

# Why Pro-Life?

It's more than just a debate . . .

Grounded in medical science and psychological studies, this updated edition of *Why Pro-Life? Caring for the Unborn and Their Mothers* offers answers to the central issues of the abortion discussion in a concise, informative manner. Whether you're on the fence or you're pro-life already, this book is an encouragement to be intelligently informed and engage in this life-and-death issue armed with the facts.

***"Why Pro-Life? is an invaluable resource for anyone trying to help a friend or family member understand the pro-life perspective. With clear, compelling language Randy Alcorn lays out the case for life, using the power of both reason and emotion."*—Charles W. Colson (1931–2012)**

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**Randy Alcorn** is the founder and director of Eternal Perspective Ministries and the author of many award-winning and bestselling books, including *Heaven, Courageous, If God Is Good—Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil*, and *The Chasm: A Journey to the Edge of Life*.

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Why Pro-Life?

ALCORN

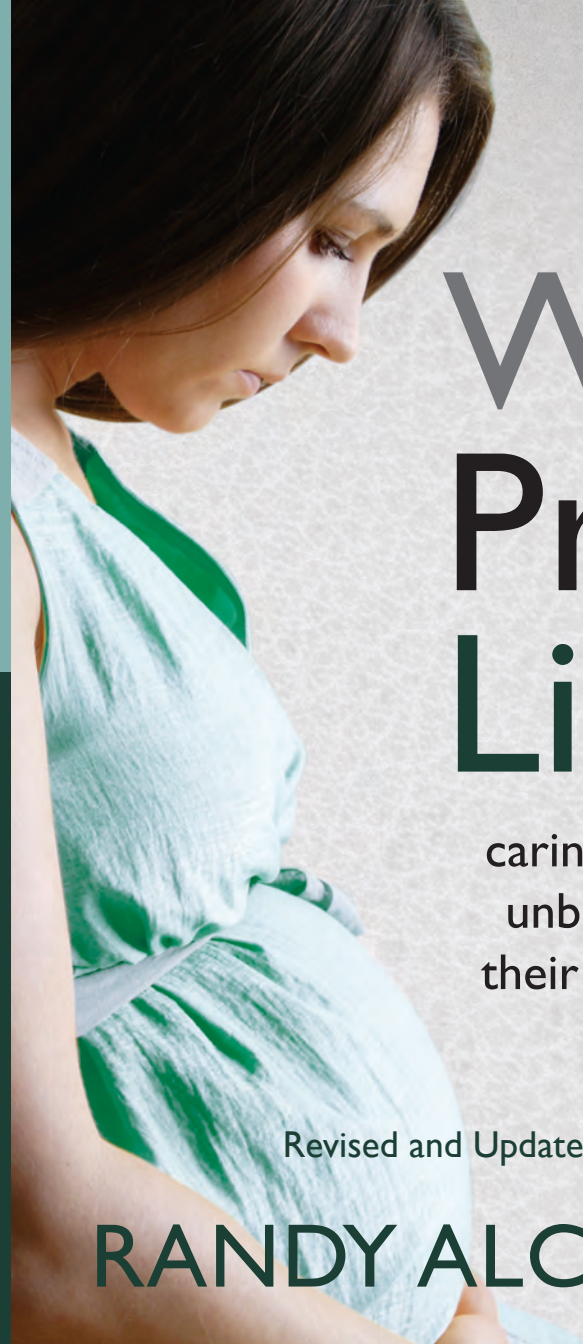


# Why Pro- Life?

caring for the  
unborn and  
their mothers

Revised and Updated

RANDY ALCORN



“Randy Alcorn’s concise but comprehensive presentation of the pro-life position is an invaluable resource for openhearted—yet often tongue-tied—pro-lifers everywhere.”

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“*Why Pro-Life?* is an invaluable resource for anyone trying to help a friend or family member understand the pro-life perspective. With clear, compelling language, Randy Alcorn lays out the case for life, using the power of both reason and emotion.”

