

Will Our Generation See the End of 'Roe V. Wade'?

For many, the abortion debate in the United States crystallized Jan. 22, 2019. That's when New York state legislators passed the Reproductive Health Act (RHA), which legalized late-term abortions in special circumstances and allowed licensed non-physicians to perform abortions. The RHA is designed to protect New York abortion rights in the event Roe v. Wade—the 1973 Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion nationwide—is ever overturned.

Following the RHA's passage, New York state senators erupted in jubilant cheers, a standing ovation and high-fives for 45 seconds. Then an unidentified woman in the public galley cried out, "Almighty God, have mercy on the state of New York," and a series of cheers erupted from conservatives until Senate leadership could regain order. The chaos only continued over the following weeks. Pro-life commentators lamented the legislation online. Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam and Virginia state Rep. Kathy Tran suggested abortion on-demand could be possible, even at birth—though both have said their comments were misinterpreted. President Donald Trump later accused Democrats of wanting to "execute" already-born babies.

Comments like these make the abortion dispute seem like a polarized black-and-white debate. One side wants abortion legalized in all circumstances. The other wants it illegal in all circumstances. Whoever can gain power will set the rules. Shawn Carney, president of 40 Days for Life, says the predominant narrative is that pro-choice is the inevitable future, and pro-life activists are just trapped in the past.

"Frankly, after 46 years of abortion, I mean on paper we should all just go away, right?" Carney says. "Abortion is here to stay. This is part of our culture. [Pro-life

advocates] are living in 1952.”

Except that’s not the whole story—and Carney knows it better than most.

“It’s unlike any other issue in our country,” Carney says. “You will hear environmentalists talk about what the oil industry does to the world. You will hear animal rights people describe how horrible it is that we kill these animals and how graphic it is. You will never hear that from the abortion advocates. They will not talk about their own issue, which is abortion.

“As a result, [the pro-life movement] has become a movement of converts—and that conversion gate only swings in one direction. We have ... millions who have had an abortion and regret it, and thousands of abortion workers who have had a change of heart and left their jobs. There are millions of Americans who at some point genuinely supported abortion rights and no longer do, and that’s a great sign because a movement of converts is a movement of hope.”

Those observations go beyond anecdotal evidence. A 2019 study commissioned by Students for Life’s Institute for Pro-Life Advancement discovered that a majority of Millennials (defined by the survey as 18 to 34-year-olds) support limits on abortion, and 42 percent oppose abortion in most or all circumstances. Just 24 percent support abortion without limits or exceptions—and only 7 percent support abortion being funded by tax dollars.

Furthermore, the study found the next generation may still be open to pro-life persuasion. The students surveyed initially said they supported *Roe v. Wade* and its sister case *Doe v. Bolton* by a 28-point margin; yet after students were told about the facts of the cases, students opposed the Supreme Court rulings by a six-point margin—a 34-point swing in mere minutes. Kristan Hawkins, president of Students for Life, says

it's because the next generation is passionate about justice—and abortion is, at its core, an injustice.

"This generation cares," Hawkins says. "We want to change our world. We want to make our world a better, safer, freer place. So often when we speak about abortion, we talk about abortion in terms of human rights. This is at a very basic level a human rights violation, and this is violence."

As abortion debates intensify in the United States, *Charisma* spoke to several pro-life leaders about the future of the pro-life movement, the possibility of outlawing abortion nationwide—and whether that would even be a good thing.

Overturn Roe v. Wade?

Overturning Roe v. Wade remains an evergreen goal for pro-life activists. Following Justice Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation last summer, the Supreme Court contains a conservative majority, which has led many on both the right and left to speculate whether the end of Roe v. Wade is near.

It's triggered intense anger by abortion advocates. Carney echoes the views of many Christians when he talks about how the rhetoric of some pro-choices advocates has become "unhinged" in the last five years.

"Abortion advocates have gotten, I would say at the very least, much less professional in how they handle themselves, and they're becoming unhinged," Carney says. "And they should. A lot of it is what's going on in the Supreme Court. A lot of it is because they hate Donald Trump. A lot of it is because they've seen a record number of abortion facilities closed."

