

WHEN THE PAIN WON'T GO AWAY

The day was gray. Somehow that fit. Neither of them spoke on the way to the clinic. She felt torn and confused. He felt disconnected. As he drove, Laurie replayed in her mind Bill's words from the previous week after she broke the news that she was pregnant: "Laurie, I'll do whatever you want to do. If you want to get married, I'll marry you. If you want to have an abortion, that's okay too." In spite of his words, she sensed his fear and his withdrawal. She felt abandoned and knew from that point on she was on her own.

She remembered that Bill's first marriage began with a pregnancy (when he was 17). It ended less than 4 years later, giving him joint custody of two children. While Laurie felt it would be unfair to put Bill through the shame of facing his family with the news that "he'd messed up again," she also dreaded the thought of disappointing her parents. She didn't want him to feel forced to marry her. She wanted to marry Bill, but not like this, not just to do the right thing and "make an honest woman out of her."

Instead, she shouldered the responsibility for the decision to "terminate the pregnancy." That's what the counselor at the clinic called it. She reassured Laurie, "Don't worry about it. It isn't a life yet. The procedure is simple and no more painful than your annual checkup at your gynecologist. You'll be fine and back to normal in no time."

As she sat in the waiting room, her ambivalence grew. Even though she was given Valium to calm her down, she still felt that something was wrong. When they called her name, she wanted Bill to grab her and say, "Wait a minute, we'll work this out." But that didn't happen.

In the operating room, the doctor was professional and aloof. The procedure was more painful than she expected. But what surprised her the most were the emotions that welled up within her.

After a short time in the recovery room, she was released--through the back door of the clinic. As soon as she saw Bill, she burst into tears. She was beginning to feel but not understand the weight of what she had done.

Her first words to Bill were, "Do you still love me?" He reassured her that he did. After all, she'd had the abortion for him. But somehow, deep inside she felt, "I must be unlovable now after what I've done."

It was quiet on the ride back to their apartment. Both knew that something had changed between them. Finally, Bill broke the silence: "It's done. We don't need to talk about this anymore. Let's put it behind us." Laurie felt a tightening in her stomach. Although she knew where Bill was coming from, she panicked and thought, "Oh no, I'm not sure I can do that. I'm just beginning to discover how I really feel." Yet because of what she sensed in Bill, Laurie took a personal vow that day to suppress her own feelings. She didn't think Bill was strong enough to handle them.

Bill's "other" children greeted them as they returned home, clamoring for Laurie's attention. Previously she had adored them, but now even those feelings had changed. She quietly excused herself to the bathroom, slumped to the floor, and sobbed. She felt empty, alone, and angry. She was angry at Bill for keeping his first two children and not wanting hers. After drying her tears, she followed through with her vow and stuffed her feelings. The abortion had unearthed so many conflicting feelings that all she could do was shut them down. Since she didn't have the freedom to feel or talk about what she had lost, her tears went underground--secret tears that she didn't face for years.¹

For many couples like Laurie and Bill, discovering they are pregnant is not a joyous occasion. The circumstances surrounding a pregnancy determine whether it's a celebration or a crisis. Sometimes the prospect of having a child collides with a couple's plans for the future. Unemployment, financial stress, relational instability, and being unmarried are all factors that push a woman to sort through her options. Many choose to abort.

In the United States this year, over a million women will choose an abortion.² But just like Laurie, many of these women have little idea what awaits them during and after the procedure. What they choose is to end a pregnancy, to eliminate an unwanted burden. But what they suffer are the lifelong effects--physically, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually.

Since the 1973 Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion in the United States, over 31 million pregnancies have been terminated by abortion.³ Each year, an estimated 50 million abortions occur worldwide.⁴ Many struggle in silence for years with the pain of what they did. Their "secret tears" need to be addressed. They need a safe place to talk and feel, a place to grieve and heal.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide understanding and hope for a woman struggling with the trauma of a past abortion. If you're that woman, we want you to know that you're not alone. Someone cares and understands. Healing is possible, through a path of sorrow that leads to repentance, forgiveness, freedom, and joy (2 Cor. 7:10). Jesus offered hope to His followers--no matter what they had done--when He taught, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Mt. 5:4).

