

THE NEW FIGHT FOR LIFE

**ROE, RACE
& A PRO-LIFE
COMMITMENT
TO JUSTICE**

BENJAMIN WATSON WITH CAROL TRAVER
FOREWORD BY CHERILYN HOLLOWAY, FOUNDER OF PRO-BLACK PRO-LIFE

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *THE NEW FIGHT FOR LIFE*

This book is an important guide for those who seek justice for all people, including the unborn and vulnerable women facing excruciating choices. In *The New Fight for Life*, Benjamin Watson offers a thoughtful way forward in the battle over abortion. He brings to the forefront the call for holistic advocacy for life, from the womb to the tomb.

KATRINA JACKSON

Louisiana state senator

Benjamin Watson helps us see past the politics and hostility of this issue to better understand the factors that created these barriers and how to come together, dismantle them, and chart a new path forward. He makes a winsome case for having a holistic view of life as we advocate for the vulnerable and fight for justice with compassion and understanding.

ELIZABETH GRAHAM

CEO of Stand for Life

My good friend Benjamin Watson has given us a balanced work that uniquely weds the case for pro-life with the call for justice, both inside and outside the church. His unique voice in this excellent literary call for a righteous and compassionate fight for life is a must-read for all those who love God, love people, and care about our culture.

DR. TONY EVANS

President of The Urban Alternative and senior pastor
of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship

In close to two decades of pro-life work, I've never read a book like *The New Fight for Life*. This book is an answer to my prayers. I've continually heard from people who value the lives of the unborn but question whether the pro-life movement cares about Black lives beyond babies. This book shows we care, as it thoroughly addresses multiple justice issues impacting our community. It brilliantly weaves together history with proposed action steps that can lead us to victory during this post-*Roe* future. It's incredibly rare to find a book that dares to tackle abortion, systemic racism, and societal issues with compassion, faith, and inspiring lessons from the football field. It's a book I can't wait to get into the hands of my husband and others looking for resources they can identify with. *The New Fight for Life* is sure to ignite a fire in its readers, leading them to compassionate and sustained action.

CHRISTINA MARIE BENNETT

Live Action News correspondent

This book puts the “pro” back into “pro-life.” Benjamin Watson’s vision of human dignity is consistent and positive, never a proxy for culture wars or power politics. Here he models for us how to love and protect life—that of vulnerable children, their mothers, and everyone else.

RUSSELL MOORE

Editor in chief of *Christianity Today*

Thriving movements innovate, adjust to new dynamics, and anticipate oncoming obstacles, all while maintaining

core convictions. In *The New Fight for Life*, Watson insightfully calls the pro-life movement to this work by challenging it to reimagine itself with a deeper commitment to justice and more faithful engagement on race.

JUSTIN E. GIBONEY

President of AND Campaign

Although history can be a great teacher, we have been poor students. Watson helps us remember not only our history but also our calling to confront the root causes of abortion. Watson's personal witness calls us to conversion and action. For those who want to end abortion, this book serves as an important guide.

GLORIA PURVIS

Author, commentator, host, and executive producer
of *The Gloria Purvis Podcast*

In *The New Fight for Life*, Benjamin Watson examines the biggest question our country is facing as we debate the issue of abortion: How can we balance the need to protect innocent lives and also respect and protect the women who have to make these difficult decisions? Benjamin looks at all sides of this issue and, as he always does, gives us thoughtful answers from a biblical perspective.

TONY DUNGY

Christian speaker, author, and former NFL coach

Every Millennial and Gen Zer in America needs this book—by far one of the most important reads for this time, season, and generation. It tells the complete,

unfiltered, and honest truth! This book fills a hole in an extensive market of literature. We as Black Americans have gone so long being spoken for, neglected, and used as talking points. Now there is an adequate pro-life point of view from the lenses of *us*. I feel a personal connection within my heart, passion, and culture mirrored on each page of *The New Fight for Life*.

TRENEÉ MCGEE

Connecticut state representative

For decades I have spent long and fruitful hours dialoguing with pro-life advocates as well as proponents of racial justice. Both causes are close to God's heart, and I have often regretted that those who see one of these causes clearly are often blind to the other. I don't know anyone more insightful and articulate on these issues than my friends Ben and Kirsten Watson, who beautifully model a kind, thoughtful commitment to both pro-life justice and racial justice. There are things in this book that may offend some political liberals and things that may offend some political conservatives. Readers who want to learn and grow should suspend judgment and prayerfully and nondefensively listen. If you do, you may find that you agree with more than you expected to and that you can disagree with parts while being enriched by the whole. This is the kind of book that can lead us beyond shallow political slogans and stereotypes that fit on bumper stickers or on Twitter but are out of place in intelligent, respectful dialogue. The post-*Roe* era we're in now is a time to ask God to open our hearts and minds to what matters to him.

I believe he has raised up Ben Watson to be a voice for two interwoven causes that should be simultaneously embraced. I highly recommend *The New Fight for Life*.

RANDY ALCORN

Author of *Heaven, If God Is Good, Happiness, and Pro-Choice or Pro-Life?*

Benjamin Watson's lived experience as a Black man in America has given him unique insights into how oppression can come in many different forms—from blatant racism and violence against Black and Brown people to the more subtle and insidious poisoned apple of “choice” being disguised as a gift to his community. While many in the pro-life movement work to prune back the branches of abortion, Watson demands that we finally, once and for all, pull it up by its toxic root. In *The New Fight for Life*, he explains how the seeds of systemic racism were planted hundreds of years ago to exploit and eradicate people like him. Now it has led many to unknowingly feast on its tainted fruits . . . because when you're starving, even poisoned apples can seem like sustenance. Watson's work implores us to join him in planting a new tree—a tree of life—that will ultimately bear righteous and just fruit for generations to come.

DESTINY HERNDON-DE LA ROSA

President and founder of New Wave Feminists

Benjamin will encourage your faith, challenge your advocacy for life, and bless you with soul-stirring truths. I'm honored to read this!

LECRAE

Author and Grammy Award-winning artist

Benjamin Watson's courageous and relentless advocacy on behalf of children, mothers, and families is an inspiration to millions. *The New Fight for Life* encourages and challenges our movement to not only abolish legal abortion but fight to ensure that every mother and father has the resources and support they need to embrace and successfully raise their children. Ben's practical advice and thoughtful, wise, winsome stories are much-needed fuel for this next chapter of our era's most urgent fight for human rights.

