

## INTRODUCTION

The church is a place where we can receive redeeming hope through the Good News of God With Us and cling to our Savior who has overcome the world. Unfortunately, the church is also increasingly avoided by those who most need the hope and grace the gospel is meant to bestow. I believe this is because the message of the church has become progressively irrelevant to the real-life experience of those who no longer darken her doors. Deadly post-modern issues have snuck into our sanctuaries and tied our tongues. Church leaders believe in their hearts that the Gospel can speak into these controversial matters but sometimes do not know how to address them.

Let us take back the issues of immorality and abortion from politics and address them redemptively through the gospel. The church often does not feel like a safe space in which to unpack these uncomfortable subjects. That is why we have the SAFECHURCH PROJECT, including this course, to equip local congregations to become safe havens.

The first place most people think of going in an untimely pregnancy is Planned Parenthood, even Christians. With the SAFECHURCH PROJECT, this course, and our other courses, we can begin to change the reputation of the local church so that the first place people begin to think of going is the church in their neighborhood which has become a safe haven. The church should never be a club where you belong only if you reach an imaginary level of perfection. Instead, we can become a hospital for sinners where we can all feel safe to be real and heal by confessing our sins to one another and praying for each other as in James 5:16. We can come around others in need with resources and love they will never find on their own. We can be a place where we can start, or start again, where we are and unashamedly grow in our walk with Christ alongside of and in support of each other, because we are all sinners, loved by Christ.

This takes strong people. Not those who “have it all together,” but those who see themselves and others through God’s eyes and confidently speak the truth in love to one another. It takes people who are not afraid to love others who are rough around the edges because we know we are also work in progress. This class will bring better understanding to all of us of the perils people find themselves in that cause them to make poor choices and reap disastrous consequences. It will humble us to realize that we are the only ones who can make a redemptive difference in the outcome for those who need the church the most. Freely we have received, so we freely give.

In this way, the church gains a new reputation, one congregation at a time. We will learn to be proactive and redemptive rather than reactive. The world around us is broken, and so many have been wounded by our judgment of them. People think of Jesus in the same way they think of us. We do not always represent Him well, do we? We are the only ones who can change that through the love of Christ shining in our words and actions.

The good news of the gospel is the key to life, and consequently, the answer to every facet of sexuality and abortion. Christ’s humble entry into humanity as a dependent, developing child by His unmarried teenage mother, His provision through the cross for sin and our redemption through His forgiveness, are all the examples that we need to champion to turn the tide in this mighty struggle. Almighty God incarnate—Immanuel – GOD WITH us—Yeshua, our Rescuer, our Deliverer, and our Salvation in the flesh is what the world needs. He’s what the frightened teen facing an unexpected pregnancy needs. He’s what the wounded man or woman needs who secretly struggles with a past abortion. He’s what the preborn child developing under the threat of abortion needs. He’s what the

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pastor or church member struggling for the words and the courage to address abortion needs. He's the only One who can address so important and difficult an issue. Jesus is what we all need: the mystery of God, Christ, our Messiah, the Promised One in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. This gospel is what shines the Light into the mess of our culture of death and brings Life to the dying. He is why we must **Get EQUIPPED** and **Be the SOLUTION** in the context of His triumph over death.

### POINT OF THIS CLASS

**OUR MISSION:** To equip the local church to become a safe haven that PROACTIVELY champions Biblical sexuality and life and REDEMPTIVELY heals those wounded by sexual sin or abortion.

**CLASS OBJECTIVES:** To equip us to address sexuality, pregnancy, and abortion comprehensively and with compassion so that the church may become:

- **Empowered by Truth**
- **Healed by Grace**
- **Champions for Life**
- **A Safe Haven**

*2 Cor 5: 14-21 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin[b] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (NIVUK)*

#### All of us are called to:

1. A Ministry of Reconciliation – to reconcile others to Christ and to one another.
  - a. Sexual sin and abortion do the opposite – wound and cause division. They kill, steal, and destroy.
  - b. Judgment about sexuality, pregnancy, and abortion repels people from Christ and His body.
2. Become Educated Ambassadors – Christ's love will compel you to speak the truth at every opportunity so that lives may be saved and healed. We are all ambassadors.

#### This is done through:

- Hope and Grace Partnership – the local church partnering with Hope and Grace Global and other churches and organizations to fulfill the Mission.

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- Commissioned Hope and Grace Ambassadors – committed to the continued equipping of the church (pastors and congregation) and coordinating members to carry out specific actions to accomplish objectives.
- Commissioned Hope and Grace Advocates – safe for and committed to those in trouble or distress. Committed to direct those in need to resources, be listening ears, bring connection, walk alongside.

I am excited that you are joining me on this adventure by taking this class! As fellow disciples of Jesus Christ, we will grow up in these specific aspects into Him who is the Head of the Church (Ephesians 4:15). And through us, the church, God will make known His manifold wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 3:10). Finally, may the God who gives endurance and encouragement give us the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and accept one another, as Christ accepted us, in order to bring praise to God! (Romans 15:5-7)

In His Amazing Grace,

—Joni Williams Shepherd

*May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word (2 Thessalonians 2:16–17).*