

The role of politics in protecting the sanctity of life

TRANSCRIPT

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NOTE: This transcript was AI-generated and has not been fully edited.

Mark Turman (00:02.828)

Welcome to the Denison Forum podcast. I'm Mark Turman, executive director of Denison Forum and your host for today's podcast conversation. We're continuing our series called Politics Discern Differently and putting together some conversations that we hope will be helpful as you think your way through this season of politics, as we move in a few weeks toward our next presidential election, and as we consider a lot of things and a lot of issues.

We're trying to bring some light and some understanding from a biblical perspective on a number of things. And today we are talking about the very significant issue of the sanctity of life, often simply tossed around in our culture under the big banner of abortion, pro -life, pro -choice, those terms. And we're going to get into that and have a helpful conversation that will help you to think biblically about that.

Before I introduce our conversation partners, I want to remind you that we have a whole collection of resources that we have put together from all of our ministries at Denison Forum, not only our Denison Forum ministry, but also Christian Parenting, our Foundations Bible study, as well as our devotional resource called First 15. You can find connections to all of those resources on our webpage, which is [denisonforum .org forward slash election](http://denisonforum.org/forward/slash/election).

[denisonforum .org forward slash election](http://denisonforum.org/forward/slash/election) You can find a whole host of things that you can search topically that you can pursue through any of these other ministries that we have and we hope that all of that will help you to have a really helpful peaceful and hopeful perspective on this season of Politics so as we talk about sanctity of life and the gift of life that God gives to all things We've invited our friend. Dr. Katie Fruge to join us today, she is the director of the center for cultural engagement with the Baptist general convention of Texas, or what I like to say more easily, just the Texas Baptist convention, which is a collection of about 5 ,000 churches spread out across Texas. And Katie helps those churches and their leaders with issues of ethics, public policy, community ministry, chaplaincy, multicultural ministry.

Mark Turman (02:21.95)

as well as other things under a broad banner. And she's been a part of our podcast before. We also have Dr. Ryan Dennison, who many of you will be familiar with. Ryan is the senior editor for theology with Dennison forum. He writes the daily article on a regular basis, a basis, particularly

on Fridays and also contributes a number of other articles is an author of several books as well as co-author on a number of works as well.

And so we're going to sit down and have a conversation. hope you'll ease drop on our conversation. And I'm hoping that I can guide the conversation and ask the questions that you would ask if you were sitting here with us around a cup of coffee. So that's the goal and the intent of today. So let me just say Katie, Ryan, good morning. Hello. And say hello.

Katie Fruge (03:11.159)

Good morning, I'm so glad to be here.

Ryan Denison (03:13.256)

Good morning, Same here.

Mark Turman (03:14.924)

Well, we're glad to get into this rather lightweight topic, right? Sanctity of life. and for maybe those that, are unaware, at least within the Texas Baptist convention and more broadly than that, one of the days that is set out in our calendar, of ministry is called the sanctity of life Sunday, which happens in January, the third Sunday of January, every year. And your church may or may not observe that, but.

it's an opportunity for us to focus again on this issue of the gift of life and particularly the protection of life and life from its earliest moment, life from, the moment of conception to the point of natural death. So many things that we can talk about that and we'll get to some of them today. but let me just start off Katie with you and Ryan, if you could follow up as well. We all know that abortion is one of the most contentious issues.

and has really been in some ways hyper-focused on over the last two years, but goes back even further than that, obviously, to 1973 and the previous decision of the Supreme Court to find a right within the Constitution for abortion to be legal for a time. But just broadly, as we kind of set out in our conversation today, you have two or three ideas about

how every Christian needs to remind themselves to walk into this issue, with a very, very significant anchor in their biblical spiritual foundation. what's, what are some of the ground rules that maybe need to be in place at the beginning of our conversation? Katie, what are your thoughts?

Katie Fruge (05:04.547)

first thought I have is just the posture of approaching the conversation with Genesis 127 as our foundation that every single human is made in God's image and that there's some innate dignity, value, and worth that all people have that is sealed on us, that's not earned or something that we have achieved in any meaningful way. And so that's something God has placed on us. And so in the conversation specifically related to abortion,

There are multiple lives at play and we want to be as holistic as possible when we are talking about this conversation, giving equal dignity and value to all the people that this conversation touches. sometimes we tend to focus just on one person or one issue related to this and it's just bigger than that. And so our posture initially when we come to this really needs to be, the bedrock needs to be that all people are made in God's image and this is why we care about

human dignity. This is why we care about human life. This is why it has value. It has value because God has put his image on every single human being.

Mark Turman (06:08.076)

Yeah, absolutely. Brian, what would, what would you say is just kind of some of the ground rules, maybe going into conversations like this.

Ryan Denison (06:15.148)

I love what Katie said there. I think it is so important to maintain a positive approach to this, where our focus is more on the lives we're trying to save than on condemning those who believe differently than we do. There are so many people that are pro -choice, not because they want to see unborn lives killed, but because they just value the ability for women to choose. They think that those two things are in opposition to one another. They have to choose one or the other.

And part of the reason I think that is that there's times where the pro -life movement frames it that way. And I think it's important for us to keep a larger view in mind of what we're trying to accomplish. And at the end of the day, that's just to save unborn lives and to help those who are considering abortion to see a different way. those don't have to be competing goals in this. In fact, they shouldn't be if we want to actually see progress made.

