

# INTRODUCTION

Unlike most “pro-life” discussions, the courses provided by Hope and Grace Academy are not about philosophizing over the problems of sexual immorality and abortion and what a mess the world and the church are in because of these things. Instead, our approach is to return to God’s intent for humanity, understand the reasons we are in such peril, and provide practical solutions for those who need healing or assistance. It is not an unsolvable mystery how we can overcome the most tragic and consequential practices of all time. In John 16:33, Jesus said, *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* Please join me as we follow our Overcomer all the way to redemption!

The church can provide redeeming hope through the Good News of *God With Us* and teach us to 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 sneaked 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™ and our 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 is not 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 start, or start again, where we are and unashamedly grow in our walk with Christ alongside and in support of each other, because we are all sinners, loved by Christ.

I am excited that you are joining me on this adventure by taking this course! As fellow disciples of Jesus Christ, we will grow in these 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