

Dear Friend,

I'm so pleased that ERI is now sending out monthly newsletters!

When people ask me to tell them the most important thing I've learned about dialoguing with pro-choice people, my answer is always that we need to understand what the person means before we start arguing with her. This requires a great deal of patience. My impulse is to jump in prematurely because I usually feel like I understand the person before I really do because they usually sound really similar to someone I've talked to before. But just because they use the same talking points as someone else, that doesn't mean they mean the same thing. If we're going to be good ambassadors for Christ, we must respond to *people*, not merely their *statements*.

In this month's newsletter my brother and colleague Josh shares the fruits he saw recently after he labored to understand someone who said something incredibly offensive.

- Tim

As you may have heard, the Twittersverse exploded in late August when Richard Dawkins tweeted that it would be immoral to *not* abort a baby diagnosed with Down Syndrome. He wrote a blog post clarifying his views the following day, and I wrote an article to help pro-life people understand what Richard Dawkins actually believes. I explained that while his view is offensive and I disagree with it, it does follow naturally from Dawkins' beliefs that first-trimester babies are not yet persons.

Here is an excerpt from the article on why I wrote it:

Just like in any dialogue with a pro-choice person, we should start by trying to understand Dawkin's views, and after what I've seen on social media in the last week, I'm concerned that many pro-life people don't get where he's coming from. We should be trying to figure out the answer to this question: *Why is Dawkins particularly in favor of abortion when the child is diagnosed with DS?* (I'll give you a hint: It's not that he hates people with DS)

I strongly disagree with Dawkins' views on abortion, but now that I've read his article, I'm going to try to explain why I believe his view isn't as offensive as his first tweet was. One of the reasons I launched Equal Rights Institute is to help pro-life and pro-choice people to have better dialogues. **I believe a necessary condition of having a good dialogue is accurately understanding what the person in front of you actually believes,** which is rarely clear in the beginning of a conversation. I think trying to get into Dawkins' shoes will be a good exercise.

To read the rest of the article, go to EqualRightsInstitute.com/Dawkins.

The day after I published the article, Richard Dawkins himself retweeted it to his one-million followers. As you can imagine, our Twitter feeds blew up and I began engaging philosophical atheists on the question of abortion. Ultimately the article got more than 7,000 views and hundreds of tweets and Facebook shares.

Even more gratifying were some of the comments we got under the article:



Benjamin  · 5 days ago

It pains me a little to have to admit that the most charitable, most fair-minded, most accurate, most logical and least emotional analysis of the whole Richard-Dawkins-on-Downs-Syndrome-and-abortion furore has come from a “pro-life” religious activist. Thankyou.

4  |  · [Reply](#) · [Share](#)



Matthew · 4 days ago

As a pro-choice person, I've always believed that the pro-life crowd make their arguments with the best of intentions. I very much appreciate your attempt here to see the best in the person with whom you disagree. Would that we could all approach contentious issues in this manner. Bravo.

4  |  · [Reply](#) · [Share](#)



Josh Brahm  [→ Matthew](#) · 4 days ago

Thanks so much, Matthew. That means a lot. I believe if everybody on both sides tried to see the others argument in its best light, we would find more truth, and the process would be a lot more fun as well. (Albeit, it would also be intellectually harder, but I'm okay with that.)

2  |  · [Reply](#) · [Share](#)

The approach of the article was different than what pro-choice people would expect from a pro-life advocate, but look at the impact it had on pro-choice people and the opportunities for conversations it gave us! It takes a lot of patience and discipline to put this approach into practice, but it is worth it because the results are so much better than the results I used to get with my old approach. I used to post Facebook statuses and tweets along the lines of, “Here’s what this pro-choice person said, and here’s why that doesn’t make sense.” Those Facebook statuses would get support from other pro-life people, but pro-choice people never responded. They probably rolled their eyes and moved on. My tweets linking to the Dawkins piece had a different result. Many pro-choice people actually considered the piece, and they reacted positively to it. People who do not generally read pro-life articles got to see the pro-life movement a little differently.

When you go out of your way to understand people, even when they offend you, they notice. You help create an environment where you can have meaningful conversations with others, which does not happen if you just follow the temptation to dismiss their view. *Our goal is to train the pro-life movement, especially college students, to be able to create an environment for dialogue that actually changes people.*

Thank you so much for your prayer and financial support.

Josh Brahm, for the ERI Staff

P.S. Last month my dad (Rich) was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer called mantle cell lymphoma. This next year is going to include chemotherapy and various other treatments through a clinical trial at Stanford. We would really appreciate your prayers both for my dad’s healing, and for strength for my whole family to get through this difficult time.