

# Real. Present. God. In Life Issues

## SESSION 1: REAL. PRESENT. GOD. IN PREGNANCY!

### Opening Discussion

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The 2006 film *Bella* follows Nina's surprise pregnancy. Check out the theatrical trailer at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-J9AkTrbxgk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-J9AkTrbxgk). Morning sickness gets her fired from her job. The baby's father abandons her. Her dad died when she was young. Her mother feels distant. She has no siblings and no other friends. So she schedules an abortion.

**What circumstances might make a pregnancy a surprise?**

**What difficulties do you imagine someone (female or male) faces in a surprise pregnancy?**

Hip-hop artist Nicki Minaj talks about her abortion in the song *Autobiography*. Her reflections begin around 2:30 at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHbFm6UfCX4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHbFm6UfCX4). She relates the grief and guilt she suffers many years later. She even apologizes to her unborn baby: "Mommy was too busy trying to have fun... to conceive you then leave you, the concept alone seems evil...I listened to people who told me I wasn't ready for you." Abortions can cause many other problems, like the ones listed at [word-of-hope.org/resources/faqs](http://word-of-hope.org/resources/faqs).

**Which of these do you think would be the worst, and why?**

### In God's Word

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In Psalm 46:5 the Heavenly Father promises His people, "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns." Pregnancy, especially surprise pregnancy, can make a person feel afraid, angry, ashamed, and alone. Yet God comes near to this situation in some very special ways. Read Psalm 22:9-10 and Psalm 139:11-16.

**What do these words tell you about God's presence in pregnancy?**

**What three activities does Isaiah 43:1 say God engages in to make every human life precious?**

Raising children involves suffering. All relationships require sacrifice. Sinful human nature does not enjoy selflessness or servanthood. But God still regards procreation as a gift. Psalm 127:3 calls children "an inheritance from the Lord."

**How does Jesus praise parenting in John 16:21?**

**What do you see as some of the many blessings that childbearing brings?**

In fact, little children teach us about faith and salvation. Jesus explains that "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Mark 10:15). And 1 John 3:1 rejoices over "what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are!" Read Isaiah 1:2 and John 15:5.

**In what ways is each one of us like a child?**

**How do 1 Peter 1:3 and Isaiah 46:3-4 and Hebrews 12:5-6 and Isaiah 66:12-13 express God's parenthood toward us?**

Abortion ends the life of a human being. Our Lord considers it a very serious sin. "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). Abortion even leaves its survivors as victims. It harms the mothers and fathers who take part in the procedures. It scars the doctors and supporters who make it possible. "Desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" (James 1:15). Read Ezekiel 18:32 and 1 Timothy 2:4.



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*What does God feel about somebody who has participated in violence against life?*

*How does He deal with them in Romans 5:6-10 and Genesis 50:20-21 to make things right?*

## Closing

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*We may not face surprise pregnancies this week, but we will probably encounter interrupting, irritating, or burdensome interactions. How might the assurances we've learned about help you?*

Close with prayer.

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## Session 2: Real. Present. God. In Dying!

### Opening Discussion

Will Traynor suffered a serious accident that left him paralyzed. His injuries cause him great pain and sadness. He used to enjoy a very active life, but now he only wants to die. He doesn't have any illness, and he's only thirty-five years old, but he'll never get any better. He relies on others to feed him, clothe him, bathe him, and care for him around the clock. He plans to go to Switzerland in six months. There the laws will let doctors give him drugs and make him dead. Then Louisa Clark become his attendant and falls in love with him. You can watch their conversation about physician-assisted suicide at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=wn5CKA7bwLs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wn5CKA7bwLs).

**What concerns does Will say make his condition so frustrating? What do you think the experiences of other individuals with a life-ending (terminal) diagnosis have in common with his? What differences might there be?**

**What do you think might drive someone to seek an assisted suicide or support it?**

Most states and most countries have outlawed physician-assisted suicide. Surveys regularly report that most voters oppose it. Almost all medical associations disapprove of the practice. For centuries doctors have taken the Hippocratic Oath. This ancient statement swears to use medical knowledge and technology to heal rather than harm. Part of it promises, "Neither will I administer a poison to anybody when asked to do so, nor will I suggest such a course."

**What do you suspect makes physician-assisted suicide so unpopular?**

**What risks might it pose to (1) a patient's loved ones, (2) doctors and hospitals, (3) persons with disabilities, (4) persons suffering depression, and (5) elderly persons?**

### In God's Word

Situations involving decisions about life and death can be quite complicated and difficult. We do not always detect how one person's life connects to and affects others. Sometimes doctors misdiagnose, and even physicians aren't able to tell the future. But we cannot undo death once we have brought it about. It often has significant consequences and ones no one foresees. Read Ecclesiastes 8:8 and Deuteronomy 32:39.