LILA ROSE

President and founder of Live Action

THE NEW FIGHT FOR LIFE



A Tynedale nonfiction imprint

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BENJAMIN WATSON

WITH CAROL TRAVER

T&Y

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FOREWORD

WE NEED TO TALK

I first met Benjamin Watson in 2019. I was at a women's pro-life conference in New Orleans that I did *not* want to go to. It's not that I'm not pro-life. But I'm pro-life in a way that's different from most other pro-lifers I meet at these events.

While most people I'd met in the pro-life community at the time acknowledged the connection between abortion and race, few (if any) were talking about *why*. As the executive director of a pregnancy center, I knew how much things like the wage gap, food deserts, and disparities in the legal system, the educational system, and the housing market factor into women's decisions when it comes to abortion. But I couldn't seem to find anyone else who was willing to address these topics, let alone talk about how we might fix them.

We all valued life, and we all wanted to advocate for those who couldn't speak up for themselves. We just had different ideas about what that looked like. And because of our differences, I often felt like I was on the outside looking in.

The general approach was more targeted, focusing almost exclusively on protecting and defending the baby in the

womb. And while I agree with that wholeheartedly, for me, being pro-life also means providing justice for the baby's mother, the baby's father, and, for that matter, everyone else who is made in the image of God—from the womb to the tomb, in all areas of life.

Often when I spoke at gatherings like this, I was told that I was diluting the message. But as a Black woman who has endured the emotional upheaval of two abortion decisions myself, I have a different vantage point. It's not enough simply to convince a young woman to keep her baby. We also have to make sure that woman has the ongoing financial and emotional support she needs to parent her child successfully.

Many women mistakenly believe they have no other option besides abortion because they think that they can't afford to raise a child or that they won't be able to finish school or that they won't be able to pay for childcare so they can work. A more holistic approach goes beyond just convincing them to keep their babies and helps them knock down the barriers that make them consider abortion in the first place.

For example, there are organizations that provide mothers with diapers, baby wipes, clothes, formula, and other necessary supplies free of charge. Many high schools offer GED programs. Many college campuses offer married/family housing. And some companies help employees pay for day care. There are grants, scholarships, and local faith-based and government-assisted programs that help vulnerable women and children get the help they need.

Overturing *Roe* made the right to an abortion uncon-

stitutional. But when women are provided with options so they no longer feel as though they have to give up their child, they can get to a place where they see their pregnancy not as the end of the world but as a new beginning. Only then will abortion be, as Benjamin says, unthinkable and unnecessary. With all these options in play, not only does a woman not *have* to choose abortion, but why *would* she?

As I made my way through the convention center that morning, I was anxious to find Destiny, the friend who had convinced me to come in the first place.

“Where are you?” I texted her.

A few seconds later, she responded, “I’m doing an interview.”

That made sense. Destiny was a rock star at events like this. Her organization, New Wave Feminists, had been featured in newspapers, magazines, and news shows across the nation. Someone always wanted to speak with her.

“They want to talk to you next.”

Now that made no sense. Why would anyone want to talk to me?

“Very funny,” I texted back. “Just let me know when you’re done.”

“I’m serious,” she replied. “They really want to talk to you.”

I craned my neck to see over the crowd, looking for Destiny’s trademark purple hair. I found her standing in the lobby talking to a man I didn’t recognize. As soon as I approached, he introduced himself as Jason Jones.

“If you’re available at 1:30,” he said, “I’d like you to be interviewed by Benjamin Watson.”

As an Ohio native and a lifelong Browns fan, I knew who Benjamin Watson was. What he was doing there and why he wanted to talk with me, I had no idea.

I later found out that Jason and Benjamin were recording interviews for a documentary they were making called *Divided Hearts of America*.

After Jason introduced me to Benjamin, we started talking about the need for a more holistic approach to abortion. The next thing I knew, we were in a deep dive into eugenics and how the Black community has been deliberately targeted by the abortion industry. The conversation got so intense that the director had to usher us to the official set and mic us up while we were still talking.

It was exhilarating. For the first time since I’d entered the pro-life space, I finally felt like someone got what I was talking about.

There’s nothing wrong with having different ideas about how to solve a complex problem. The trouble comes when we fail to take other people’s viewpoints into consideration. We need to be willing to engage with those who think differently from us and who have had different experiences so we can understand why we each believe what we believe and figure out a way forward. We don’t have to agree with one another about everything, but we have a responsibility to educate ourselves and to learn from one another.

As you’ll soon discover, Benjamin is a student of history, and like me, he loves research, facts, and figures. He is also a man of integrity who speaks from a firm biblical foundation

resulting from decades of walking with the Lord. And people listen to him. They might not agree with everything he says, but they listen because of his witness.

In this book, Benjamin paints a vivid, fact-driven picture for people who genuinely want to learn more about how we can best advocate for the vulnerable and why abortion disproportionately affects the Black community. Only then will we be able to stop shouting at one another from across the divide and start creating bridges.

And we have *got* to start creating bridges.

We need to create bridges that help get people out of poverty. We need to create bridges to help women facing unplanned pregnancies leave abusive relationships, finish school, find well-paying jobs, and raise their children in safe, healthy neighborhoods. We need to create bridges that make abortion unthinkable and unnecessary.

I learned a lot from Benjamin at that conference, and I hope you will learn from him as well.

Thank you for joining us in this new fight for life. I can't promise you it will be easy. But I can promise you it will be worth it.

Cherilyn Holloway

FOUNDER OF PRO-BLACK PRO-LIFE

INTRODUCTION

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

The best way for pro-life Americans to view the reversal of Roe is not as the beginning of the end of abortion in the United States, but rather as the end of the beginning of a long struggle to remake our nation into a culture that is far more hospitable to mother and child.

DAVID FRENCH

On Friday, June 24, 2022, my wife, Kirsten, and I were getting ready to fly to Dallas to speak at Together '22. The two-day event was organized by Nick Hall, the founder of Pulse, an evangelism movement aimed at reaching young people all over the world for Christ.

I met Nick in 2016 in Washington, DC, when he gathered hundreds of thousands of people on the National Mall for a historic day of unified worship and prayer. Now, six years later, he was commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the 1972 Explo, when Billy Graham preached at—of all places—the Cotton Bowl.

Together '22 was an outdoor event, and Texas was in the middle of a historic heat wave, having already stared down

fourteen straight days of one hundred-plus degree temperatures. With seven kids at home, we knew it would have to be a quick fly-in-and-fly-out event for us. But once Nick told me the venue, I just couldn't say no.

I'd never been to the Cotton Bowl before, but my dad played a football game there once when he was studying at the University of Maryland, and he has worn his Cotton Bowl ring every day since. Well, *almost* every day since.