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WHAT IS POST-ABORTION TRAUMA (PAT)?

Since the early 1980s, an increasing number of women have sought treatment for emotional struggles resulting from a past abortion.⁵ Dr. David C. Reardon, a leading post-abortion researcher since 1983, writes: "Abortion is not some magical surgery which turns back time to make a woman 'unpregnant.' Instead, it is a real-life event which is

always very stressful and often traumatic."⁶ And many women cannot resolve the trauma of an abortion on their own. They need help.

Post-abortion trauma (PAT) is defined as a woman's struggle to express and work through her thoughts and feelings about her pregnancy and abortion, and her striving to come to peace with herself and others (including God) over her choices and losses.⁷

What makes an abortion profoundly disturbing is that it involves death and loss. A common feeling repeated in the interviews of women before, during, and after an abortion is the sense of a life being taken. "It's killing," responded one woman interviewed in a clinic's waiting room. "But it is justifiable homicide."⁸

Some people are better equipped than others to deal with any traumatic event that involves death. Some faint at the sight of blood, while others spring into action. Some talk about what happened, while others pretend it never happened. The same is true with abortion.

No matter how people deal with an abortion, everyone is changed by it. In Laurie's words, "Something was different. They brought me in the front door and they took me out the back. I was never the same." After searching in vain to find a way to deal with her abortion, Laurie shut down her emotions and developed a coping mechanism in order to survive. This shutting down of a woman's heart is the second casualty of abortion.

While each woman's response to her abortion is unique, some common feelings and experiences are:

- anger
- anxiety
- betrayal
- bitterness
- depression
- distrust
- grief
- guilt
- helplessness
- remorse
- resentment
- shame
- problems bonding with other children
- avoidance of babies, small children, or anything to do with pregnancy or abortion.⁹
- broken or abusive relationships
- a desire to replace the baby
- eating disorders
- flashbacks
- fear of future pregnancies
- lowered self-esteem
- nightmares or sleep disorders
- self-destructive behaviors
- sexual dysfunction
- substance abuse
- suicidal thoughts or tendencies
- uncontrollable crying

If a woman has had an abortion and identifies with five or more of the above categories, she may be struggling with post-abortion trauma. She should consider seeking help to

work through her struggles. Several agencies specializing in PAT are listed at the end of this booklet.

Researchers have also established a strong link between post-abortion trauma (also known as post-abortion stress or post-abortion syndrome) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).¹⁰ PTSD is a diagnosis that identified Vietnam veterans who were unable to deal effectively with normal life after having experienced the trauma of war. A recent crisis fact sheet published by the American Counseling Association to help victims of traumas like plane crashes, violent crimes, and terrorist bombings gives 10 ways to recognize PTSD with the qualifier, "The following information is equally helpful for individuals facing other emotional crises in their lives." The criteria are:

1. re-experiencing the event through vivid memories or flashbacks
2. feeling emotionally numb
3. feeling overwhelmed by or diminished interest in performing normal tasks
4. developing unusual interests
5. crying uncontrollably
6. isolating oneself from family and friends, avoiding social situations
7. relying increasingly on alcohol or drugs to get through the day
8. being extremely moody, irritable, angry, suspicious, or frightened
9. experiencing disturbance in sleep, either too much or too little; nightmares
10. feeling afraid and a sense of doom about the future.¹¹

Because many women who have had abortions identify with some if not most of these criteria, they argue that clinics need to inform their clients of these emotional risks prior to an abortion.

The arguments for and against an official post-abortion syndrome diagnosis will no doubt continue. But those who honestly examine the data are admitting that abortion deeply affects those who choose it. Dr. Julius Fogel, a pro-abortion psychiatrist and obstetrician who has performed 20,000 abortions, expressed deep concern over the effects of abortion on the mother. He stated:

Abortion is an impassioned subject. . . . Every woman--whatever her age, background, or sexuality--has a trauma at destroying a pregnancy. A level of humanness is touched. This is a part of her own life. She destroys a pregnancy, she is destroying herself. There is no way it can be innocuous. One is dealing with the life force. It is totally beside the point whether or not you think a life is there. You cannot deny that something is being created and that this creation is physically happening. . . . Often the trauma may sink into the unconscious and never surface in the woman's lifetime. But it is not as harmless and casual an event as many in the pro-abortion crowd insist. A psychological price is paid. It may be alienation; it may be a pushing away from human warmth, perhaps a hardening of the maternal instinct. Something happens on the deeper levels of a woman's consciousness when she destroys a pregnancy.¹²

Laurie's anger began hours after her abortion and became the undercurrent of her personality. She became highly critical of everything Bill did. She even went so far as to do all she could to sabotage their relationship, proving once-and-for-all that she wasn't worthy of being loved. She felt empty and cold most of the time.