The pro-choice rhetoric may be falling on deaf ears. Most evangelicals are already convinced of the evils of abortion. A 2018 study by LifeWay Research found that 88 percent of American evangelicals say abortion is a sin. In a March 2019 online poll, 99 percent of *Charisma* readers surveyed said they

opposed abortion in most or all circumstances.

Ronnie Floyd, president of the National Day of Prayer, calls abortion a national tragedy.

"Since 1973, over 61 million babies have been aborted in the United States," Floyd says. "That's an estimated 2,400 a day. That's roughly the combined populations of California and Florida. Abortion was the leading cause of death in the world in 2018. 41.9 million abortions were performed globally. So when you look at that and you see where our country is, there are only eight or nine countries that are above the U.S. in the tragedy of committing abortions in the world. To us, that is a tragic violation. I believe it's obviously a sin against God."

Then abortion should be outlawed as quickly as possible, right? Not so fast, says Mattie Montgomery, founder of Awakening Evangelism. Though he opposes abortion, he believes few Christians have considered the consequences of hastily criminalizing abortion. If the church is unprepared, the abolition of abortion could cause even more problems than the original ruling.

"We are in a moment politically in the U.S. where there's a very real possibility that, within the next year or so, Roe v. Wade could be overturned, and abortion could become illegal," Montgomery says. "That sounds great. Tragically, that sounds to a lot of Christians like the end of the fight. But the truth is, that could be the worst thing that ever happened to our country."

"Imagine if abortion suddenly ceased. Imagine what our country will look like in 15 years with an entire generation of kids who were born to parents that didn't want them or couldn't afford them. You'd be talking about poverty, sex, violence, abuse, perversion and addiction absolutely decimating our country."

Worse still, David Benham, popular television personality and pro-life activist, believes untold millions of abortions could have been avoided already if the church were known more for action than personal comfort.

“I love the bride of Christ,” Benham says. “But what we’ve become here in America is we sit in our suburban churches, often, and we have so much wealth in these churches—not just the church buildings and the properties and the programs and all that, but we have so much wealth in the pews. And yet we are the answer. We can deploy and really get involved and really help these folks, even just the ones in our local communities. But we don’t do that anymore. The church used to build the hospitals, the community centers, all of these things. But what does the church build now? Big buildings. Sprawling campuses. Now, those aren’t bad. But if we’re building those at the expense of helping these mothers and helping those who are poor, then shame on us.”

Francis Schaeffer was even more cutting in his evaluation of pro-life rhetoric versus action. The renowned theologian is often quoted as saying, “In front of every abortion clinic there should be a sign that reads, ‘Here by permission of the church.’”

These leaders believe the church must reject the political rhetoric and refuse to view this as a zero-sum, black-and-white political game. If this is truly a justice issue, then what matters is not the laws of the land but the lives of its citizens. This battle is not simply a matter of empowering the Supreme Court to make a big move. Pro-life activists must focus on saving as many lives as possible.

Doing that requires focusing on more than just abortion. It means showing love and empathy—not judgment—to the women who choose abortion. It means adopting and fostering children born to parents who don’t want them. And it means passionately sharing real stories, not just political talking points.

Before the church can push for the big overturn of Roe v. Wade, individual believers need to show they can be faithful with the small things.

Love, not Anger

Volunteers at Carney's 40 Days for Life station themselves outside abortion clinics for 40 straight days. But they're not picketing, yelling or shaming the women and employees inside. Instead, they're peacefully praying and interceding for everyone inside. They're praying life will be chosen.

"People say, 'Hey, can't we just pray at home [or] church?'" Carney says. "'Why would we go out to abortion clinics?' ... The most basic thing we need to do is pray for an end to abortion in our homes, with our families and in our church with our fellow believers. But the urgency that abortion demands of us requires that we go out—as we do as missionaries for everything else around the world as Christians. It calls us to get out of the pews and to get out of our homes, to go and try to stop where this injustice takes place. It takes place in our neighborhoods, and we can do something about it."

