struggle with my sin and my conscience, as long as I struggle the war is not over. If you have not guessed already, this term "abortion" has consumed my being and hung a dark cloud over my family for many years. For the purposes of safety and anonymity I am not releasing my identity, not because I fear for myself, but those whom I may cause inadvertent harm in disseminating this information in order to help the church better serve and understand the world in encounters. While the world is blowing up with #shoutyourabortion we have to be those who have a voice to shout our love! In the course of this article it is my aim to do one thing: to aid in softening the hearts of Christians so that we truly can shout our love. We are not to just shout our love for the unborn, but for the world. Or is that not the premise behind Jesus coming to this earth?

Forgiveness must be the first step we take if we are going to shout our love for this world. I am the result of a failed, or botched, abortion. My mother did not have second thoughts regarding her abortion and leave halfway through the procedure. So, I don't have one of those happy stories for you. The equipment malfunctioned and the damage done, according to the doctor, would have caused me to be miscarried. So, out of respect for my mother's life the doctor declined to continue to perform the procedure. Thankfully, I did not find this out until I was much older, so I did not have to wrestle with the feeling of being unwanted or worthless. My mother never made me feel I was a burden or anything less than her beloved child. Of course I felt the standard stuff, not as special as my sister, but I hear that's normal. What hurts the most is when the topic of abortion comes up my opinion is disregarded because I do not possess the proper reproductive system so as to actually have an abortion. As well, it is difficult to hear some of the rhetoric coming out the church towards mothers who have made the decision to abort their babies. I by no means support abortion, but it's that same playground mentality; "You're talking about my momma." I am even guilty of throwing out an angry phrase or two, much to my own shame. I was raised to believe that abortion was ethically okay. The reasoning instilled in me was bringing a child into an adverse environment would be more cruel than terminating the pregnancy. I do not believe my mother had ill intentions, but rather misguided sympathies. She's human and it's easier to rationalize your sin than it is to confront it. It is also easier to terminate a perceived problem than to persevere through the hardships. I have forgiven my mother, my biological father and the doctor. I will forever be grateful for the abortion equipment made in China that has given me this outlook on life. All of those feelings aside, we have to come to the point of forgiveness before these women ask for it if our love is going to be felt. The term forgiveness, and many forms of the word, are found over one hundred times in the New Testament. There are two different words translated as "to forgive." One means to separate or release from one's

presence. The other means to graciously absolve someone as a gift. Both of these definitions have to be a part of our mindset when it comes to how we treat sinners, ourselves included. If we as the church are going to be effective at showing Jesus' love we have to love the same way Jesus did. Romans 5:10 tells us that even while we were enemies of God we were reconciled through the death of His Son. To be reconciled seems like an easy enough concept, but we must consider that God gave up someone dear to Him and stopped firing at us while we were yet on the offensive. As offensive and ungodly as we may see the systematic slaughter of millions of babies, remaining enemies of those who have already done these things will keep us at odds. We must focus on those who are looking to have abortions and throw a loving arm around them so as to be of greater affect in the future. So, first we must forgive these mothers if we are going to have a voice to shout our love for their children.

Second, we must love these mothers if we are going to have a voice to shout our love. This one is simple. We simply cannot give what we do not have. In Matthew 7 Jesus makes the point that when our child comes to us and asks for a fish we will not give him a snake. The assumption is that we have fish to give. When someone comes to us asking for love, we will not give them hate will we? Or have we? Not only am I the result of a failed abortion, but I've recently had the bomb dropped on me that I have either an older brother or sister who succumbed to a much worse fate in abortion. While the bomb was still whistling towards the ground my mother asked me how I felt about abortion. I was very clear concerning my respect for life and my belief that all life has to be protected. She then got to the part that was the most important to her, how did I feel about her? I paused for a second and told her the only thing I could in all honesty. I told her she's still my mother and she did what she thought was best. In my head I was mind-screaming that she was a murderer who took away an opportunity for a beautiful life, but that would not yield positive results. Love is a popular word, feeling and talking point. It is a much less popular action. Normally when we hear the phrase "love your neighbor as yourself" we think about those famous words from Jesus to the young man asking how to have into eternal life. We forget that these words came from an old covenant context. *'You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.* Leviticus 19:17-18 is a teaching I have failed to appreciate when it comes to abortion. If you're making excuses for righteous indignation right now, I would implore you to consider the parable of the Good Samaritan. It wasn't about who the neighbor was, but who was going to be a neighbor. It is within our spiritual right to reprove our neighbor, but Yahweh's instruction is also to love our neighbor. If we are going to live agape kind of lives where we love without condition we have to let people move past their condition. Even those who proudly shout their abortion are in need of your unconditional shout and action of love.