Other women, however, respond differently. Lynn had sex with her high school sweetheart one time and got pregnant. While her secret struggles began immediately after her abortion at 17, it was not until 15 years later--after achieving professional success, marrying for the second time, and expecting her first child--that her abortion came back to haunt her. As her coping strategies crumbled and she began to feel her trauma again, the truth about what she'd done at 17 became overwhelming. That's when she finally sought help to deal with her loss.

WHY HAS POST-ABORTION TRAUMA BECOME A PROBLEM NOW?

There are two reasons why post-abortion trauma has become a national problem in America: 25 years of legalized abortion history and the long-term ineffectiveness of denial.

The History Of Legalized Abortion. Reviewing 25 years of post-abortion history and research, we have discovered an all-too-familiar pattern of emotional bleeding within women who have had abortions.

Most women who abort feel deeply ambivalent about abortion, just like the rest of the country. Recent surveys show that while 60 percent of Americans believe abortion should be legal, 75 percent also believe it is immoral.¹³ Interviews at abortion clinics--even by abortion advocates--confirm that at least 70 percent of the women who get abortions believe it is immoral, or at least deviant behavior.¹⁴ But in spite of those beliefs, these women feel so desperate that they choose a solution that collides head-on with their conscience and maternal instincts. A woman's ambivalence causes a crisis of heart and soul.

The Long-Term Ineffectiveness Of Denial. Denial is effective for short-term pain management. It shields us from the brunt of a traumatic loss. Immediately after an abortion, denial helps a woman absorb the initial shock of what she's done. Without it, the pain would be unbearable. Statements like "It isn't a baby, it's just a blob of tissue," "If it's legal, it must be okay," or "I didn't kill anything, I just terminated a pregnancy" are a woman's attempts to minimize the effect of her abortion. But denial ultimately doesn't work.

As denial melts away and the truth begins to emerge, a woman begins to feel the pain she has tried to bury. Pretending "it was no big deal" no longer works. For most women, denial usually ceases to be effective 5 to 10 years after her abortion. Eventually, some

event--the birth of another child, the last child leaving home, a divorce--triggers an emotional tremor, a long-forgotten memory erupts, and the neatly constructed house of denial begins to crumble.

The tremors of this crumbling denial began to be felt in the early 1980s and have continued to escalate. Studies demonstrate that "dissatisfaction and regrets over abortion grow with time."¹⁵

WHAT CAUSES POST-ABORTION TRAUMA?

A woman's ambivalence over abortion is common¹⁶ because it is an assault on her feminine heart and soul. PAT is caused by a woman's struggle to reconcile what she has done with who she is made to be. Abortion is abhorrent to so many because it violates a mother's God-given design as a nurturer of life. These two contradictory truths can collide in the heart of a woman who has had an abortion and ignite an emotional firestorm that threatens to destroy her. In order to survive, many shut down emotionally and deaden their hearts through some form of denial so that they feel nothing. Numbness is preferred to the feeling of being ripped in two.

Silence can be deafening to a woman struggling alone with the pain of her abortion.

However, unless a woman is willing to face the truth and accept responsibility for her own choices, she can remain imprisoned behind her denial, unable to freely enjoy life and relationships. She may work hard to maintain her deadness--from workaholism to

alcoholism, from sexual promiscuity to sexual avoidance, from quickly getting pregnant again to avoiding anything associated with pregnancy. But ultimately nothing works. The carefully woven veil of denial eventually unravels to reveal an empty, broken, and lonely woman who cannot face herself or anyone else. Instead of enjoying life, she endures it. As a result, many resign themselves to an existence that is colorless, shapeless, and tasteless.