Mark Turman (07:10.668)

Yeah, absolutely and and to both of you's point is the person that you may be talking to that you may most disagree with is the is a life made in the image of God as well and that they are deserving of your respect and your love and your honor and your consideration because The life that you may save may be the one you're talking to at this moment in one way or another Yeah, and

Katie Fruge (07:27.181)

Mm -hmm.

Katie Fruge (07:36.387)

100%.

Mark Turman (07:39.714)

That, that in all things, but particularly in this issue, you know, Ryan and I were talking yesterday, Katie, that, this, this just brings out levels of emotion, like almost nothing else can. and that reminds us that, you know, we need to remember we're dealing with real people and

with, with real situations. And it is, never limited to an individual, as you said, but, is lived out in time and space by individuals.

And we oftentimes don't know anybody's full story. And certainly that's true when we're in a congregation of people in a church. And so we don't know what their story may be and how they may or may not be connected to issues of life and particularly the life of the unborn. so having a real sense of compassion, of humility, biblical conviction, absolutely.

But always walking into those conversations with civility and with respect and with all of the fruit of the spirit, is really just the framework that we have to walk into this and every issue with, going forward. I was wondering, Ryan is we, we sit here and think about going into this election. And, I don't think any of us anticipated, you know, two years ago, five years ago, that this would be such a predominant conversation again.

we, felt like in many ways we kind of moved past some of that as a political thing, but we're now a little over two years past the Dobbs decision that overturn Roe v. Wade, 1973, the right to abortion. I just kind of wonder, get from both of you kind of a sense of where you feel like we are now culturally and politically, with the issue of abortion and the sanctity of life.

what do you feel like is new or that we've seen come back around that maybe could frame our conversation for today? Ryan, how would you answer that?

Ryan Denison (09:43.152)

I think one of the big changes has been prior to Roe v. being overturned, the pro -choice movement often approached this issue as if it was more of a minor annoyance that they had to talk about it at times. But there was a basic understanding that, or basically the law of the land was fairly safe with Roe v. Wade. When that was overturned, I think the roles of reverse were the most passionate people on the subject are now on the pro -choice side.

And that has reframed a lot of how it's discussed. In a lot of ways, the pro -life movement has sort of lost our voice. We're on the defensive far more than we should be. And I think the times where we try to be more proactive about it, we often approach it the wrong way. Where we're trying to, like, as we discussed before, we're trying to demonize the people who think differently than we do. And I feel like in a lot of ways, there was the segment of the pro -life movement that thought, okay, if we can just get early weight overturned, we'll be okay.

And the reality is that that took it from a national conversation where one vote could change it to a state conversation where now 50 votes can change it. And so we've multiplied the realms in which we have to have this discussion where we have to fight for life. And I think I don't think the pro -life movement was necessarily ready for that reality. I think a lot of us underestimated what that was going to look like. And I think we're seeing a lot of people on the pro -life side.

we're trying to play catch up to an extent and I don't think we're playing that game very well.

Mark Turman (11:11.938)

Yeah, that's a to think about. Good, Katie.

Katie Fruge (11:11.949)

Yeah, I can, I completely agree with what Ryan said there. think in some ways the pro -life movement pre -Dobbs was so singularly focused on the overturning of Roe v. Wade, we were unprepared and caught a little off -footed when it finally happened. I think it happened sooner than a lot of people were expecting to, and there really wasn't a unified cohesive game plan on what happens post -Roe within the broader pro -life space.

And I think that really is so, it's played out when you look at the elections post -Dobbs, abortion has been a winning issue every single time on every major ballot. And I think it's because, as Ryan alluded to, the pro -choice side is now the side that is singularly focused and has an aim and a goal that they're all marching towards. Where on the pro -life side, we're seeing kind of a scattered approach. There's not a lot of even unity, even within the pro -life space on what

regulations we want or what our focus should be. And so there's a lack of cohesiveness even within the pro -life space right now that I think is unfortunate when our ultimate goal is to see fewer abortions and more lives saved.

Mark Turman (12:20.598)

Yeah. And I would add to that a little bit that, you know, I've been fairly involved, in a significant way. I've, I've served on the boards of two crisis pregnancy centers. I've helped to raise money for, for those centers and for pro -life causes. And that's, caused me to be, you know, more attuned to some of the policy issues that have gone on. I can tell you in several decades of being involved in that way, I didn't hear a single conversation about.

Well, if we ever overturned row, then we would need to do this next. I've never, I've never heard a single conversation or presentation around that. and there was, there was no anticipation that, what would this look like if it got tossed back to the States? heard that comment, leading up to the Dobbs decision, but nobody really explained what that would mean or what that potentially could mean.

Katie Fruge (12:56.002)

Hmm.