Third we must humble ourselves if we are going to shout our love. I still remember the car ride to the abortion clinic when I was too young to understand the ramifications of my sister's actions. I have very vague details in my mind, but somethings I will never forget are my sister's tears. She was still a young woman, a young woman who had made poor decisions but still a baby by the world's standards. I do not wish to justify or vindicate what my sister did, nor her actions leading up to the abortion. I would however like to introduce you to her now. She eventually had another child, but can no longer have children due to the long term effects of the abortion. I have heard many people say such things as "good for people who can't have children now." They say this with the understanding that those people are not fit to be parents. At this point we have taken ourselves from the lowly position of a witness to

the lofty seat of the Lord as judge. My sister's story is one that is very common today. A young girl gets pregnant in high school, has an abortion and can no longer have children. They carry that stigma into every relationship and are forced to explain or lie about the cause. If all of our sins carried such a long lasting effect I believe we would all find that humility James talks about in James 4. *"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it."* (James 4:8-11, NASB95) While we humble ourselves we are called to purify our hearts, mourn and weep in the presence of the Lord. When we do these things there is no room for judgment because our own sin is prevalent. If the sin of bearing false witness caused the person we lied about to be imprinted on our foreheads we too would have to carry the shame and explain what we had done. 1 Corinthians 6:8-11 is a beautiful passage about who we were and what we had done to those, even of the church, and what God did for us in exchange for our humility. Humility, lowering ourselves in order to lift others up, must be a part of our character if we are going to shout our love.

Finally, if we are going to shout our love we must redirect. I'm not saying we shift blame or that we modify our beliefs. We must redirect people from ad hominem or legislative attacks to a Christ-centered contention. When Paul said he was determined to know nothing among the Corinthians except Christ Jesus and Him crucified, the interesting thing is that Corinth had all kinds of issues; disunity, bickering, improper worship and adultery. Yet Paul wanted to make sure Christ was the focus and basis of every aspect of their lives. This is where I let you in on another deep dark secret hidden for centuries, right? Well, I would be remiss of the past paragraphs if I didn't, but first let me say that this is the hardest thing for me to deal with every single moment of my life. It haunts me more than my own potential demise. When I was 16 or 17 I was sexually involved with a young woman and she soon after alerted me to the possibility of her being pregnant. Those first couple of days, when it was just a possibility, I could not eat or sleep. Thoughts of becoming a teenage father drove me to sickness. She eventually called me and told me she was not pregnant. This was my understanding for many years. Unbeknownst to me she had an abortion. What could that child have become? What would he or she look like? Where would I be now if he or she had lived? These questions run through my mind every time I pick up one of my children. I must admit that at the time a 16 year old boy would have gladly welcomed an abortion. It's what my sister did after all. The older man does not feel this way. I have forgiven her, but I have had a tough time in forgiving myself for placing a 17 year old girl in such a position. So, where is Christ in all of these thoughts? Where is Christ when I'm faced with my past? His blood is there to remind me that my sins are forgiven. His grace is there to give me what I do not deserve and His mercy is there to shield me from what I do deserve. That same forgiveness, love and humility God shows towards us every moment, we must redirect to the world if we are going to shout our love.

Wow! That was difficult. Let me conclude by offering a challenge. I will begin by asking a question. How do we change the culture of death and disrespect for life? More blogs and articles circulating around the brotherhood attacking the culture will only stir up the same righteous indignation. To change culture we must confront culture. The disciples were in the world, yet were not of it. We have opportunities every day to engage our communities, whether it's knocking doors to invite someone to church or getting involved in a community

project. Let me encourage all of us, yes US, to take advantage of the wheels already spinning in our communities. Boys and Girls clubs, shelters, rescues and schools are yearning for positive influences to help our kids, young men and women to make something of themselves. Place yourself on a list to adopt one of these children of God. Give a young mother another option. As long as we sit on our thrones and pronounce judgments the same shouts will go forth, but when we choose to forgive, love, humble and redirect for the cause of Christ a great shout of love will be heard in the deepest recesses of our neighborhoods. A young girl will say 'No.' A young man will respect himself and that young girl. A woman will choose life, because she had someone to show her that her life mattered.