I have no recollection of this, but legend has it that when I was little, I took Daddy's Cotton Bowl ring and flushed it down the toilet, so the one he currently wears is a replica. I don't know whether this story is true, but with seven kids of my own at home, you'd better believe I keep my Super Bowl ring under lock and key.

At any rate, I'd always wanted to see the stadium, and Daddy once told me he'd accepted Christ while watching a Billy Graham crusade on TV in 1972—possibly that very event—so the nostalgia factor alone made the trip too good to pass up.

Much to Kirsten's chagrin, I've always been a last-minute packer, so while her bag was already sitting by the front door, I was still rummaging around the bedroom trying to get my act together. We weren't going to be gone long, so I just threw a change of clothes and my One Year Bible into an overnight bag and headed to the kitchen to grab a quick bite to eat.

As usual, the kitchen was a hive of activity, with kids scattered everywhere. Yet somehow Kirsten was the picture of serenity in the middle of it all, rinsing off the last of the breakfast dishes and loading them into the dishwasher.

“Hurry up, babe,” she called over her shoulder. “As soon as the sitter gets here, we’ve got to go.”

I took a quick glance at my phone to check the time, and then, sheerly out of habit, I clicked over to Twitter. There it was: “BREAKING: U.S. SUPREME COURT OVERTURNS ROE V. WADE.”¹

With my feet frozen in place, I quickly scrolled down.

“Dobbs opinion makes it official: Roe and Casey overturned.”²

“26 states are expected to ban or severely restrict abortion rights in wake of the Supreme Court’s ruling overturning Roe v. Wade.”³

“Oh, my God,” I said, half praying, half in shock. “It’s over.”

“What’s over, baby?” Kirsten asked.

I looked at her, stunned. “*Roe*. They just overturned it.”

“Are you serious?” She rushed over to look at my phone, and we both stared at the screen in silent disbelief.

Don’t get me wrong—we were thrilled. Like millions of others, we’d been praying for this day for years. And like millions of others, we’d been tipped off that this day was coming.

Just seven weeks earlier, Politico.com had published a leaked draft opinion from Justice Samuel Alito. In it, Alito stated, “*Roe* was egregiously wrong from the start. Its reasoning was exceptionally weak, and the decision has had damaging consequences. And far from bringing about a national settlement of the abortion issue, *Roe* and *Casey* have enflamed debate and deepened division.” He went on to declare that both

“*Roe* and *Casey* must be overruled. The Constitution makes no reference to abortion, and no such right is implicitly protected by any constitutional provision.”⁴

He wasn’t wrong about that. Even Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who had always been a fierce advocate for women’s rights, had taken issue with the constitutionality of *Roe v. Wade*, commenting that *Roe* “ventured too far in the change it ordered and presented an incomplete justification for its action.”⁵

“It is time,” Alito concluded, “to heed the Constitution and return the issue of abortion to the people’s elected representatives.”⁶

It seemed too good to be true. For one thing, leaks like this—especially about rulings as incendiary as *Roe v. Wade*—just didn’t happen. And even if it was true, I had a hard time believing our culture was in a place where a ruling like this could even happen.

A lot of people say that law is downstream of culture, and I think that’s partly true. But I also think that law informs what’s acceptable in a culture. Take same-sex marriage, for instance. Before 2015, ballot measures to restrict same-sex marriage routinely passed by popular vote in several states. But after the Supreme Court established the constitutional right for same-sex couples to marry in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, polling numbers on the constitutionality of gay marriage showed a significant trend upward.⁷ Simply put, people become more accepting of what has been codified into law.

In the case of abortion, which had been legal for almost fifty years, the culture—though deeply divided—seemed to have grown accustomed to it.

Granted, the lower courts had been chipping away at the constitutionality of abortion for years. The *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* decision of 1992, for example, overruled the trimester framework established under *Roe v. Wade* in favor of viability analysis. Then in 2003, President George W. Bush signed into law the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act, effectively prohibiting late-term abortions.⁸ So by the time the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* case came along in 2022, there had been enough incremental shifts to make *Roe v. Wade* vulnerable. But even with the recent appointments of Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett shifting the balance, I really didn't think the Supreme Court would be willing to rock the proverbial boat.

And yet, as I read the leaked draft, I couldn't help but wonder, *What if it's true?*

As the full weight of the decision washed over me, I felt a multitude of emotions. I thought about all the people I'd met since God had swept Kirsten and me onto this pro-life journey—people who had dedicated their lives to caring for the women who walked through the doors of pregnancy centers, fighting for the rights of the preborn in courtrooms, and advocating for the needs of women and children in underserved communities across the country—and about all the lives that would be saved now that *Roe* had been overturned. It was a lot to take in.

Within minutes of the announcement going live, texts started pouring in from friends and colleagues:

Roe is done!

So relieved they didn't back off the draft opinion!

Congratulations on a huge win! This was our Super Bowl today!

Thank you all for having the courage to stand for life and be the wind that brought the change!

Headlines and hallelujahs continued to flit across the screen, cementing that the decision we'd been waiting for and praying for was finally a reality. As much as I appreciated everyone's excitement and enthusiasm, all I could think was, *Now what?*

My mind began to recall numerous conversations I'd had with women and men from various viewpoints about the complexities surrounding abortion. While the distinction between choosing life and death is, in my mind, abundantly clear, I also knew about the web of relational, economic, and emotional factors that were not likely to be addressed with the repealing of *Roe*.

Unfortunately, Kirsten and I were too rushed to unpack the matter more that morning. But once we were in the air and Kirsten had fallen asleep, I pulled my One Year Bible out of my bag to spend some much-needed time in God's Word. I wish I could say that I'm always up-to-date, but as sometimes happens, I had fallen a few days behind in my daily readings. Now more than ever, I felt the need to re-center

myself. I flipped to where I'd left off—June 21—and for the second time that morning, I was stunned into silence.

The day's reading was Psalm 139. I knew those verses like the back of my hand.

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
 and knit me together in my mother's womb.
 Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!
 Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I
 know it.
 You watched me as I was being formed in utter
 seclusion,
 as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.
 You saw me before I was born.
 Every day of my life was recorded in your book.
 Every moment was laid out
 before a single day had passed.

PSALM 139:3-18

I couldn't believe it. It felt like God was directly affirming this fight for life that people had been pouring their lives into for so many years. It seemed he was speaking directly to me, reminding me of his heart for the most vulnerable among us and urging me on in the fight.