Mark Turman (13:20.308)

And nobody anticipated that the pro -choice side of the culture and the political spectrum would pick this up and become as energized as they are. and so in that sense, I think we really have kind of, it almost feels like at times that we swatted a nest and now we have, now we have bees everywhere. as opposed to having all of it contained in one place. And you kind of see that in,

something I wanted you both to kind of comment on, which is what I call the, rule of unintended consequences because, most, some of the most recent research Pew research surveys, type of

thing indicate that 67 % of Americans, now think that abortion should be legal and available at least on some scale. there was this incredible reality that again, you didn't hear this talked about,

in many ways before the Dops decision that for almost, for almost four decades, the number of abortions in America was going down. And just as a kind of a historical context, you have the decision of Roe v Wade in 1973. And that kind of sets off kind of an explosion of abortion in our country that goes on for almost a decade. And I can remember being a young Christian in 1980.

my church in East Texas addressed the issue, wanted the congregation to understand what this was all about and how horrific it was on many ways and kind of a call to action that we as Christians in his churches have to do something. And there, there was a lot of movement at that point and a lot of things that came to life in the pro -life movement at that time. but, but interesting enough, abortion seemed to kind of,

peak at about 1983 and then start steadily going down and went down consistently until the Dobbs decision and now have spiked back up. I, I just want either of you, both of you to respond to that of just how, what should we even think about that reality? Katie, what, how does that, how does that hit you?

Katie Fruge (15:40.119)

What it tells me is that we've done a really good job regulating and creating laws and not changing hearts. We have really not been able to make a compelling argument for the sanctity of human life in a holistic way. I think that there's also a lot of just disappointment with the Christian witness as far as we've not been holistically pro -life. We've been very focused on the pre -born and regulations, but we've also been

adamantly opposed to policies that we know support families. We've been adamantly opposed to policies that support what I call a culture of life. There's really great research out there that shows things, policies that would make a mother reconsider continuing a pregnancy, things like affordable housing, childcare.

access to expanding Medicaid, different things like that, are tangible things that we really haven't wanted to wade into. And so we've lost the moral argument. We haven't compelled hearts. And we've also been so focused on regulations and laws that protect one little thing and not looking to ways to create a culture of life within our communities that holistically uplift the whole spectrum of human experience.

Mark Turman (16:53.932)

Yeah, Ryan thoughts that you'd add to that?

Ryan Denison (16:57.568)

I think that sums it up really well. So much of it does go back to just having such a focus on the pre -born that we lose sight of. We see this as a moral issue when for the people that are

actually getting abortions, it's a practical issue. There was a Notre Dame study that found that basically of all the people they interviewed, not a single one of them described abortion as a desirable good. And I think that's one of the things that we're starting to see is that it's

among at least a certain minority, even within the pro-choice movement, it's become this sort of rallying cry to an extent where it used to be like there was in the nineties, for example, there was your universal agreement that like even among those who thought abortion should exist, it wasn't a good thing. And I think we're starting to see that shift alongside this because the polemics of it are just getting more intense and there's so much we could be doing to just to

If we were to do kind of what Katie's talk about and start supporting moms, start supporting things that would make it easier for people to care for their children, then it would kind of put the lie to the idea to a lot of them is characterization of the pro-life movement that we don't care about mothers, that we don't care about anyone besides the babies. When that shouldn't be the case, and it's not the case more often than not, but we just need to make sure our actions reflect that.

Mark Turman (18:16.076)

Yeah, makes. Go ahead. Yeah, go ahead.

Katie Fruge (18:16.195)

I want to play off of something real quick that Ryan said, because I think this is important. You, think, wisely said that for a lot of people, it's just a practical issue. And I think oftentimes within the pro-life spaces that I've been in, you have this idea of a woman having an abortion. Maybe she's a teen mom or doesn't have a lot of resources, where the data actually tells us that the average woman having an abortion looks a lot like me. She already has children. She knows what it means to raise a family. And she's making just a weighted decision on

Do I have the bandwidth? Do I have the capacity for this? And so I think even that really is an interesting observation that the overwhelming majority of women who are electing to have an abortion right now already have a child, already have a home or something like that in place.

Mark Turman (19:04.436)

And there's just so many things for us to think about. this kind of leads to one of the things I wanted to, we've already talked about this a little bit, but maybe we can go further with the idea that for many of us as Christians, we're just defining the term pro-life too narrowly. obviously it should contain in a significant and major way, the contention for the pre-born. No question about that, but

I can remember learning the related issue a few years ago that, know, the number one indicator of poverty in America is that you're a single mom. And perhaps the number one reason that women indicate that they are pursuing an abortion or considering an abortion is because of the economic factors in their lives. And then Katie, as you say, you add to that the other awareness and understanding of the parenting responsibility.

Katie Fruge (19:41.037)

Mm.

Mark Turman (20:01.036)

that they already have if they have one or two children. And you can, you can see how a sense of desperation, starts to build into a person's life. and they might start to be open and to consider, a choice that they would have never found themselves considering in another set of circumstances. and just to realize that being a pro life.

as sometimes we're accused of, you know, we're, we're accused of being pro birth only and that we're just not doing enough to be as Katie says, holistic in that. how, how do we reclaim that space or how do we gain credibility in that space would be one of questions I'd want you to respond to.

Ryan Denison (20:54.44)

think one of the best ways would be, especially on the pro -choice side, there's almost a culture of shame for those who have had abortions, those who have considered abortions. so many of those, the grief that so many women feel after they have an abortion,

If there was a way to minister to those mothers, to help them process that, mean, in some ways they would become the most powerful voices in support of the unborn. If they didn't feel like they had to hide that, if they felt like we could help them understand that decision to understand God's grace, God's mercy and forgiveness. Like some of the most powerful voices for the preborn could be those who have had an abortion.

If we foster a culture of shame around that, if we foster a culture that demonizes those who've made that decision, then we're going to lose that voice and we're going to make those mothers just continue on their grief alone. And that's not a Christian response. It's not an empathetic response. And practically it's not a wise response.