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—**Jennifer O’Neill**

Actress, author, and spokesperson for  
Silent No More Awareness Campaign

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RANDY ALCORN



## **Why Pro-Life? Caring for the Unborn and Their Mothers**

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# CONTENTS

## **SECTION 1: THE BASICS**

Chapter 1	Why Talk about Abortion?	2
Chapter 2	Pro-Woman or Pro-Child?	6

## **SECTION 2: THE CHILD**

Chapter 3	Are the Unborn Really Human Beings?	12
Chapter 4	What's the Difference between Egg, Sperm, Embryo, and Fetus?	20
Chapter 5	Is an Unborn Child Part of the Mother's Body?	25
Chapter 6	What Do the Pictures Tell Us?	30
Chapter 7	What Makes a Human Life "Meaningful"?	39

## **SECTION 3: THE WOMAN**

Chapter 8	Is Abortion Really a Women's Rights Issue?	48
Chapter 9	Do We Have the Right to Choose What We Do with Our Bodies?	58
Chapter 10	Does Our "Right to Privacy" Include Abortion?	64
Chapter 11	Does Abortion Harm a Woman's Physical and Mental Health?	69
Chapter 12	Is Abortion Right When Pregnancy Presents Risks to the Mother's Life?	79
Chapter 13	Is Abortion Right When Pregnancy Is Due to Rape or Incest?	82

## **SECTION 4: OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES**

Chapter 14	Do Birth Control Pills Cause Abortion?	86
Chapter 15	What about Disabled and Unwanted Children?	93
Chapter 16	Does Abortion Prevent Child Abuse?	100
Chapter 17	Can You Be Personally Opposed to Abortion and Be Pro-Choice?	104
Chapter 18	What about Adoption?	106

## **SECTION 5: SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Chapter 19	Will God Forgive Abortions?	112
Chapter 20	Pro-Life Issues: Distraction from the Great Commission or Part of It?	117
Chapter 21	How Can I Help Unborn Babies and Their Mothers?	124

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1	Abortion in the Bible and Church History	132
Appendix 2	Biblical Passages Relevant to Life Issues	139
Appendix 3	Talking Points for Communicating the Pro-Life Message	144
Notes		150

# Author's Introduction to the Revised Edition

*Why Pro-Life?* was first published in 2004. With three hundred thousand English copies in print, and translations in eighteen other languages, I have been amazed at its far-reaching impact. We have heard many heart-warming stories about lives touched by the book.

But technology changes, statistics become dated, and new resources, stories, and discussions arise. It was time for a thorough update and revision.

As I write this in 2012, with the help of others—in particular, research assistant Cathy Ramey—I have gone over every sentence in the book, revising and updating. Hardly a paragraph of the original has remained unedited, and much new material has been added.

I am pleased to say that although I believe the original was a good book, the expanded and updated version is a better one. Those who read the original will find much more to think about and to use.

May this new book serve to further in greater ways the purposes for which it was originally written.

Randy Alcorn



# Pro-Woman or Pro-Child?

**M**y wife and I became involved in pro-life work out of concern for women who'd been devastated by abortion. In 1981 we opened our home to a pregnant teenage girl. I served on the board of one of the first pregnancy centers on the West Coast, with the objective of offering help and abortion-alternatives to pregnant women who were needy, confused, and desperate.

As time went on, I became involved in pro-life education, political action, and peaceful nonviolent intervention outside abortion clinics. Some pro-life ministries focus more on saving unborn children, others more on helping pregnant women. I found both kinds of efforts to be vitally necessary and completely compatible.

## **The Movement You May Not Know**

Countless myths have been attached to the pro-life movement. One example is the oft-repeated statement, "Pro-lifers don't really care about pregnant women, or about children once they're born." A television reporter, with cameras rolling, approached me at a pro-life event and asked for my response to that accusation. I said, "Well, my wife and I opened our home to a pregnant girl and paid her expenses while she lived with us. We supported her when she decided to give up the child for adoption. And, since you asked, we give a substantial amount of our income to help poor women and children."