Something like this had happened to me one other time. It was back in 2020, when I was flying to Florida to record a program about faith and football with Coach Tony Dungy. We were talking about the intersection of faith and justice, and normally I'd be all over that. However, we were only a

few months removed from the murder of George Floyd, and the latest reckoning with ongoing racism across the country was still sky-high. I was a little nervous about finding a way to faithfully and honestly delve into such a traumatic topic.

Then I opened my One Year Bible and found Psalm 16:8 waiting for me, like a balm:

I have set the LORD continually before me;
because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.
(ESV)

The title of our discussion that day, which we'd chosen months prior, was "Unshaken." In that still moment, it felt like God saw all we were carrying and was reminding me that he was my true foundation, my refuge in a discouraging time. At 36,000 feet in the air, I could sense the Spirit giving me courage to speak truth and grace into this situation. We really do serve an amazing Lord.

By the time we left Dallas that evening, the online frenzy had reached fever pitch. While Kirsten and I were onstage talking about the joys of parenting and the importance of fostering a sense of justice and empathy in our kids, people all over the country were taking to social media to celebrate, debate, grieve, and denounce the Supreme Court's decision.

The spectrum of emotions couldn't have been wider.

On one end were the pro-lifers, who were ecstatic, posting

videos and selfies outside the Supreme Court, cheering, hugging, and crying tears of joy and relief.

On the other end were members of the pro-choice movement, many of whom were understandably incensed. Some felt betrayed. They firmly believed their constitutional rights had been violated by the decision. Others were fearful that this might lead to the reversal of other rulings, especially those that protected rights to contraception, interracial relationships, and same-sex marriage. The anger and anxiety were palpable.

And the vitriol was by no means limited to the Internet. In the days and weeks following the leak, protesters had been vandalizing and, in some cases, setting fire to pro-life offices and pregnancy resource centers across the country. Fencing was erected around the Supreme Court Building to keep protesters at bay. Several justices and their families had received death threats, and one irate activist showed up outside Justice Kavanaugh's house brandishing a gun.

Amid the chaos, others took a more measured approach. One of these voices was from Dr. Tony Evans, who celebrated the victory for life but also encouraged people to show compassion to those who disagreed with the ruling. He wrote, "It is time for God's people to lead the way in promoting a 'Whole Life Agenda,' from the womb to the tomb. . . . While doing so, may we never forget to show compassion to those who have experienced abortion as well as kindness to those who believe differently than we do on this issue. . . . We, as the body of Christ, should come alongside those in need through spiritual and tangible support."⁹

Likewise, Destiny Herndon-De La Rosa, who founded

New Wave Feminists, a pro-life group advocating for new mothers and mothers-to-be, tempered her tearful celebration with a reminder to other pro-life supporters that there is still more work to be done.

“Legally, I understand [this] is a very, very big deal,” Herndon-De La Rosa said. “The systems that are currently in place are not set up to support women in the future. And that is a really, really scary thing. . . . A terrified woman who is in a desperate situation, she doesn’t care what her congressman thinks about abortion. . . . She doesn’t even really care if it’s legal, because she feels absolutely trapped and terrified.” She went on to say that the only antidote is to change these systems so a woman’s life “is not over with an unintended pregnancy. . . . And that child is going to grow up and thrive, not just survive, because it is living below the poverty line with no access to education or health care or any of these other things that are vital for their development.”¹⁰

Aside from those who were threatening violence and shouting obscenities, I felt for all of them.

I felt a sense of solemnity for those who felt as though they had been assaulted by the court’s decision.

I felt compassion for the women who were legitimately frightened and felt as though they had lost their autonomy.

And I felt a deep sense of appreciation for those like Evans and Herndon-De La Rosa, who were able to see past the politics and the hostility to the humanity underneath, recognizing that the court’s ruling—encouraging as it was—was just the first step in what is still a long and arduous journey ahead.

This book is about that journey.

There’s no question that June 24, 2022, was a day to

be celebrated, but as political commentator and columnist David French rightly pointed out, “The simple truth is that if the pro-life movement wants to *end* abortion, it has to do much more work than merely *banning* abortion.”¹¹

In fact, abortion hasn’t been banned. The decision has simply been passed on to the states, where a patchwork of abortion laws will undoubtedly create a precarious web of state-by-state regulation for years to come.

Women will still have unintended pregnancies and seek solutions. And the 76 percent of abortive mothers who claim they would prefer to parent if their circumstances were different will still face barriers that act as roadblocks to life.¹²

Black women in particular face unique challenges, as disparities in health, wealth, housing, employment, and education make the Black community disproportionately susceptible to the stain of abortion.

As individuals and as a nation, we need to better understand the factors that created these barriers and work together to dismantle them. In doing so, we’ll create new pathways for life.

As believers, we must commit ourselves to not just advocating for preborn children in the womb but supporting both mother and child—before, during, and after birth.

As a church, we need to become a safe haven, a refuge, a place where the most vulnerable can turn—not just for spiritual help, but for emotional, material, and financial support too.

We need to chart a new path forward.

For half a century, we have fought to protect the sanctity

of human life. The battle over the constitutionality of *Roe v. Wade* may be over, but now a new fight has begun.

It's not a fight over political partisanship or constitutional constructs. It's a fight for justice—for the preborn, for the poor, and for everyone who bears the image of God.

It's a fight not just to return the debate over abortion back to the states but to create a culture where abortion is unthinkable and unnecessary.

It's a fight that will spill out of the courtrooms and into the churches, schools, and underserved neighborhoods of red and blue states alike.

I believe we *can* make abortion both unthinkable and unnecessary, but it's going to take all of us working together. It's not enough to place legal restrictions on abortion. Our higher, more complete calling must be to address the factors that drive women to choose abortion by removing the obstacles that stand in the way of choosing life. We must dismantle and make right a protracted history of economic marginalization and oppression.

The path ahead will be a steep one. But I believe it will be worth the climb. Because nothing is more worthwhile or more sacred than life.

CHAPTER 1

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

I would unite with anybody to do right; and with nobody to do wrong.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

During my sixteen seasons in the NFL, I had the privilege of playing under some of the most accomplished head coaches in the game: Bill Belichick, Sean Payton, and John Harbaugh. Each had his own unique style and strengths, but one thing they all had in common was that none of them had a problem calling people out when they made a mistake. This was especially true of Bill Belichick.

There were times we would beat a team handily, sometimes by as many as thirty points, and the ongoing joke among my teammates would be, “What is Bill gonna fuss at us for tomorrow?” It didn’t matter that we won or that we’d played a nearly flawless game—Bill was always able to pinpoint something that could have been done better.

Whether you were Tom Brady or the fifty-third man on the roster, if you did something wrong at practice or in a game, you would hear about it—often in front of everyone at a team meeting. Bill held every player on the team to the same high standard, no exceptions and no excuses.