Mark Turman (21:57.354)

Is it Katie? we're, we're kind of trying to put some life in this for an individual Christian or a church congregation, what would, what would be some ways that just say a church could be more holistically pro -life as opposed to just simply saying, we oppose abortion and, and obviously that's a, that's a thing to do, but what are some other things that a church or a believer could do to kind of build that out further?

Katie Fruge (22:27.671)

think just taking a posture of listening and believing the felt needs of the mothers within their community. Statistics definitely tell us that this is not an issue outside of our pews, that there are women in our pews who have experienced abortion. And maybe creating space for them, first of all, to be honest about that experience and the decisions that led up to it. And then saying, how

can we come alongside you and help the next generation? How would we be able to help the next mom be able to see a path?

forward, what we've really got to do is claim the space within the church community that shows her a path forward. Maybe that's creating more of an opportunity for childcare, maybe more Mother's Day outs or programs like that to be able to create on -ramps within the church community. It's incredibly difficult to raise children, no matter what, and even in the best situations, it's hard to raise kids.

It is really hard to raise a child if you are a single parent, if you are living in poverty, you need a church community. That is going to be a critical component to being able to thrive and have the resources you need to raise a child well and be able to see a path forward. And so even just creating a church community for moms, be able to create...

community that will be an essential piece that really in some ways only the church can do. The church has the bandwidth, the church has the manpower to be able to meet the need of that moment. It's really just being able to see that, own it and step into that space. Really trying to see all the different ways it means showing up in her life.

beyond just giving her maybe a baby shower. Baby showers are great. She's gonna get diapers, but you know what? She can also go get diapers on WIC. And so what are some other ways that she could use you to come alongside and walk through life with her?

Mark Turman (24:16.752)

And as is, and I like to tell myself and others as well, when they're leading in church, people aren't so much looking for friendly churches as they're looking for friends. They're, looking for real fellowship, real men, real mentoring, real friendship, real persons to, to live life with and to, traffic with in terms of life. well, I want to move further down the political realm in a moment, but before we do that, let's, let's swim a little bit in the area of theology.

and for a moment try to put ourselves in the position of Christians who say that they are willing to make allowances for abortion at least on a limited scale. Let me just stay right here at the beginning that I'm not in any way saying that any of the three of us and certainly the ministries that we work for are in any way endorsing this. This is really a conversation of trying to say

Well, if I was going to try to understand the other person's perspective, that person that, know, when you, when you have 67 % of the country that says that they believe that abortion should be available on at least a limited basis. When you have at least 67%, there's a lot of people in there that are Christian in that 67%. So the conversation I want to try to get into is really what theologians call a personhood.

conversation or a personhood theory with this idea of you have the moment of conception that is obviously the beginning of life by some definition and then there's this whole area of theology

that flows from that call okay when does this become a person and there are there's a range here at least it goes from okay that is a person

In the fullest and complete sense that you can say it is at the moment of conception. There are many that believe that I believe that I think intuitively all of my life and particularly all my life as a Christian. But then there are others who say, that that idea of full personhood happens somewhere in that process of fetal development. And again, we're just, we're trying to help ourselves think how could any Christian

Mark Turman (26:41.078)

make any allowance for abortion, particularly like when we talk about making allowances for an abortion in the case of the life of a mother that's being threatened or in the case of rape or incest, those are common ideas of allowances that some Christians, many Christians may be perhaps in embrace. so how do we, how does that person, how does that Christian get there?

Recently I ran on to the reference of Exodus 21 22 which is a reference to a premature birth or a miscarriage we might say as a text that a person who would accept a Christian that would accept limited expressions of abortion might point to So anyway, how how does a Christian get to any kind of a limit?

or, not a limit, but any kind of an exception for abortion in some case around this idea of personhood. Katie and I flipped a coin. decided that Ryan should go first in talking about this and we'll try to see if we can make some sense out of this. So Ryan help us, around the idea of personhood theory.

Katie Fruge (27:49.587)

Hehehehehe

Ryan Denison (28:01.1)

It is, it gets very complicated very quickly. I think, and I think from the start, I think it's important to have a foundation of understanding the biblically, the best way to understand scripture, especially on issues where there are potential arguments that could go both ways is to stand on the ground that is most clear and have that be the foundation and then take other texts to build, to build up the walls. And I think this is one of those issues where

While there are some like Exodus 21, 22 that point to a potential difference between kind of the pre-born life and life outside of a mother with regards to children, the basic foundation is that God values all life. And that what we know for certain is that God is the author of life, God is the creator of life, and life belongs to him, not us. And so it is not our job to take that life at any stage of its development.

And I think having that as a foundation is really important for understanding the rest. Beyond that, do think one of the issues that I've been wrestling, I guess, wrestling with is probably the best way to put it recently is the idea of ensoulment in terms of the mother and the father create

the life of the baby in terms of that's how God designed the system. But temporal beings cannot create something eternal. so God is the one that imparts the soul. And I don't think scripture is a hundred

percent clear on when in the process of pregnancy that happens. And I think that factors into how we understand issues of miscarriage, how we understand the issue of abortion. And I think it gives room for grace to an extent to at least have these conversations without immediately assuming the worst about someone who might be asking questions or about someone who might be inclined to offer a bit to be a bit more on the pro -choice side.

that there are scriptural reasons to at least ask those questions. I think at end of the day, what we're called to come back to is the idea that if we're not sure when life begins, if we're not sure when God imparts the soul, if we're not sure when a fetus becomes the image of God, then we need to err on the side of caution with that, which is why personally I'm pro -choice from the moment of conception. But I do think there are interesting discussions and arguments to be had within that idea.