Then I introduced her to a pastor friend standing next to me who, with his wife, had adopted nineteen children, a number of them with Down syndrome and other special needs. The reporter signaled the cameraman to stop filming. I asked if she wanted to interview my friend. She shook her head and moved on, looking for

someone who matched her stereotype of the pro-lifer who doesn't care about children once they're born.

The truth is, thousands of pro-life organizations around the country and throughout the world provide free pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, counseling, support groups, childcare classes, financial management education, babysitting, diapers, children's clothes, and housing. To these, add tens of thousands of churches donating time, money, food, house repairs, and every other kind of help to needy pregnant women, single mothers, and low-income families. Countless pro-lifers adopt children, open their homes, and volunteer to help children after they're born. Together, I am convinced these efforts actually comprise the single largest grassroots volunteer movement in history.

While those who offer abortions charge women for them, those who offer abortion alternatives give their assistance freely, lovingly, and almost entirely behind the scenes. Contrary to some caricatures, these people are not just pro-birth—they are truly pro-life. They care about a child and her mother, and help them both before birth and after.

## **Our National Schizophrenia**

Despite the split among those calling themselves pro-choice and pro-life, well over two-thirds of Americans say they believe abortion is "morally wrong."<sup>1</sup> Some pro-life advocates believe this means it's no longer necessary to argue that the unborn is human or that abortion is wrong. Instead, our emphasis should be on helping women see that abortion isn't in their best interests. I emphatically agree we should help women.

Yet many women still believe that as bad as abortion may be, it is the lesser of evils, a better alternative than having a baby, raising a child, or surrendering a child for adoption.<sup>2</sup>

We must show the men and women indoctrinated to believe abortion is the best choice, that while the alternatives are challenging, only abortion kills an innocent person. Precisely because it does so, it has by far the most negative consequences in a woman's life.

Many of the same people who believe unborns are human and that abortion is immoral nonetheless choose to have abortions and defend abortion as legitimate. This proves they don't believe abortion is immoral in the same way that killing a three-month-old or a three-day-old is immoral.

Polls also indicate that many of the same people who believe abortion is immoral believe it should remain legal. This is odd. After all, surely they believe rape, kidnapping, child abuse, and murder are immoral—but they wouldn't argue that rape and murder should be legal. This demonstrates a fundamental difference between what they mean by rape and murder being “immoral” and abortion being “immoral.”

No one who considers a preborn child a full-fledged person can rationally defend abortion's legality unless they also defend legalizing the killing of other human beings. After all, every argument for abortion that appeals to a mother's inconvenience, stress, and financial hardship can be made just as persuasively about her two-year-old, her teenager, her husband, or her parents. In many cases older children are *more* expensive and place *greater* demands on their mother than an unborn child. People immediately recognize those arguments as invalid when it comes to killing older children. So why not the unborn?

Women often say that when they got abortions they had no idea who was inside them. Some knew subconsciously they were carrying a child, but they latched on to dehumanizing pro-choice rhetoric that doesn't call an unborn baby a baby, but a “product of conception,” an embryo, fetus, and sometimes even that old unscientific propaganda “blob of tissue.”

Having discovered their mistake after their abortions, these women now profoundly regret being misled by abortion clinics who reassured them of what was untrue. They think of what they did as temporary insanity, usually enabled by their well-intentioned but misguided friends or family. They wish someone would have tried to talk them out of the choice that now haunts them. One woman, sobbing with guilt and regret, said to me, “I prayed that if I shouldn't

get an abortion just one person would be standing outside the clinic when I came, to try to talk me out of it. But no one was there.”

We should love and care for pregnant women who feel pressured toward abortion. We should also love women who’ve had abortions, and do all we can to help them recover from abortion’s trauma.

## **The False Dichotomy**

It’s never in anyone’s best interests to kill a child. It’s not just the child who suffers, it’s her mother.

Precisely because the unborn is a child, the consequences of killing him are severe. It’s the identity of the first victim, the child, that brings harm to the second victim, the mother. That’s why we need to begin our treatment of abortion by focusing on the true identity of the unborn.