So in the spirit of Coach Belichick, let's jump right in and acknowledge the elephant in the room. What business does a retired football player have speaking into the pro-life discussion?

It's all right. I get that question a lot, and while I realize many people consider this to be a women's issue, there are several reasons that I, as a man, have joined the ranks of those speaking into it.

For one thing, there are currently seven children (and holding) in the Watson household, each one of whom has forty-six chromosomes, twenty-three of which they got from my wife, Kirsten, and twenty-three of which they got from me. So from a strictly biological standpoint, men have an equal share in the procreation of every child.

Also—while I am by no means saying this is right—historically speaking, when it comes to politics and the law, men have held the majority of the power. Case in point: there have been 115 Supreme Court justices in US history, and all but seven of them have been white men.¹ Women didn't even hold a seat on the Supreme Court until Sandra Day O'Connor was confirmed in 1981, and there was not a Black woman represented until 2022, when Ketanji Brown Jackson became the first Black female justice in the Court's 232-year history.² It was seven men who voted *Roe v. Wade* into law in 1973, and five men and one woman who voted to overturn it in 2022.

I'm not trying to quell the voice of a woman speaking out on her own behalf. It's vital that women *do* advocate for themselves. But given that it's still predominantly men making the decisions, it seems to me that the most effective way to even the playing field is for men with like-minded ideologies to advocate for equality and justice along with and on behalf of women.

In many ways and for many reasons, men have championed abortion on demand in this country. They—*we*—have led the campaign to legalize this practice, harming women along the way, framing the unnatural as choice and freedom while ultimately seeking to benefit our own interests and protect our own passivity. It was a man, Dr. Alan Guttmacher, who first introduced abortion to Planned Parenthood.³

Too often, men have remained silent on topics that matter most, believing the common assertions that abortion is a women's issue. I have even encountered men who claim abortion is a necessary good to protect against future suffering or to keep other social ills at bay.

But as a man, I take very seriously the words written in Proverbs 31. Most people are familiar with the description of the Proverbs 31 woman, but earlier in the chapter, the author (King Lemuel) describes what his mother taught him. I suppose you could say this is what it means to be a Proverbs 31 man:

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves;
 ensure justice for those being crushed.
 Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless,
 and see that they get justice.

Isaiah 1:17 says, “Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s case” (ESV). Over and over in Scripture, God challenges us to protect widows, foreigners, the young, and the vulnerable. In fact, the truth of the gospel, in its totality, challenges each one of us to humbly ask God to show us places where we can make a difference.⁴

To that end, the issue of abortion is very much intertwined with others of equal importance to me, like poverty, racism, and the trafficking of children. The way I see it, these are all matters of justice.

Over the course of my career, Kirsten and I have been introduced to individuals and organizations on the front lines of some of the worst ongoing human rights violations in the world today. Through those partnerships, I’ve seen firsthand how poverty, inequality, fear, and desperation can push people into unthinkable choices.

I traveled to the Lebanon-Syria border in the spring of 2017 with a pastor-friend of mine to witness the impact of the war in Syria. Hundreds of thousands of refugees had fled the violence, leaving behind their homes and possessions. We met with Lebanese pastors who had opened their church doors to families fleeing violence and visited primary schools where children were trying to continue their education in an unfamiliar land. I remember seeing a student’s drawing taped on the wall, depicting him and his family running from tanks and bombs.

Sitting on the floor in the primitive conditions of a tent settlement, I spoke to a father about his harrowing experience. His wife sat by his side as their children peered through the sheet that served as a door.

Recalling the dangerous journey to safety across the border, he said through our interpreter, “As a father, I just want my family to be safe. We go to sleep hoping we will wake up back home. But we don’t know if we will ever return.”

My heart and mind drifted thousands of miles away to my own family and how, like him, I would willingly endure extreme hardship to keep them safe. No matter the cause of suffering—war, sexual abuse, food poverty, or discrimination—human suffering should upset us, and even offend us.

So while a lot of people define pro-life as protecting the preborn, I believe being pro-life means caring about life, period, and recognizing that *everyone* has the right to flourish and be protected, regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic standing.

To echo pro-life activist Cherilyn Holloway, being pro-life means that “we care about the life that is in the womb, but we also care about the man on the street. We also care about these children and where they’re getting their education and health care from and Grandma and Grandpa who are entering end-of-life care and that they’re treated with dignity and respect. . . . These are all whole-life issues for us.”⁵

Simply put, every life bears the image of God, so every life has value. For me, being pro-life means advocating for *every* life—especially those who cannot advocate for themselves.

There’s one more reason I choose to lend my voice to this issue.

Since I retired from the NFL in 2020, I’ve been doing weekly game analysis for the SEC Network. Normally I’m in the studio in Charlotte, but when the College Football Playoff rolls around, I get to go on the road to recap the games on-site.

In December of 2021, I was in Miami for the Orange Bowl, and the network set us up in the main concourse so they could show fans walking by as we talked about the game. I had my earpiece out for a few minutes between setups.

Someone walked by and said, “Hey, Benjamin, I really appreciate your stance on life, man.”

Mind you, this wasn’t a political rally or a church event—it was a Georgia-Michigan game. (Georgia won, by the way—go Dawgs!) And the thing is, I get comments like this quite often.

A few months ago, a woman who works in Silicon Valley messaged me to say how much she appreciated my speaking out for life because she couldn’t. “I can’t even retweet or repost anything about this,” she said, “or I could get into trouble.”

Unsolicited comments like these are encouraging to me, because there are a lot of people out there who, for one reason or another, are unable to speak out on issues that are important to them. So if I can use my platform to advocate on their behalf, you’d better believe I’m going to do it.

That said, I get why people might question my involvement. For what it’s worth, this wasn’t part of my original game plan either.

A MATTER OF BLACK AND WHITE

When I was a kid, all I wanted was to be a football player and a missionary. And an astronaut. And president of the United States. But a pro-life activist? It never even crossed my mind.

As the oldest of six kids, I grew up in a home that was

unquestionably pro-life, though I don't remember that exact terminology being used. What I do remember was my parents making this message abundantly clear: "You care for other people because all people are valuable in the eyes of God."

My father was a parole officer and later a pastor, and with eight of us under one roof, every dollar was taken into account. Yet my parents always had an open-door policy, welcoming others in, giving faithfully, and serving as counselors and leaders in our community and church family.

For most of my childhood, we lived in all-Black neighborhoods and were members of predominantly Black churches. But in my early years I attended a white Christian school, and we would visit an all-white church on occasion. So from as far back as I can remember, I was aware of the economic disparity between Black and white.

