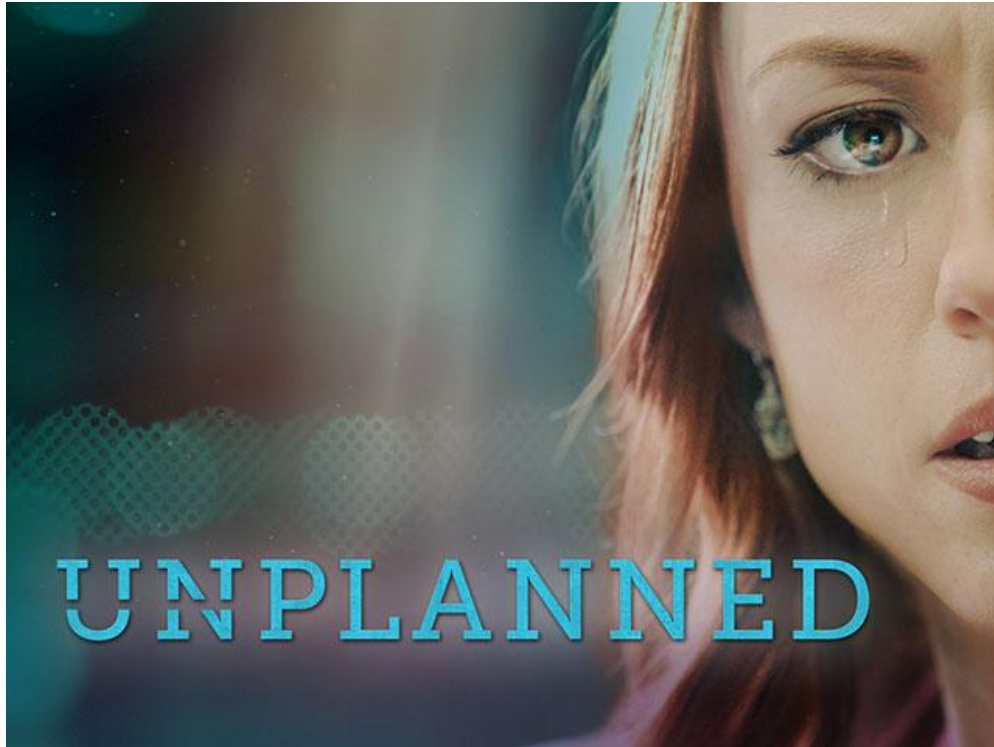


The Power of an Image

A Review of ***Unplanned***.



Picture: Pure Flix Films

Daniel Bahaud

The most gripping moment of *Unplanned* occurs when Abby Johnson, played by Ashley Bratcher, assists with an ultrasound-guided abortion.

For the real-life Planned Parenthood clinic director turned pro-life activist, this is a pivotal moment. *The* pivotal moment, and a sobering one for viewers as we see a 13-week old unborn human being struggle against the abortionist's vacuum cannula before its life is violently taken.

Those with squeamish hearts might be shocked by some of the bloodier aspects of the procedure, presented with a clinical sterility echoing the abortion doctor's casual callousness.

For my part, I was constantly drawn to the image on the monitor, marvelling at the impact ultrasound technology – with us with ever increasing sophistication and clarity since the 1950s – has had on the pro-life movement.

No wonder, really, since real-time ultrasound images provide a highly compelling argument that we are indeed looking at a human being. I was personally convinced in 1984, on viewing Jack Duane Dabner's difficult-to-watch short documentary *The Silent Scream*, which takes viewers step by step through an abortion.

Later, I was blessed to see my two unborn children, thanks to ultrasound images. A much happier experience to be sure.

Which brings me back to *Unplanned*. This is a film I very much want to take my now teenaged children to see. I want them to marvel at the tiny unborn human being on the monitor screen. And to understand, in an unflinchingly way, what abortion ultimately is. Like *The Silent Scream*, *Unplanned's* powerful and disturbing image exposes the deep lie regarding abortion that too many people still accept: that this is solely about a woman's right over her body and is not, ultimately, the taking of human life.

The child on the ultrasound monitor was the final straw in Abby Johnson's personal and ethical journey – one that led her to become pro-life and, ultimately, to convert to Catholicism.

Her journey is well told throughout the movie, thanks to a judicious use of flashbacks. As well, Ashley Bratcher creates a very human and often conflicted Abby Johnson. Her honest, raw and powerful performance is one of *Unplanned's* highlights.

Other aspects of the film are less successful. Some performances are not particularly convincing. *Unplanned* also has an unnecessary voice-over that simply restates what we're seeing, almost as if directors and screenwriters Cary Solomon and Chuck Konzelman felt it necessary to hold the audience's hand throughout Abby Johnson's ethical and spiritual journey. Ditto for the overly emotional song score that serves no useful purpose besides emphasizing emotions we are already feeling. With such a compelling story, the filmmakers should have greater confidence in an audience.

Of course, these are peripheral details in what is, at heart, a 106-minute argument for the protection of the unborn. Viewing *Unplanned*, those already convinced of the truth that life begins at conception will be confirmed in their convictions, but hopefully will also come away forcefully reminded of the necessity of helping by all means possible those women, often young and single, who have ultimately chosen not to abort their child in a crisis pregnancy situation.

Watching *Unplanned*, those that aren't pro-life may come to rethink their position, and ultimately understand that what is legally permitted is not necessarily ethical. I hope they will not be put off by the somewhat polemical tone the film sometimes slides into.

My most fervent hope is that they are moved by the power of that one ultrasound image.

Unplanned

Directed by Cary Solomon and Chuck Konzelman

Starring Ashley Bratcher, Brooks Ryan and Robia Scott

Based on *Unplanned*, Abby Johnson's memoir of her eight years as a Planned Parenthood volunteer, and employee and director of a Planned Parenthood clinic in Bryan, Texas.