Mark Turman (30:24.888)

I think that's well said, first of all, and thank you for that. In nowhere are we trying to set up an opposition between texts like Exodus 21 -22 and what we find in the Psalms and in other places where the psalmist says, I'm fearfully and wonderfully made, from In My Mother's Womb, You Knit Me Together, those familiar passages. We're not trying to set up a...

combative relationship between these texts, but trying to understand as clearly as we can. And part of this for me came up recently. I was listening to another conversation, where the idea was, at least practically speaking, we don't deal with these things the same way. Most of the time, if somebody has a miscarriage, particularly in a very early stage miscarriage, we don't treat that the same way that we would if that child,

died, say in the first year of its, life outside the womb. We don't, we don't treat those situations the same in most cases. maybe we should, you might even make a case that we should in some, in some people's minds. but Katie, how, can build on this for us and help us to get the best handle on it? can.

Katie Fruge (31:44.163)

I think that there's a beautiful mystery to it in some ways that postures us in humility as we are engaging and talking about the topic. I do think there's something interesting when you look at the creation account where God, I think it's in Genesis 2, God forms Adam and he's got his physical body, but then he breathes his spirit of life into him. And the translation is something to the effect of like a living soul or a living being. And I think the question really is like, when does God embark that?

And I think in honest humility, we can say, we don't know. But that doesn't mean there's not a sacredness for life, even at the very onset of it. so I do think, yeah, practically there is a

difference between, you know, there's real grief in a miscarriage and there's real grief when a parent has to bury their child and they're not the same. But it's still a uniquely different grief because of the sacredness of something that has been lost when you miscarry at 10 weeks.

that is different than when your puppy dies. And there is something fundamentally different in the life lost in the human versus, and they're both griefs, they're both real, but I think we innately and fundamentally can still recognize the sacredness of this process that's happened and something that's been lost without having to go into, well, at this exact moment, this soul was created. Like we don't have to have all the answers to recognize the sacredness of it.

Mark Turman (33:13.804)

Yeah. And I think, you know, it's, it's really important for us to kind of think through this and to think through this theologically for a couple of reasons that come to mind as I think about it. One is, is maybe it will help us to have better conversations because we might, we might more consider that the person who has a more pro choice opinion is not simply motivated to, eliminate babies because they see them as inconveniences.

If we go back to that To that Catholic study the Notre Dame study that across the board No one felt like an abortion was a positive good event. Okay, and if we could have that more understanding and Perhaps respectful position of look most people the majority of people be they Christian or not Christian are not just out to get rid of children that are inconvenient

Katie Fruge (33:53.901)

Mm

Mark Turman (34:10.636)

That that's not where they're coming from. And if we could embrace that, we could have a better conversation with them because these issues are complicated. But Ryan, I like where you, came around as well to this idea of, can't know some of these things. and we will never know, exactly how, the joining of two lives creates a third life, which is an, it just an enormous.

Katie Fruge (34:21.11)

Mm

Mark Turman (34:39.892)

Expression of trust that God would allow us to be involved as human beings in this in the first place When you think about it that we get to participate in creating and another human being That can live for all of eternity. Okay? We're never gonna know everything that God knows about that process and we should be humble about that but I love what you say in in the absence of

God revealing those secrets to us we should always lean in the direction of the sacredness of life that Katie's talking about and that But at the same time when you're when you're living in a culture and in you're living in a country where not everybody believes the same and You're

trying to create policy and law At some point you have to make some kind of a decision or else you're not going to have any kind of law to guide

the group of people that are in the country. And that's why you, this, all of this, I bring it up is because this is all of what's behind different views that say, well, abortion should be legal, but limited and it should be limited to this number of weeks or it should be limited to the presence of a heartbeat, to all the way to the other end of the spectrum that, gets really scary when it starts to sound like infanticide by

People on the far, far extreme who would say, well, no parents can decide to abandon their children even at the time of birth. and there's very little of that, but there are some voices in that regard. And then, so anyway, there's, those are things for us to think about when we're trying to think about, okay, what about policy and what about law and what about conversation with somebody who sees things in a different light than we do, which is

Kind of where I want to move the conversation next, which has to do with politics and political parties. Okay. I want you guys to talk about, how do Christian Christians view and engage political parties? And obviously by extension, those that represent those parties, but mostly the party, what do we do when there is a particular aspect of those parties and their, their

Mark Turman (37:01.217)

Proposals that don't align with our Christian values And kind of what's behind this I'll tip my hand here is that it kind of feels like now We're to the point where neither party is as pro -life as we would want them to be People will argue with that, but that's just an opinion. I have it feels like With the changes that the Republican Party made to their platform earlier this summer

And some of the other rhetoric, it, kind of feels like that all of us in the Christian community who are strongly pro -life feel like maybe we have neither party to look to, Katie, you deal with public policy on a regular basis. How should we think about this?