This disparity was on full display every morning as we drove to school. To earn income for our tuition, my mother drove the school bus. Because she had to pick up kids from all over the city, we drove through every type of neighborhood you can imagine—wealthy, middle class, and impoverished; some all-Black and some all-white.

I remember one neighborhood in particular called Ghent. It was in a very well-to-do area of Norfolk, Virginia, with a lot of expensive homes, and it was almost exclusively white. Over time I learned that Ghent used to be all Black, but the city stopped taking care of the roads, sidewalks, and sewers until it fell into a state of disrepair. All the Black families were forced out through eminent domain, the old houses were bulldozed, and larger, more expensive homes were built—ones that only affluent white people could afford.

Every day as we wound our way through town, I would look out the school bus windows at the Black neighborhoods, which were tired, dilapidated, and worn. Then I'd see the newer, cleaner, decidedly nicer white neighborhoods like Ghent, and I struggled to make sense of it. I knew that not every job paid the same, but still . . .

I saw how hard my parents and neighbors worked. So why did we live in such different places? It just didn't make sense. Nor did it seem fair. If we were all, as my parents had always impressed upon us, equally valuable in the eyes of God, why did some people seem worse off than others for no reason I could discern other than the color of their skin?

Then, when I was ten, I watched Rodney King get savagely beaten by four white police officers on TV. That, more than anything, entrenched in me the reality that there are two markedly different worlds out there.

By the time I was sixteen, I was keenly aware that as a Black person, who you are and how you look can be a problem simply by virtue of caste.

I remember my dad sitting me down and earnestly telling me, "Benjamin, policemen have a tough job to do, and you never know what kind of day they've already had. So if a police officer pulls you over, don't make any sudden movements. Show them your hands and be respectful, because you might not get the same grace somebody else would."

Daddy's experience as a parole officer aside, I'd seen enough lack of parity between Black and white by that point to know he was right.

Prolific author and sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois talks about what he calls the "double-consciousness" of Black America:

feeling fully American but at the same time not, and seeing yourself not only from your own perspective but also in the way others perceive you.

“It is a peculiar sensation,” he said, “this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”⁶

Blackness is beautiful, but realizing you are a member of the “other” brings both pride and precaution. You are forced to reckon with the perception that white America, as the majority culture, may have of your ilk. You try to maintain a sense of dignity, strength, and pride, all the while grappling with what feels like visitation rights in the land of your birth.

One summer, my father took our family to visit some of the old Civil War battlefields. Daddy was a history buff, and I vividly remember a framed painting that hung on our living room wall depicting one of those battles. It often captured my gaze, and I would imagine the invisible heaviness each man in the scene must have carried alongside his bayonet.

The fighting men in blue and gray were engaged in the bloody fury and confusion of combat, yet glory rose from the carnage and death. For the 54th Massachusetts (the first Black regiment organized in the North), it was a willing exchange to lay down one’s life on the sands of Morris Island, South Carolina, to secure freedom for themselves and their descendants.

That summer, as my family walked the grounds where blood was shed to help free the enslaved, I felt an increasing sense of affirmation that no matter what I eventually became—a football player, a missionary, or even an astronaut—I would fight for the oppressed, the outcast, and the voiceless. In short, I wanted to be an abolitionist.

So really, my involvement in the pro-life movement started with a passion for justice.

Then came Grace.

THE GIFT OF GRACE

I remember it like it was yesterday.

It was the winter of 2008, the middle of my fifth season with the Patriots. Kirsten and I had been married for three years, and she was seven months pregnant with our first child.

We had taken advantage of a bye week to spend some time with my parents in Rock Hill, South Carolina. As it happened, a friend of Kirsten's who lived just half an hour away, in Charlotte, had her own 3D/4D ultrasound business as a service and outreach to expectant mothers in the area. She asked if we would be interested in getting a scan.

We'd already had a regular ultrasound, so it wasn't necessary, but as first-time parents, we couldn't resist getting a sneak peek. Besides, it's never too early to get a jump on that baby album.

We had a name picked out already. Well . . . Kirsten did. As soon as we found out we were having a girl, we went back and forth and nearly chose another name. But one day while

she was listening to a new rendition of “Amazing Grace” (she never was a fan of the slow version), Kirsten felt in her spirit, *Her name is Grace*.

Personally, I thought it sounded like an old lady’s name, but Kirsten was certain. The more I considered it, the more I began to love it as well. Ephesians 2:8 says, “By grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (NIV).

A gift from God. It’s hard to argue with that.

When we got to the office, Kirsten’s friend ushered us into a welcoming little room with a sofa, a comfortable chair for me to sit in, warm lighting, and soft music playing in the background. It was a totally different experience from when we got our eighteen-week ultrasound, which was in a more clinical setting. At that appointment, the focus was on taking measurements and checking vitals. This, however, was an *experience*.

I sat next to Kirsten, holding her hand, while we waited for the first images to appear on the screen in front of us. Honestly, I wasn’t sure what to expect. Our first ultrasound had looked like a staticky black-and-white blur that the sonographer had to interpret for us. How she was able to discern arms and legs amid all the pulsating shadows, I have no idea.

At first all we could make out was a large sepia-colored mass.

“That’s the back,” our friend said, adjusting the screen slightly. “Let’s see if we can’t get this little one to turn around.” She began gently pressing on Kirsten’s stomach, and we both watched the screen as her hands deftly rotated the mass, little by little.

Then, all at once, we saw our daughter's face. She looked almost as though she were made of clay, but I could clearly make out every facial feature, as crisp and clear as if I were holding her in my arms.

Kirsten and I couldn't speak. We just stared at the screen with tears in our eyes as our little gift from God rocked back and forth, her legs flexing, her tiny fists clenching and unclenching.

It's difficult to describe—that feeling of seeing your child for the first time. Is it wonder? Is it joy? Is it awe? The answer is yes.

I was already excited about starting a family. I had even gotten over the fact that our baby wasn't a boy (four of them coming soon enough). But watching this extraordinary little being moving in the womb felt at once exhilarating and terrifying.

As the oldest of six, I can remember at least four of my siblings coming home from the hospital. And of course, I'd helped a little with feedings and changings, so it wasn't as if babies were foreign to me. But staring into the face of your own child? There simply aren't words to describe it.

Then she yawned.

And so did I.

“Did you see that?” I asked, laughing through my tears. “Grace just yawned, and I yawned right back! How crazy is that?”

There was no question about it: this wasn't just a collection of cells or a hazy shadow fluttering on a screen. This was a real live human being. This was our daughter. This was Grace.