# Are the Unborn Really Human Beings?

**P**ro-choice advocates once commonly stated, “It’s uncertain when human life begins; that’s a religious question that cannot be answered by science.” Most have abandoned this position because it’s contradicted by decades of scientific evidence. However, this out-of-date belief is so deeply engrained in our national psyche that it’s still widely believed.

Throughout history the words *fertilization* and *conception* have often been used interchangeably. Both referred to that time when egg and sperm joined into a single unified cell. Fertilization was the *process* by which the sperm penetrated the ovum. Conception was the *outcome* in which twenty-three chromosomes from a sperm cell joined with twenty-three chromosomes from an ovum to form a single unique life with its own distinctive DNA.

Political battles have long been fought over these two words, precisely because winning propaganda wars depends on semantic manipulation. Back in 1963 and 1965 pro-choice advocates within the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) sought to normalize, or strip away the great historic resistance to, the notion of medically killing unborn children.

## Redefining Conception

The promotion of “therapeutic abortion” (note the semantics of labeling killing as *therapeutic*) involved redefining the word *conception*. Rather than refer to the most immediate outcome of the fertilization process (usually within the first twenty-four hours of

sperm-to-egg penetration), they determined to begin using “conception” to refer to a point at which the unborn child is approximately seven to eight days old.

What was once a process called “nidation” or “implantation” was, without public discourse, henceforth systematically referred to as “conception.”

By using a word associated with the very beginning of life but referring to a point several days later in time, ACOG confused and desensitized not only the public, but even its medical colleagues.

Planned Parenthood’s website assures questioners that emergency contraception doesn’t cause abortions.

Is it true that emergency contraception causes abortion? What about other hormonal methods of birth control?

No. Abortion ends a pregnancy. Emergency contraception (EC) cannot end a pregnancy. EC works before a pregnancy begins. Pregnancy begins with the implantation of the developing fertilized egg in a woman’s uterus.<sup>1</sup>

The truth is, though emergency contraceptives do not *always* cause abortions, sometimes they do. But by claiming that pregnancy begins with implantation, they convince people that an already conceived child’s death is not an abortion.

Such definitions have caused even some pro-life advocates to confuse the distinctive processes of conception and implantation. Therefore, throughout this book I will use “fertilization” and “conception” in a historically accurate manner, referring to the earliest process and outcome of human life’s beginning.

## **What Science Says**

Dr. Alfred M. Bongiovanni, then professor of obstetrics at the University of Pennsylvania, stated, “I have learned from my earliest medical education that human life begins at the time of conception . . . human life is present throughout this entire sequence from conception to adulthood . . . any interruption at any point throughout this time constitutes a termination of human life.”

Speaking of the early stages of a child's development in the womb, as far back as 1981, in testimony before a congressional subcommittee, Professor Bongiovanni said, "I am no more prepared to say that these early stages represent an incomplete human being than I would be to say that the child prior to the dramatic effects of puberty is not a human being. This is human life at every stage."<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Jerome LeJeune, while genetics professor at the University of Descartes in Paris, stated, "After fertilization has taken place a new human being has come into being." He said, this "is no longer a matter of taste or opinion. Each individual has a very neat beginning, at conception."<sup>3</sup>

Harvard University Medical School Professor Micheline Matthews-Roth said, "It is scientifically correct to say that an individual human life begins at conception."

The moment of each person's creation is the moment of conception. Before that moment the individual (with her unique DNA) does not exist, after that moment she does.

