



Rebecca's Reflections



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Weird Pro-Lifers

Sometimes pro-lifers can be down-right weird. They can be so concerned about treating the unborn with respect and dignity that they forget to treat the person standing in front of them (the pro-choice advocate) with respect and dignity. Proving that the pro-choice advocate is wrong becomes the main objective of a conversation. Most pro-life advocates in these situations are probably not aware that this is what their actions are communicating. Sometimes these actions include using belittling words, accusatory body language, and yelling.

In the picture to the right, I am talking to Vincent, a pro-life student at the University of Kansas. One might think by my body language, pointing my finger at him, that I am upset with him and being a poor pro-life ambassador. Let me put your mind at ease...I was pointing at him to illustrate a point.

Me: You seem to strongly believe that abortion is wrong and should be illegal. Have you ever had a conversation about abortion with someone who disagrees with your position?

Vincent (confidently and quickly): Yes. Multiple times.

Me: How did those conversations go for you?

Vincent (in a proud and condescending voice): Great! It was easy. They didn't have good arguments so I told them that their arguments were horrible and I shut them down immediately. They didn't even know how to respond.

Inside I cringed and thought, "What must it have felt like to be the friend of Vincent receiving that monologue?" I asked Vincent if this way of arguing helped change his friends' minds or if the conversation ended because they were possibly too offended to desire continuing the conversation. He wasn't sure. I wanted him to experience what his friends would have experienced so I did a rather unconventional role-play. I asked him to play the role of a pro-choice person, like his friend, and I played the role of the pro-lifer. So I raised my voice, pointed at him, and made fun of his pro-choice position.

Don't worry. I only did that for a little while, because he was intrigued to find out how he could have responded differently. Wanting to oblige him, I gave him a miniature version of our prolife seminar, *Abortion: From Debate to Dialogue*.

In JFA's seminar, we teach participants to become pro-life ambassadors for Christ. Being an ambassador for Christ in the pro-life movement means representing Christ in our conversations with pro-choice people. We desire that each volunteer becomes such a great pro-life ambassador that when a pro-choice person speaks to one of them the pro-choice person would have an encounter with Christ! That is not an easy job.



Pictured above I am role-playing with a pro-life student, Vincent, at the University of Kansas. We discussed which types of conversations are least productive in changing hearts and minds about abortion. Then I helped him practice having good conversations about abortion.

We believe that ambassadors must possess three specific characteristics in order to represent Christ well: 1) Knowledge - an accurately informed mind 2) Wisdom - an artful method, and 3) Character - an attractive manner.

(The information that follows is very similar to pages 18-22 in the Trainer's Guide, but I have rewritten part of it for the purpose of this newsletter.)

Knowledge - an accurately informed mind

Knowledge is necessary to productive dialogue, especially when two people in conversation are attempting to determine the morality of specific actions. If you want to represent Christ in your conversations, you need to know what Christ thinks about important issues. You also need knowledge of false ideas so that you can be ready to respond to them.

It can be true that a person doesn't care how much you know until he knows how much you care. From our experience on campus, though, we've also found that some people don't care how much you care until they know how much you know.

Does this mean you need to memorize an encyclopedia's worth of facts before starting a conversation? No, but it does mean that all of us, including myself, are on a journey, always trying to learn new things that can help us connect with the people we are talking to.

Wisdom - an artful method

Vincent had some knowledge about abortion and the unborn. However, it's possible that his friends had never heard his message because he was lacking something else...wisdom. You could have all of the knowledge in the world, but if you do not have wisdom, or an artful method, your knowledge will not make a positive impact for the person you are talking to. Wisdom tells us what to say when, and when to keep our mouths shut.



It's not our job to tell people what we think. Instead, it's our job to **ask** them what they think. Then **listen**; then ask another question.

This does not mean we should listen just long enough to respond to the person the moment he is done speaking. It means we should listen to reflect rather than to refute.

Along with asking good questions and listening, there is a third tool we should regularly use and incorporate into a conversation: common ground. We seek to agree whenever possible, without compromising our

position. You might wonder if that's possible, but this is something wise ambassadors do often. They try to find things they believe that the people they're talking to also believe.

Most people have lots of conflicted beliefs about abortion. They're uncomfortable with abortion in general. Many pro-choice advocates are against late-term abortions. Often they believe abortion is wrong but that it should be legal. In each of these cases there is something that pro-lifers can agree with. Take the time to point out agreement when it exists. That is what we call true common ground. Use helpful words such as: "I agree with you," or "You make a good point." For example, "Abortion really does seem wrong, doesn't it? We are on the same page in that regard. What makes you feel that it is wrong?"

Character - an attractive manner

You could be the smartest, wisest person when it comes to talking about abortion, and you will still fail to be a good ambassador if you do not have character, or an attractive manner.

The key to having an attractive manner is *humility*. Students on campuses we visit can smell pride and an agenda meant to "prove them wrong" from a mile away. If they sense this, the conversation will not go well. But imagine what happens when a student meets a volunteer who can genuinely say:

Can you tell me what you believe and why? And if it's helpful to you, I'll share what I believe and why ... and maybe we can get closer to the truth together.

This conversation, that would have typically been a debate, can be transformed into a dialogue! However, this is easier said than done. Before every outreach I have to pray that humility will be present in my conversations.

Two months ago I challenged you to practice sharing the JFA exhibit brochure. This month I challenge you to use the conversational tips mentioned above to engage in a loving, respectful conversation with someone about abortion. Feel free to use the brochure again.

Thanks for your support that has helped me train pro-life advocates like Vincent!

Defending life together,

Rebecca L. Haschke

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