It's an effective strategy. These prayer vigils have spread to over 50 countries and 800 cities worldwide. Women and even clinic employees have turned around and left the abortion clinic because of the prayers of volunteers—without the intercessors ever raising their voice to anyone but the Lord. Former Planned Parenthood directors have reportedly told Carney that when 40 Days for Life launches a vigil outside an abortion clinic, no-show rates at the affected clinic can reach 75 percent. Carney says it's no surprise.

"No one grows up wanting an abortion," Carney says. "Nobody grows up wanting to work in the abortion industry, for that matter. There's always this natural hesitation. We've had so many women say, 'You know, I just knew this was wrong. I woke up, and I asked God to send me a sign and when I went out

there, you were that sign.' ... Every abortion decision is clouded. It's made with anxiety, it's made with hesitation and it's made with noise. There's a lot of noise in our world, and it distracts people from the reality of abortion. We bring a calm and a peace to these facilities, and women and men respond."

Benham agrees, saying Christians can embody the Good Samaritan to every woman facing an impossible situation.

"Every woman who darkens the doors of an abortion clinic is looking for a time of refreshing," Benham says. "They're going through a hard time. They feel that this is their only choice. They believe the propaganda. And what we as believers are called to do is to love our neighbor as ourselves. ... We cannot turn a blind eye to these millions of baby boys and girls and their mothers who are robbed, beaten and left for dead in a ditch. The baby's left for dead, but the woman is not. She is still alive. And we have got to get into the ditch and help her with her tangible needs."

But those women will never accept help from someone who is angry at them or condemning them from afar.

"We've seen over 15,000 women turn around at the very last moment, and those are the ones we know about," Carney says. "We've helped nearly 200 abortion facility workers have a change of heart and leave their jobs. But they wouldn't do that if there was a bunch of anger, or if they felt like they were being judged, or if they felt like it was just a bunch of lunatics out there. That's not effective. But prayer is always effective."

Benham urges Christians to always remember that the enemy is not the woman who feels like she needs to get an abortion or the director of a Planned Parenthood clinic. The true enemy is the devil, for Christians war not against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities. And Benham points out

Satan's latest scheme is nothing new.

"When God plans deliverance, Satan plans destruction, and it's always happened that way," Benham says. "Just think back to Israel. When God wanted to deliver Israel, His chosen, out of Egypt, what did he send? He sent a baby, right? Moses in the form of a baby. But now what did Satan immediately plan and put in Pharaoh's mind? Kill the babies."

He continues, "Now you fast forward several thousand years, the ultimate deliverer is sent in the form of what? A baby. And what was the plan Satan hatched in the mind of Herod at the time? Kill the baby. ... That's why we as the church have to lead with compassion. We have to lead by loving our neighbors as ourselves to help these mothers make the choice [for life]. Not just make the choice, but help them when they make the choice to take care of the diapers, to really get them plugged into mentor groups, to help them financially. Last year, we had seven moms choose life who didn't have cars and didn't have a place to live. We got them cars and houses to live and helped some of their boyfriends get jobs. So this is just part of what we do as the church."

Adopted, not Abandoned

This February, thousands of Christians gathered in Orlando, Florida, to contend for evangelism at The Send. There, Lou Engle delivered a fiery challenge to believers: "I want to pray for the end of abortion in America. But we have no authority unless we want children more than those who don't. Will you be the end of the abortion crisis in America? Let us adopt every unwanted child in America."

Andy Byrd, one of the event's organizers, introduced foster care and adoption as one of the five great mission fields in today's world. He even cited a statistic by the Adoption Network Law Center, which in 2012 noted that "no more than two percent of Americans have adopted."

Natalie Brumfield, chapter leader for Bound4Life in Birmingham, Alabama, says being pro-life has to embody more than just the ending of abortion.

“The Lord has opened my eyes to the need for adoption,” Brumfield says. “You can’t pray for the ending of abortion ... without needing to, in some way, either adopt yourself or support adoption.”