Katie Fruge (37:48.053)

One of the things that's probably the most frustrating for me is how different partisans grab what I would consider to be a pro -life issue. We put them in R and D buckets, and it really kind of makes our holistic view of what it means to be pro -life. It kind of feels anemic, because you're going to take the pre -born argument, and we're going to put that in one issue. But then we're going to talk about other ways that support a culture of life, and that's going to go over in the D bucket. And so I think one of the spaces Christians need to reclaim

is just not being owned by either one party, that ultimately our loyalty, our citizenship is to the kingdom of heaven. And we are trying to faithfully represent that and live it out as holistically as possible. One of the things, one of our team members, John Litzler, the way he describes it is, advocacy is telling someone what matters to you. Christian advocacy is telling them what matters to Christ. And so when we're going about engagement,

We want to be holistic in our conversation here and not be owned or pigeonholed to just one particular issue. We don't want to just vote based on, well, what does this candidate say about the pre -born and not look at the holistic spectrum? Is he honoring a culture of life through natural death? We really need to re -expand our imagination when it comes to the pro -life conversation.

to reclaim it as a holistic piece and not just one very minor, like, focused issue.

Mark Turman (39:19.542)

Yeah. Yeah. Very helpful. So Ryan build on that from some of the things that I know you've been thinking about just how, how politics tends to oversimplify, big complex issues like this, and then use them for political advantage rather than because they are deeply rooted in moral conviction. Can you kind of chase that out a little bit further based on what Katie set up for us?

Ryan Denison (39:46.696)

Absolutely. And I think she's right. There's so much other pro -life movement that involves issues beyond just abortion that we need to take into account. More specifically to abortion, though, you mentioned that it's like 67 % of people support some access to abortion. But if you break that down by trimester, 55 % of people oppose abortion in the second trimester and 70 % of people oppose abortion in the third.

And so part of how we've seen this change on a state by state basis where you have states that are now enshrined it up to the abortion rights, up to viability or up to even the point of birth when that goes against public sentiment, public opinion is because we've created a binary decision, either essentially no abortion or all abortion. And what people have shown is that if they're that choice, they will choose all abortion, even if that's not what they would want.

Katie Fruge (40:31.523)

Mm.

Ryan Denison (40:40.944)

And I think there's so much ground to be taken, whether it's just trying to push for laws that ban abortion after the first trimester, that is still progress. Even if it's not what we may want, it's still progress. And I think when we look at it politically, being able to have conversations to be less absolutist about what needs to happen so that we just keep in mind the goal is to save lives. And even if it's not all the lives we would love to be able to save, saving some is still good.

And I think what has been shown in the democratic process is that, I mean, if we were in a monarchy, the king could just say, no abortion, that's the law. In a democracy, you have to take public opinion into account. And you have to work from that. And public opinion is not on the side of no abortion. And so I think it would be great if we could just take the victories that are there for us and then from that platform, keep pushing. But the other thing to remember is that while this is a political issue,

so many of these decisions, like the government's never going to mandate abortions be done. And so even in states where abortion is legal up to the time of death or up to the time of birth, we can still fight for life. can still through crisis pregnancy centers, through conversations, through our churches and working to make, to create a culture of life where we help people make the right choice, even if it's not a legal choice for them, it's a personal choice because of what the laws are, we can still help them choose life.

And I think if we could shift more of our focus to that, for far too long, we've put all of our hope in politics on the issue of abortion, on the issue of being pro -life. And that's just not where we were ever going to see our greatest progress.

Mark Turman (42:25.688)

Yeah, I think you're exactly right. Katie, I wonder, from your involvement in public policy, do you think that too many of us as Christians have kind of taken an all or nothing approach when it comes to, policy that will know we're not, we're not going to settle for a 15 week ban or we're not going to sell before a heartbeat law. if we can't have the whole, the whole band, we we're just gonna.

keep fighting on until we can get, till we feel like we can get to that place. Our, our, is our willingness to compromise to something less than a total ban hurting us in some ways.

Katie Fruge (43:08.099)

That's an interesting way to put it. I think I could go there. I think ultimately what I would say is I would love to see Christians really rally around the idea of we want to see as few abortions as possible and we want to get there as fast as possible. And we've seen that a lot of the bans and the things that we're seeing, especially in the red states, they're not helping the number of abortions go down. As you pointed out at the beginning of the show, abortions are up and that should devastate all of us.

I think we've just been arguing about the wrong things versus focusing on, hey, how do we collectively get our heads together and bring these numbers down?

Mark Turman (43:47.682)

Yeah, and I think, again, going back to that term holistic, I think the real opportunity here for Christians and for churches, particularly for churches working in the midst of their own members and in their communities and with other churches is just this big idea of, how do we holistically create a plan and a strategy to promote a culture of life across our community?

How, how do we do that in broad measure? and obviously that would mean advocating in every possible way for, every pregnancy to be taken to full term and to the delivery of a, of a child. would, that would be part of what we would want to do in every place we could, but that would not be all that we would do. There would be many more aspects of that that we could do starting locally and starting congregation.

Katie Fruge (44:47.213)

Mm -hmm.

Mark Turman (44:47.664)

that we should be pursuing and, there's an opportunity for us as Christians and as churches to build a framework for that. We've, we've always done some of it, but we need to be doing a much more robust effort at that. so that that's hopefully one of the things that we all take away from this conversation before we finished up. We've got a few more minutes, but maybe a couple more questions. Katie, I wanted you to give us your thoughts on how IVF.

relates to this whole conversation. That's been significant within the last few months. the Cal, the case in Alabama, that was a part that set off a lot of, of movement in, terms of, this conversation, give us some clarity about just how IVF fits into this conversation.