## **No Question, It's A Fact**

It's not only pro-life people who believe this. The owner of Oregon's largest abortion clinic testified under oath, "*Of course* human life begins at conception." The award-winning secular book *From Conception to Birth* documents the child's beginning at conception and her movement toward birth, as do other books and DVDs.<sup>4</sup>

How clear is the proof that human life begins at conception? There are a multitude of historic authorities,<sup>5</sup> so many that the Missouri General Assembly overwhelmingly approved a 2003 bill that stated, "The general assembly of this state finds that: (1) The life of each human being begins at conception; (2) Unborn children have protectable interests in life, health, and well-being. . . . The term 'unborn children' or 'unborn child' shall include all unborn child or children or the offspring of human beings from the moment of conception until birth at every stage of biological development."<sup>6</sup>

That life begins when the ovum and sperm unite into a single cell (called a *zygote*; from Greek, meaning "to join" or "to yoke") is a fact constantly in need of reaffirmation. Why? Because in

*Roe v. Wade* the US Supreme Court chose to ignore or act in defiance of overwhelming scientific evidence. They handed down a decision favoring a US Population Commission goal to reduce fertility and birth rates in the United States. In the divide between science and policy, the government sought out Planned Parenthood for guidelines, then began to implement that agency's suggested population control policy as represented in what is referred to as "the Jaffe memo."<sup>7</sup>

In spite of the historic deception that was embodied in *Roe v. Wade*, science continues to affirm what it has all along—that life begins at fertilization, or conception, which refer to the same starting point.<sup>8</sup>

## What The Constitution Says

The Fourteenth Amendment says that the state shall not deprive any person of life without due process of law. When that was written, the word *human* was a synonym for *person* and could just as easily have been used. The Supreme Court admitted in *Roe v. Wade*: "If the suggestion of personhood [of the unborn] is established, the appellant's [pro-abortion] case, of course, collapses, for the fetus's right to life is then guaranteed specifically by the [fourteenth] amendment."<sup>9</sup>

To solve this problem, the court chose to abandon the historic meaning of personhood. In the years that have followed, a long series of subjective and artificial distinctions have been made by pro-choice advocates to differentiate between *humans* and *persons*. Part of the reason for this is that the scientific fact that life begins at conception paints the pro-choice movement into a corner. The newer strategy is to say, "Okay, this is human life, but it isn't really a person."

Changing the meaning of words doesn't change reality. The concept of personhood is now virtually worthless as an ethical guide in the matter of abortion. The only objective questions we can ask are

"Is it human; that is, did it come from human beings?"

"Is it a genetically unique individual?"

"Is it alive and growing?"



If the answers are yes, then “it” is in fact a “he” or “she,” a living person, possessing rights and deserving of legal protection.

## **What A Pro-Abortion Ethicist Says**

Consider carefully these words written by a father concerning his son:

On the desk in my office . . . there are several pictures of my son, Eli. In one, he is gleefully dancing on the sand along the Gulf of Mexico, the cool ocean breeze wreaking havoc with his wispy hair. In the second, he is tentatively seated in the grass in his grandparents’ backyard, still working to master the feat of sitting up on his own. In a third, he is only a few weeks old, clinging firmly to the arms that are holding him and still wearing the tiny hat for preserving body heat that he wore home from the hospital. Through all these remarkable changes that these pictures preserve, he remains unmistakably the same little boy.

In the top drawer of my desk, I keep another picture of Eli. This picture was taken on September 7, 1993, 24 weeks before he was born. The sonogram image is murky, but it reveals clearly enough a small head tilted backward slightly, and an arm raised up and bent, with the hand pointing back toward the face and the thumb extended out toward the mouth. There is no doubt in my mind that this picture, too, shows the same little boy at a very early stage in his physical development. And there is no question that the position I defend in this book entails that it would have been morally permissible to end his life at this point.<sup>10</sup>

## **Complex and Human**

The newly fertilized egg contains a staggering amount of genetic information, sufficient to control the individual’s growth and development for his entire lifetime. A single thread of DNA from a human cell contains information equivalent to a library of one thousand volumes.<sup>11</sup> Today we know the human genome has up to three billion base pairs of DNA that influence the expression of traits in an individual cell.<sup>12</sup>

The cells of the new individual divide and multiply rapidly, resulting in phenomenal growth. There’s growth because there’s life. Long before a woman knows she’s pregnant, there is within her a living, growing human being.