As we walked back to our car that afternoon, Kirsten smiled at me. “Wow, I just got to see my daughter before I get to hold my daughter.” Then she said, “Baby, I want to find a way to provide this for other women. Every mom should be able to have this experience.”

I knew exactly how she felt. When you have an experience like that, you want to share it with everyone, and you don’t want money or accessibility to be an obstacle.

Beyond desire, though, we had no idea how to move forward. Kirsten’s friend had purchased her own equipment and was renting out the office space. But getting the equipment solved only part of the problem. Because 3D ultrasounds are an elective procedure, they aren’t covered by insurance. And they’re expensive.

Kirsten was right. Being able to see your preborn child and form an emotional bond with them shouldn’t be a privilege reserved for people of a certain financial standing who have access to a private provider. It should be a viable option for everyone. The question was, *How?*

LIFE FINDS A WAY

In 2016—eight years, four more kids, three seasons with the Browns, and three seasons with the Saints later—I found myself in Baltimore playing for the Ravens. I had just written a book called *Under Our Skin*, about racial injustice in America, and I’d been asked to do an interview with a pregnancy resource center that wanted to hear my thoughts on how race factors into the abortion discussion.

To be honest, I hadn’t spent an extensive amount of time

examining the history of abortion. But I had done research on the impact of racial injustice, and it was difficult to ignore the link between the two. I knew, for example, that compared to other ethnic groups, abortion disproportionately reduces the Black population, that the American eugenics movement was the ground from which the abortion industry blossomed, and that abortion access hadn't solved any of the socioeconomic issues Black people continue to face. The research I'd done indicated that groups like Planned Parenthood intentionally promote abortion to minorities.

I knew from both inquiry and observation that the odds are inordinately stacked against Black women, and even though the notion of deliberately terminating a pregnancy runs counter to everything I believe, I'm sympathetic to what many of these women are facing. Regardless of a person's skin color, the decision to willfully terminate the life of your own child is an unthinkable difficult and painful one to have to make, and I would never be so bold as to presume that women in this position are having abortions flippantly.

I shared these thoughts in the interview, adding that Kirsten and I were thinking about different ways we could use our foundation to support the pro-life cause.⁷

The next thing I knew, the article had gone viral. It was picked up by MSN, BET, CBN, Fox News, Sporting News, the *Christian Post*, the *Drudge Report*, the *Washington Times*, and *Christian Today*. As it turns out, when you're Black and in the NFL, and you start talking about abortion, people tend to take notice.

Shortly after this interview, I received an email from Jeanne Mancini, the president of March for Life, asking

if I would speak at the upcoming March for Life event in Washington, DC.

I had never even heard of the March for Life, but I didn't hesitate to accept. How could I say no? Not only had I just made an open offer in the interview, but for the past eight years, Kirsten and I had been seeking opportunities to advocate for justice and serve marginalized men, women, and children in the US and around the world. Our foundation had been created specifically to bring the hope and love of Jesus Christ to those who need it most—first and foremost by meeting their physical needs. What greater physical need is there than to simply be allowed to live?

Believe me when I say that I had no idea how big the March for Life was. When I arrived, I was shocked to discover there were thousands of people gathered on the National Mall that day. And it wasn't just women. There were countless men, too, plus buses full of teenagers and young kids who had come from all over the country.

With all the people cheering and holding up signs, the event almost had a pep rally feel. I have to admit, that threw me a little. I'd expected the tone to be more solemn. After all, we were talking about the loss of more than 60 million pre-born children. And while there were small pockets of people gathered in prayer and tearstained faces dotting the crowd, there was still an undeniable feeling of hope.

There's power that comes from knowing you're not alone—that there are other people out there fighting alongside you—fighting *for* you. It's a reminder that you're not by

yourself. And when you're united together, you're capable of more than you could ever accomplish on your own.

I'd experienced a similar feeling many times during my NFL career, but this was altogether different. This wasn't just a game. This was literally a matter of life and death.

I began my speech by quoting one of my favorite Scripture passages, Jeremiah 9:23-24 (NASB): "Thus says the LORD, 'Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on the earth; for I delight in these things.'"

I encouraged everyone to remember the power of loving-kindness and to empathize with the men and women who had made the decision to terminate their pregnancies, regardless of whether they'd done so willingly or under duress. I expressed my hope that pro-life be not only a political stance but a way of life, encompassing the victims of sex trafficking and abuse, the hungry and the poor, the disadvantaged as well as the elite. I reminded them of our biblical commitment to justice—that those who take innocent life be held accountable, that lives never be forgotten under the guise of choice, and that we stay the course on days when the fire inside us burns, as well as on days when the ember flickers. I acknowledged that while this battle may seem never-ending, the end goal is more than worth the effort.

Finally, I issued a special call to the men in the crowd—and there were many. I told them that it was past time for us to be the leaders, caretakers, and providers we were meant to

be. That we as men must stand up for the lives of the innocent and their mothers in crisis. And that as important as women have been in championing this cause, we men must rise up and lead the charge. We must be silent no more.⁸

After that event, the floodgates opened. I started receiving speaking opportunities from other pro-life organizations, pregnancy resource centers, fundraisers, and dozens of other events.

That's when Kirsten finally got her wish.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

In 2018, I was invited to speak at the third annual Evangelicals for Life Conference in Washington, DC. The event was sponsored by Focus on the Family and the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), and as providence would have it, the topic of one of the presentations that night was a partnership between Focus on the Family's Option Ultrasound Program and ERLC's Psalm 139 Project, both of which support expectant moms by placing 3D/4D ultrasound machines in pregnancy resource centers.

Kirsten was there with me, and as soon as the presentation ended, we looked at each other and said, "We're doing this!"

Several months later, we donated our first 3D/4D ultrasound machine to the Severna Park Pregnancy Clinic just outside Baltimore, in one of the country's most abortion-friendly states.⁹

When Kirsten and I toured the facility, we learned that the building's previous tenant was, of all things, an abortion clinic.

“When we walked [in], we found they had left overnight,” the CEO of the clinic explained. “There were still bloody sponges on the floor, bloodstains on the floor, client files they had left behind. They didn’t close; they simply moved to a very discreet location where they wouldn’t have people out front protesting and holding signs and praying.”¹⁰

She also told us that because the old clinic never changed the contact info on their website, they still received thousands of calls every year from women wanting to know how much an abortion would cost. Think about the gracious irony in that: calling to arrange for an abortion and finding a pro-life organization on the other end! I love when God does things like that.