Katie Fruge (45:38.177)

Yeah, I think the real question really does go back to what we've already kind of talked about with personhood and, you know, does life begin at the moment of conception? Does it begin at the Petri dish? How do we navigate some of those more nuanced, challenging conversations about understanding life itself and personhood related to IVF? You know, I know and love many beautiful children who are here because of IVF. I know many Texas Baptist pastors have families because of IVF.

I think it's been a tremendous blessing to many people. And two things can be true at the same time, that IVF is a gift that has brought beautiful life that our full image bears. And it's been a positive thing for so many people. I think there's also some space to have questions about the regulations and guardrails around how we treat the embryos.

not really a database right now. At this point, my understanding is that we don't even know how many embryos are frozen in the United States. And so I think that there's some valid questions, and questions don't mean that we're going to throw the baby out with the bath water, that we can walk and chew gum at the same time and recognize the gift that it is to a couple struggling with infertility. I also know couples who have adopted frozen embryos, which is just an incredible ministry and a really cool thing to be able to walk through as well.

I think ultimately what we want to do, again, we've kind of already said this, but it's walking through this process affirming the sanctity of life and wanting to honor that sanctity even in the IVF process. And I think that that's very possible. think that it's just trying to be cognizant of saying, hey, as we go through this incredible scientific process now, how

what does honoring life look like? And I think that's the posture that we're trying to have when we have a conversation about IVF.

Mark Turman (47:35.862)

Yeah, and really important. Ryan, anything you wanted to add there?

Ryan Denison (47:40.796)

Honestly, I think that sums it up really well. If this is an issue that it's complicated, there's a lot to it. But again, just remembering that we're talking about people rather than just ideas, I think really can help us be more empathetic with the way we discuss it. And I think that's one thing that's essential to doing this well.

Mark Turman (48:01.334)

Yeah. And again, just that, that posture of humility and consideration and respect. if you've ever known or walked with anybody through a journey of infertility, know, what a hard, hard journey that can be. and yes, there are important ethical, spiritual, moral questions here that we need to think prayerfully and deeply about. when that case came out, a few months ago in Alabama, two of the pastors that I know well, and that I respect deeply.

didn't have exactly the same view of it. they, honored life in both respects, but they didn't have exactly the same views. were still working out their thoughts and understanding. so there's a lot to it, a lot of complexity. Ryan, wanted to maybe get a thought or two from you before we finish up on the reality that today in the, in the world that we live in, most abortions that happen are not surgical. They're rather chemical.

And that's really a huge, huge reality, that, that has come about in rapid form, particularly over the last, three years or so. And I, I've, you we talk about this all the time in the environment when I'm helping with crisis pregnancy centers on a local level. this is, this is a reality of where, the ending of life for the preborn is really happening. The taking of.

children's lives through chemical abortion is where a major part of this struggle and battle is happening. What are your thoughts on how we think about that, how we address that from both a ministerial church perspective as well as from a policy perspective?

Ryan Denison (49:48.712)

I think to start it, especially with regards to how we approach it from a church perspective, I think one of the things that chemical abortions allow is for far greater privacy and for far less accountability with regards to how people make this decision. It's gone from being something where they had to leave their house, where they had to go talk to a doctor, where they had to potentially see a sonogram to something where they can fill out something online and receive what they need to abort their child's life.

That creates a situation in which if we can be more, we just have to be more open about these discussions in our churches and our communities. We have to make sure that we are not so, even if we are certain that the pro -choice or the pro -life side is correct, that we, that that certainty does not allow us to approach it as if everyone else is going to think the same way we do. Because so many of the people considering this and taking that route are the ones that don't want other people to know.

that they're having an abortion, that they don't want that. On some level, maybe they don't understand what they're doing is wrong, but they are still going to make that choice. And if we can foster an environment where they feel comfortable.

talking to someone about that decision before they make it, then even that would make a huge difference. But I also think it reinforces kind of like what Katie was saying earlier, that at the end of the day, the greatest strides we're gonna see in our fight for life is by just ministering to people and by...

and by addressing all the causes of abortion that have nothing to do with the theology of it, that are more about just the practicalities of life and about why people make these decisions, because it's getting easier and easier to make them without having to actually think through any of that. And so we need to be more proactive in that regard. We need to be more pathetic in that regard. But I think we need to understand that this isn't going to change either. Spring Court's already ruled once on it.

Ryan Denison (51:46.852)

And the way they did that ruling, think, was mischaracterized to an extent. They did not say that the abortion chemical drugs, because I'm struggling to say that one right now, that that one is going to be forever legal. That was not what they said in that ruling. They just said that the people that brought that case didn't have standing to bring it. And so there is hope that maybe this can change at some point, but that doesn't seem to be the direction either the courts or laws are heading. And so I think we need to understand that this is going to be a new reality.

Katie Fruge (51:55.359)

No.

Mark Turman (51:56.184)

That has a really hard name. Yeah.

Katie Fruge (52:06.211)

Mm

Ryan Denison (52:16.71)

for how abortions are being done, it's not, and it's not likely to change. And we need to change in response to it.