Brumfield, whose first three children are adopted, says adoption directly fights the enemy’s lie—that life is not sacred or intrinsically valuable—while symbolically pointing toward our adoption as children of God.

“When we adopt, it is literally a prophetic declaration,” Brumfield says. “It’s a manifestation of the Spirit, a prophetic declaration and a real physical sign of Sonship. It’s a declaration this nation needs to make—and Christians need to make it, so that we can begin to heal and address the lie and the wound. [Adoption] is so much more than what people think it is. It really does break the chains of the orphan spirit and that demonic attack over women and over life. We are the image bearers. We are sons and daughters.”

Montgomery believes if everyday Christians rise to this adoptive challenge and shower these orphaned children in the love of God, the spiritual harvest could define America’s future.

“There is an opportunity ... coming for the church to be the answer to a problem we created,” Montgomery says. “There will be millions of children every year being born to parents who would have aborted them if they could. If that comes, there has to be a revival in adoption. There has to be a church-led movement for adoption. If we do that, for 15 years after Roe v. Wade gets overturned, we will have brought in 20 to 25 million people into the kingdom—without doing a single conference, holding a single service, spending a single dollar

in marketing or advertising, building a website, handing out flyers or putting up a billboard. Just by doing family, 20 million more people enter the kingdom.”

Brumfield says anyone can adopt. She and her husband were only engaged when they first began learning more about foster care and getting licensed. But those who won’t adopt can at least support adoptive families at their church. That may mean donating school supplies, clothing or book bags. That may also mean buying Christmas gifts for foster families, offering free babysitting or even coordinating meetings with a local agency to help others at church learn more about and get licensed in foster care.

Neighborhoods, not Courts

Finally, while an end to legalized abortion via Roe v. Wade and statewide legislation is exciting, Alveda King—who leads Priests for Life—says the true battle will not happen in the Supreme Court but in the court of public opinion.

“I believe that the Supreme Court would be one vehicle [to end abortion], but we must change the hearts and minds of Americans about abortion,” King says. “Letting America know and the world know that abortion is a crime against humanity. ... We must do as we are doing now: Tell the truth wherever we can, but do it in a very logical, compassionate way. Not condemning, but informing people about the truth and asking people to pray and ask God to forgive our sins of abortion and to heal our land.”

In fact, Carney says some of the pro-life movement’s greatest strides were made during a pro-choice president’s tenure.

“Some of our largest growth was during President Obama, the most pro-abortion president we’ve ever had,” Carney says. “So we’re not dependent on politics at all. What we do is transcend that and bring the spiritual element and the direct opposition [to abortion] in the neighborhoods where it

actually happens.”

That strategy—changing public opinion and then later changing laws to match—was used by LGBT activists in the fight to legalize same-sex marriage, which was ultimately accomplished through *Obergefell v. Hodges*. The same tactic could be wielded by conservative Christians to bring an end to abortion.

Pro-life leaders say there are a few important ways you can encourage others to reject abortion. One of the most persuasive tools any individual has is storytelling. Telling personal stories about good lives that could have been ended early by abortion can make a subject real that otherwise feels abstract or political.

Lisa Smiley, a conservative blogger and speaker, has two such stories—her mother chose life for her, and she later chose life for her own son. Smiley was born in China during the One Child Policy, and her mother hid from government officials to protect the life of her daughter.

Later, when Smiley became pregnant with her first son, Zeke, doctors informed her that he had a life-threatening heart defect and advised abortion. Smiley ignored their advice. Though Zeke was in and out of the hospital from his birth until his young death at 6, Smiley says she does not regret her decision. Her church embodied what it meant to be pro-life throughout Zeke’s life, supporting her family and offering aid during challenging times. And before his death, Zeke came to salvation through Jesus, and his life blessed the Smiley family and the church community.

“The world would say, ‘This is too much,’” Smiley says. “‘You don’t have to go through this. You don’t have to go through years and years of pain and suffering to just see your son pass away.’ But my story [says] no—God has taught me so much through Zeke. Despite his short life, we could see that God was working miraculous things.”