Between five and nine days after conception the new person burrows into the womb's wall for safety and nourishment. Already his or her gender can be determined by scientific means. By fourteen days the child produces a hormone that suppresses the mother's menstrual period. It will be two more weeks before clearly human features are discernible and three more before they're obvious. Still, she is a full-fledged member of the human race.

At conception the unborn doesn't appear human to us who are used to judging humanity by everyday appearances. Nevertheless, in the objective scientific sense she is every bit as human as any older child or adult. In fact, *she looks just like a human being ought to look at her stage of development.*

At eighteen days after conception the heart is forming and eyes start to develop. By twenty-one days the heart pumps blood throughout the body. By twenty-eight days the unborn has budding arms and legs. By thirty days she has a brain and has multiplied in size ten thousand times.

By thirty-five days her mouth, ears, and nose are taking shape. At forty days the preborn child's brain waves can be recorded, and her heartbeat, which began three weeks earlier, can be detected by an ultrasonic stethoscope. By forty-two days her skeleton is formed and her brain is controlling the movement of muscles and organs.

No matter how he or she looks, a child is a child. Abortion terminates that child's life. The earliest means to cause abortion, including Mifepristone (RU-486) and all abortion pills, take a human life just as certainly as if the life taken were that of a week-old, year-old, or twenty-year-old person.

## **The Drama of Life**

Famous intrauterine photographer pioneer Lennart Nilsson is best known for his classic photo essays in *Life* magazine and his book, *A Child Is Born*. In his "Drama of Life before Birth," he says this of the unborn at forty-five days after conception (before many women know they're pregnant): "Though the embryo now weighs only 1/30 of an ounce, it has all the internal organs of the adult in various stages of development. It already has a little mouth with lips,

an early tongue and buds for 20 milk teeth. Its sex and reproductive organs have begun to sprout.”<sup>13</sup>

By eight weeks hands and feet are almost perfectly formed. By nine weeks a child will bend fingers around an object placed in the palm. Fingernails are forming, and the child is sucking his thumb. The nine-week baby has “already perfected a somersault, backflip and scissor kick.”<sup>14</sup>

The unborn responds to stimulus and may already be capable of feeling pain.<sup>15</sup> Yet abortions on children at this stage are called “early abortions.”

By ten weeks the child squints, swallows, and frowns. By eleven weeks he urinates, makes a wide variety of facial expressions, and even smiles.<sup>16</sup> By twelve weeks the child is kicking, turning his feet, curling and fanning his toes, making a fist, moving thumbs, bending wrists, and opening his mouth.<sup>17</sup>

All this happens in the first trimester, the first three months of life. In the remaining six months in the womb, nothing new develops or begins functioning. The fully intact child only grows and matures—unless her life is lost by spontaneous miscarriage or taken through abortion.

It’s an indisputable scientific fact that *each and every surgical abortion stops a beating heart and stops already measurable brain waves.*

What do we call it when a person no longer has a heartbeat or brain waves? Death.

What should we call it when there *is* a heartbeat and there *are* brain waves? Life.

Every abortion ends a human life. That is a simple and scientifically certain fact.

## **SLED**

Scott Klusendorf of Life Training Institute points out that there are only four differences between a preborn and a newborn. They can be remembered through the acronym SLED,<sup>18</sup> which I’ll briefly summarize:

## Are the Unborn Really Human Beings?

*Size:* Does how big you are determine who you are?

*Level of development:* Are twenty-year-olds more human than ten-year-olds, since they are smarter and stronger?

*Environment:* Does being inside a house make you more or less of a person than being outside? Does being located in his mother's body rather than outside make a child less human?

*Degree of dependency:* Does dependence upon another determine who you are? Is someone with Alzheimer's or on kidney dialysis less of a person? (Am I, an insulin-dependent diabetic, less of a person than before I developed the disease in 1985?)

A three-month-old is much smaller than a ten-year-old, far less developed, and just as incapable of taking care of himself as an unborn.

The question is not how old or big or smart or inconvenient the unborn are, but *who* they are.

The answer is simple: they are human beings.