Katie Fruge (52:26.243)

would also add to that real quick, again, just as a word of warning to all of us not to repeat our mistakes from history. We put all of our focus on trying to overturn Roe, and we kind of put all of our eggs in that basket. We don't want to put all of our hope on, well, if we could just make chemical abortions illegal, then they won't happen. That's just not the case. Even right now in states where chemical abortions are technically illegal, there are ample ways to still be able to get access to the abortion pill.

And so we ought to be very careful in putting any hope in the Supreme Court and making regulations. Yes, they're helpful and they can give some guidance, but I think it's important for the church not to repeat the same mistakes we made with Roe.

Mark Turman (53:10.636)

Yeah. And there's, there's so much to think about here, from the standpoint of access. and we, and we see this with other types of drugs and things, just the, the ability to stop any particular drug in the world from getting from one person to the next is enormously difficult. and so, yes, we should consider, and promote and advocate for policies, particularly for people, taking any kind of medication without.

Katie Fruge (53:28.696)

Mm

Mark Turman (53:39.736)

proper oversight and supervision. There, there are medical ethics there that apply not only to the chemicals that produce an abortion, but that do other things as well. but in the world that we live in, the ability to traffic things through the mail system and other things is an enormously difficult problem. and it's going to lead to some tragedies. already has. but, if you, if you now envision,

Katie Fruge (53:42.049)

Yes.

Mark Turman (54:08.184)

a particularly, you know, a young woman having an abortion at 10 or 15 or even 20 weeks, in the privacy of her home through a chemical there, they're going to be traumatic if not, life altering life ending experiences, not only for, that unborn child, but also for that young woman that that's, that's happening already. It's going to happen on greater scale.

Katie Fruge (54:29.987)

Mm

Mark Turman (54:34.378)

And so there's a lot to be concerned about a lot, lot to be prayerful about, and a lot to try to advocate in around that as well. we just a minute or two left. wanted to give each of you maybe opportunity of a closing word. If, and let me frame it this way. If you walked into your church and you were going to hear your pastor in the next couple of weeks, or you were walking into a random church, and that pastor had chosen to.

somehow speak around the issue of politics and the sanctity of life. What would you want him to say to you and to that congregation as we head into these next few weeks of election around the issue of the sanctity of life?

Ryan, I'll let you go first.

Ryan Denison (55:26.253)

All right. I think what I would want to hear is a more holistic view than just abortion, but also not shying away from the issue of abortion. And I think that's the balance we have to walk here is that while there is so much to what it means to be pro-life, being for life from the moment of conception, I think is a key part of that. And we can't afford to give up on any of it.

All of it is necessary if we want to fight for a culture of life, if we want to actually see more children be able to be born, fewer children killed in the womb, and more families thriving in general. And I think I would love to see a more holistic approach that speaks to every facet of it as important.

Mark Turman (56:15.352)

All right, thanks. Katie?

Katie Fruge (56:17.411)

So in full disclosure, this last summer I wrote for the Texas Baptist Press a 13-week Bible study on the sanctity of human life, and it's called Sacred Life. And I give that disclosure because I think it's just a bigger topic than a one Sunday morning issue. And I'd love to see a pastor who says, hey, church, human life has dignity and value, and it is sacred. And we're going to spend a long time looking at

all the different ways that we are going to uplift and affirm the sanctity of human life. We're going to talk about disability. We're going to talk about racial reconciliation. We're going to talk about being conformed to the image of Christ. We're going to be talking about the kingdom of heaven and how the image of God tells us we're made for the kingdom of God and really trying to intentionally push people's imagination on what it means for life to be sacred.

Mark Turman (57:05.937)

Katie, tell us where people can find that Bible study.

Katie Fruge (57:08.899)

GC2 Press, you can find it there, it's called Sacred Life and it's a 13-week Bible study.

Mark Turman (57:14.912)

All right. And we're just, we're to recommend you go check that out as well as a good way, because that's, know, what we have to realize here, is the conversation is that this is a spiritual battle and that we do have a real enemy that, that the devil is real and the devil can't create anything. And he certainly cannot create human beings. Okay. But the devil hates anything that God loves and God loves people more than anything else.

And so how could we not be, why would we be surprised that the devil wants to stop life everywhere he can from its conception all the way to its natural end. He, he would want to eliminate life in a very real way, in a very physical way, every way that he can. And he does that in other ways, emotionally, relationally, mentally he does. He he's out to destroy at every level.

And that's why we need a broad and holistic approach, personally and congregationally. And, we hope that our conversation today helps you to think in that direction. realize that if things are being oversimplified, that's probably not coming from God. That doesn't mean that we get to check out because it's hard and it's complex. The most important things are oftentimes hard and complex, but God has promised to help us. He's given us his word.

He's given us his spirit and he's given us each other in the context of the Christian community, to work with him for the saving of many lives, as the Bible says in several different places. Guys, thank you for being a part of the conversation and want to thank our audience for listening in as well. If this has been helpful to you today, please rate, review us on your podcast platform, share this with family and friends, so that you can have a conversation with them as well.

We hope it helps you to navigate this season of politics as we move toward important decisions in our country. Let me remind you as well. You can find additional resources, as I said at the beginning at [denison forum .org forward slash election](https://denisonforum.org/forward/slash/election). And, we hope you'll check all that out. Thank you for supporting us and being a part of the conversation. We look forward to being with you the next time on the denison forum podcast. God bless you.