Others chose abortion but have since repented. Those stories are just as important to tell. King shares her story of having abortions as a young woman—and how the physical and emotional toll of those procedures led her to become pro-life.

“[Roe v. Wade] happened on my birthday—Jan. 22, 1973,” King says. “Prior to that, I had had secret abortions, but I had bought the lies that they weren’t babies in the womb—they were lumps of flesh or blobs of tissue. ... I became born-again in 1983, 10 years later, and I realized that abortion is a crime against humanity. So from 1983 until today, I have been proclaiming the truth that human life is sacred, and that we must choose life because the innocent babies cannot speak for themselves. I repented of my own secret abortions.”

To win Millennial support, Hawkins says it’s also important to emphasize the unjust aspects of abortion. For instance, sex-selective abortions have been used over the last century to discriminate against and kill women. Smiley points to China’s One Child Policy as one example: “Chinese culture values sons over daughters, so there have been literally millions of children, especially daughters, aborted all throughout China and Asia.”

Now similar legislation is being debated in the United States.

“Abortion definitely is a woman’s issue when you consider that the majority of abortions being committed on preborn human beings are on women,” Hawkins says. “The abortion industry right now is lobbying against the Supreme Court taking up a case against an Indiana bill that made sex-selection abortions illegal.”

Overturn Roe v. Wade

As Montgomery noted earlier, an immediate overturn of Roe v. Wade could have disastrous unintended consequences. But suppose the church began interceding and empathetically loving and embracing the women and clinic workers who previously

chose abortion. Suppose the pro-life movement began winning the war of public opinion. Suppose there was no longer room for pro-choice advocates to call pro-lifers hypocrites, because pro-life Christians were almost singlehandedly ending the adoption crisis.

Would it be possible to overturn Roe v. Wade and end abortion for good?

Hawkins certainly believes it's possible—and she's appalled that so many older believers think it's a lost cause. She calls the enthusiasm gap the biggest challenge facing the pro-life movement.

"Often I speak to these adult audiences at a Right to Life or pregnancy-center banquet," Hawkins says. "I think a lot of people just come because it's the thing to do, or it's what they do every year, but they don't come with that fire in their heart. They don't come to that event actually believing that the mission of the pro-life movement is possible—that we can, in fact, abolish abortion. We can make abortion illegal and unthinkable in our lifetime.

"I find it so crazy because these are Christians. Ninety-nine percent are Christians. So we say we believe in an awesome and Almighty God who spoke the world into existence, but then we say we can't abolish abortion? That working through us, the Holy Spirit can't do it? I think that's unbelievable, and I think until we as Christians change our mindset, until we start envisioning a nation without abortion, until we start acting like 'Oh my gosh, we can do this,' we're not going to see that change. It's our level of faith that has to change."

Carney is the first to admit the pro-life movement has been, overall, "a very disappointing movement. We've had justices who haven't worked out. We've had presidents make promises, and that hasn't worked out. We've had so many disappointments in the political realm."

And yet he still believes the end of abortion is not even possible but likely.

“Roe v. Wade is so poorly written, and it’s been so poorly applied too, and in the case they say, ‘If we ever do learn the humanity of the baby, then this law is no longer valid,’” Carney says. “So it’s only a matter of time until we get the right case to send it up and to have it overturned, and then it goes back to the states.”

Floyd exhorts pro-life activists who have been fighting for decades not to grow weary yet. He can see the light at the end of the tunnel—and abortion may yet be extinguished in our lifetime.

“I’m telling you, we’re on the edge of seeing this thing changed in many ways,” Floyd says. “I’m not sure we’ll ever live to see Roe v. Wade change. Perhaps we will. I pray we will. But I tell you what: we’re seeing already stricter [state laws] about this again and again and again. And only through the supernatural, miraculous power of God will we one day live to see the entire death matter in this country in relationship to the womb of the mother overturned. I pray that I live to see that. And if I don’t, the great news is the young generation literally might. ... I think that’s where we’re going, and I pray to God in the name of Jesus that it happens.” {eo}

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