**Who is responsible for determining the manner of our living and the time of our dying?**

**Why do John 10:10 and John 11:25-26 call this fact a comfort for us?**

**What makes physician-assisted suicide sinful?**

**What does Matthew 10:28 say endangers us even more greatly than physical suffering?**

Psalm 46 reassures us "God is a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way." His power puts purpose and hope and joy in every life, no matter what age or appearance or ability. Maggie Karner was a Lutheran wife and mother. She developed terminal cancer. You can see at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJwWKDGBS5o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJwWKDGBS5o) how the Gospel of Jesus Christ gave her great faith and gracefulness in her final days.

**How does Psalm 22:1, 14-18 show us the Lord God understands our hurting?**

**Where does Psalm 23:4-6 locate our Heavenly Father when we suffer, and what does Isaiah 53:3-4 proclaim He is doing about it?**



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Illness, disability, and advancing age may impact our autonomy. We become less independent than we would like to believe. Death also makes us afraid, because it is the instrument of Satan and the enemy of God's kingdom. Often discomforts lead us to conclude that God is punishing us. So using death against ourselves tempts us with the illusion of getting a little control amidst chaos.

***What better blessing than autonomy does God deliver to His people (1 Corinthians 12:26-27; Psalm 91:11-12)?***

***What does Jesus teach us in Isaiah 53:5 and Psalm 103:10-12 about punishments from God?***

***What purposes does He impart that can make our pain worth it (2 Corinthians 4:11-12, 17)?***

***How does the faith God gives help us face dying (Psalm 16:9-11)?***

## Closing

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***When you encounter suffering or difficulty this week, which of God's promises above will be most encouraging?***

Close with prayer.



# Real. Present. God. In Life Issues

## Session 3: Real. Present. God. In Controversy!

### Opening Discussion

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Pastor Skip worries about Mary. He suspects she may have gotten into trouble. He asks her classmates Hilary Faye, Tia, and Veronica to help her. He believes that by speaking the truth in love to her, they can remind her of the strength her Christian faith gives her. Witness the uncomfortable conversation here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWVFP9Ra-Wc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWVFP9Ra-Wc).

***Have you ever found yourself in an interaction like this about spiritual matters? How did it turn out?***

***What went wrong in the girls' dialogue? What aim did they have in mind? What approach did they use?***

***What often makes conversations about life issues uncomfortable?***

***Why might we sometimes sidestep speaking the truth in love?***

Cultural voices frequently advise us that love matters more than truth. "If you have the choice to be right or be kind, choose being kind over being right." (See, for example, these recommendations: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhTOEm9RxRo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhTOEm9RxRo)). This may effectively avoid disagreement, but it may fail to resolve some very serious dangers.

### In God's Word

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***Look at James 2:15-17. What can go wrong when we unlovingly speak truth? Can we tell somebody the whole truth if we don't care for his or her well-being?***

***Read Ezekiel 33:7-9. Can we fully love someone without honesty? What can go wrong when we neglect truth in our attempts to love?***

***What do 1 John 3:1, 1 Corinthians 13:6, and 1 Peter 1:22 say about why truth and love always belong together?***

Psalm 46 proclaims that our Lord "utters his voice and the earth melts" (46:6). It also promises that this Heavenly Father "makes wars cease to the ends of the earth" (46:9). His love and His voice are strong, but they bring risks as well. This discussion, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLj988xA08I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLj988xA08I), in which Uncle Ben warns Peter Parker (Spider-Man) about the consequences of his actions, illustrates some of the pains.

***In John 15:13-15, what motivates God to speak the truth to us? What two messages does He share, according to John 1:17, Romans 6:23, and Luke 24:47-48?***

***How do 2 Thessalonians 3:15 and James 5:19-20 describe our motivation for speaking truth? What attitudes and approaches do 1 Peter 3:8-9, 15-16 suggest?***

***Find Psalm 51:15 and Matthew 10:20. What makes our truth-speaking more than just opinion?***

***What comfort and encouragement do Psalm 33:6, 9 and Luke 21:15 give us about the outcomes?***



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## Closing

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*The next time you find yourself in disagreement about God's obvious truth—maybe a topic of conversation among your friends or a subject of discussion in class this week—what one discovery we've made here will ease your anxiety about speaking up?*

Close with prayer.