The final stop on our tour was the prayer room. I was picturing a warm, welcoming space with pictures on the walls, lush carpeting, comfortable chairs, a coffee table, some bookshelves, and maybe even a sofa where people could come to reflect and pray in peace. Instead, we were ushered into a large, open room with a dingy tile floor and a handful of wooden chairs lining stark white walls. The only splash of color was a rectangular Persian throw rug, much too small for the room, sitting curiously off-center.

On closer inspection, I noticed that the walls were covered with handwritten notes—Scripture passages, in fact. As Kirsten and I made our way around the room, reading the hand-scribbled verses, our guide shared that the room we were standing in had once been the scene of countless late-term abortions. She lifted the edge of the Persian rug, revealing a faded yet unmistakable bloodstain on the tile, a somber reminder of what had once taken place within these stark

walls. This room had purposely been left “as is” as a remembrance of “what once was.”

When the battle becomes too much to bear, the staff comes to this space to pray, mourn, read, and recharge, surrounded by walls that once witnessed unrelenting death but now behold words of abundant life.

Since then, Kirsten and I have placed three more ultrasound machines in pregnancy clinics in cities we’ve lived in during my NFL career, in addition to my hometown. And though I don’t have quantifiable statistics, we have learned through our various partners that many women who come to pregnancy centers considering an abortion experience a change of heart after seeing their child in vivid detail on the screen. For them, seeing truly is believing.

MAN ON A MISSION

Shortly after I retired from the NFL (the first time) in January 2019, the state of New York passed the Reproductive Health Act, essentially extending abortion rights up until birth. This news sent shock waves throughout the entire country.

Prior to the bill’s passage into law, abortion was legal only during the first twenty-four weeks of pregnancy, after which a woman could get an abortion only if her life was at risk. Under the new law, a woman could get an abortion after twenty-four weeks—not just if her life was threatened but also if carrying the child to term was deemed detrimental to her health. The law also decriminalized abortion, eliminating the threat of prosecution for medical professionals who perform abortions. Further, it opened the door for nurse

practitioners, physician assistants, and licensed midwives to perform abortions.¹¹

Illinois quickly adopted similar laws, with Governor J. B. Pritzker vowing to make Illinois the most “abortion-friendly” state in the nation.¹² Since then, other states have followed suit.

With things heating up in the legislature and an election year around the corner, I was anxious to take a more active role in advocating for the preborn. I kept asking the Lord, “What else can I do? How can I help?”

A few weeks later, I got a call from a movie producer named Chad Bonham. I’d met Chad a few years earlier when he was working on a project highlighting Christian athletes, and we’d kept in touch ever since. Now he was working on a documentary about the impact of abortion on America. He’d seen some of the press Kirsten and I had been receiving for the ultrasound donations and wanted to know if I would be interested in getting involved. Needless to say, I was.

I spent the next several months talking with politicians, physicians, lawyers, advocates, and activists on both sides of the issue to paint a comprehensive picture of where the US stood on abortion. I discovered that the topic is far more layered and complex than many people realize. There are a multitude of factors—relational, economic, educational, political, and religious—that affect the way people feel about abortion, and the vast majority of people fall somewhere between the extremes. Yet we have a tendency to zero in on the most polarized ends of the spectrum, which ends up demonizing the other side, shutting down dialogue, and pushing us even further apart.

Our goal with the documentary was to model a civil discourse—to show the humanity behind the headlines and to model empathy. Whether or not we agree with someone’s position, they are God’s image bearers and deserving of dignity and respect, just like we are.

That’s what it’s been about from the beginning for me: valuing and protecting life—*all* life.

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

When we look at Scripture, we tend to think that Moses always knew he was going to get people out of Egypt or that Peter had a pretty good idea from the beginning that he’d be called to spread the gospel. In actuality, however, God chose specific moments for specific people to speak and act on his behalf. The rest of the time they were off doing their own thing. That’s what happened to me: I was going along, playing football, raising a family, and serving our local community as best I could. And then . . . *bam!*

If you’d told me when I was growing up that one day I’d be speaking at a March for Life rally in Washington, DC, donating ultrasound machines to pregnancy clinics, filming a documentary about abortion, or writing a book on how to make abortion unthinkable and unnecessary in a post-*Roe* world, I would have laughed and said, “Nah, not me, man. I’m gonna play in the NFL.” The thought that I might do both never even occurred to me.

I’ve often said that God doesn’t need football, but he can use it. I truly believe that God has put me in this particular space at this particular moment for a particular reason.

I don't know when this season will end, but I do know that for now, this is what he wants me to do, and I intend to be faithful to that call.

So now you know why I'm here. And no matter what has brought you here, and no matter where you stand in the pro-life/pro-choice conversation, my hope is that this book will be just that: a conversation. One about justice, dignity, empathy, taking responsibility, and coming together to make a positive impact in the lives of others.

Shortly before I began working on the documentary, Kirsten and I welcomed twin boys into our family. One day I came home from filming to find a young woman sitting in our living room. Her name was Nikki, and she was Kirsten's nurse practitioner and lactation consultant. After Kirsten introduced us, we spent some time talking, and before I knew it, I'd asked her to take part in the documentary.

As a Black woman, she understood the myriad issues that have plagued Black people for centuries and have made Black women particularly vulnerable to abortion. As a health-care worker, she was in the fight. She wasn't sitting in an ivory tower or drafting legislation. She was right there in the midst of it, working with pregnant women, watching them make decisions, and helping them take care of their babies. She loved life and wanted people to parent, but she also understood the very real, complicated reasons that drive some women to have an abortion.

When she sat down to talk with me on camera, I asked her how she felt we could best come together and have this

conversation. She looked at me, smiled, and said, “First, we need to calm down. *Everybody* needs to calm down. And when I say ‘calm down,’ [I mean] putting down those extremes. Because if we come to the table not being open at all, we’re going to be in our little lanes, and we’re not going to want to try to understand what the other person is trying to say.”¹³

She’s right. As living beings, the issue of life is inherently important to us. That’s why we become so emotionally charged whenever human flourishing is at stake, why we mourn when we lose loved ones, and why we’re saddened whenever a tragedy occurs on our doorstep or around the world. However, if we hope to achieve any semblance of mutual understanding, we must engage one another with civility.

Now is not the time for extremism, for focusing on one side and one side alone. What we need is to come together in humility to honor, protect, and ensure the best possible life for both mother *and* child, not just for one or the other—or worse, one at the expense of the other. And we need to ensure the best possible life not just before birth but all the way to the tomb.

That’s what it means to do justice.

That’s why I take this issue so seriously.

And that’s why I know that we still have a lot of work to do.