But in spite of all her efforts, what a woman cannot deny forever is her feminine heart that longs to nurture life. In her private moments, when she reflects on her life, her suppressed feelings begin to come back. It's in those moments that the freedom of truth calls to her from the solitary confinement of her denial (Jn. 8:32). If she yields to the offer, the process of healing can begin.

WHAT IS A PREREQUISITE FOR HEALING?

For a woman to begin the painful process of healing from PAT, she needs a safe place to talk. Silence can be deafening to a woman struggling alone with the pain of her abortion. She often feels isolated and misunderstood. No one listened to her objections before her

abortion. No one has listened to her struggles since. She desperately needs someone to listen to her now--someone who understands what she's going through and who won't condemn her or minimize what has happened.

It's hard for a woman to work through the trauma of her abortion alone. In fact, the lack of supportive relationships may have contributed to her decision to abort. It is essential that she have supportive and encouraging relationships while she works through her grief and loss. Crisis pregnancy centers and post-abortion recovery groups can provide an understanding and compassionate setting for a woman to be honest without feeling judged or condemned.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF HEALING FROM POST-ABORTION TRAUMA?

Healing is always a process involving pain and time. There are no "quick fixes" for the wounds of the soul. But God has given a promise to all who join the journey: "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Ps. 147:3). The journey involves:

- [Letting Go Of Denial](#)
- [Releasing The Anger](#)
- [Grieving The Losses](#)
- [Confessing The Guilt](#)
- [Receiving Forgiveness](#)
- [Living Passionately](#)

WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF HEALING FROM POST-ABORTION TRAUMA?

LETTING GO OF DENIAL

Denial is the wall of forgetfulness that a woman erects to protect herself from the pain surrounding her abortion. The only way to tear down denial is to remember. Jesus taught that freedom comes through knowing the truth (Jn. 8:32). As she begins to reconnect with her feelings about the abortion, a woman must face the truth about who she is, what she has done, and what was done to her.

Who She Is. God created her in His image (Gen. 1:27). He designed her body and soul to bear and nurture life (Gen. 1:28; 3:20). It is this nurturing heart that King Solomon relied on to settle a dispute between two women who were claiming possession of the same baby. He suggested cutting the child in two, knowing that the true mother would sacrifice her own desires so that her son could live (1 Ki. 3:16-28).

God used the illustration of a nursing mother's care and compassion to express His love for His people. Through the prophet Isaiah He asked: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" (49:15). A woman living in denial has forgotten that she was made to live in such a way that the image of a nurturing and compassionate God could be seen in her.

What She Has Done. A woman needs to face her denial by admitting that her decision to abort brought an end to the life forming within her. Reading Psalm 139:13-16 will help her to see God's involvement in the development of a child:

You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be.

In 1971, the pro-choice editors of *California Medicine* identified the need to use "semantic gymnastics which are required to rationalize abortion as anything but taking a human life."¹⁷ This message of denial has been fed to women for years. And yet, no matter how anyone tries to package it or rephrase it, everyone really knows deep down that abortion is the taking of a human life.

What Was Done To Her. Many women who've had abortions were themselves victims of misinformation. A survey indicated that 93 percent of women who have had abortions insisted that they had little or none of the necessary information to make the decision to abort.¹⁸ The advent of ultrasound has exploded the myth that "the fetus isn't a baby, but only two teaspoons full of tissue." Even at the earliest stages of fetal development, a mother can now see and recognize that it is indeed a baby.

Letting go of denial may also mean that a woman will need to admit that she has been wronged by the irresponsibility of the man who got her pregnant and by those family members who discouraged her from carrying the child to term.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF HEALING FROM POST-ABORTION TRAUMA?

RELEASING THE ANGER

As a woman faces the truth about her own choices and as she faces what others have done to her, one of the emotions she may have to deal with is her anger. That was true for Laurie. Like many women who have had abortions, her anger had become a way of maintaining her denial and some semblance of control in her life. It became her best

weapon to keep Bill at a safe distance. If he got too close to her and she felt threatened, she'd lash out at him and make him pay. She felt that since he didn't protect her child, she couldn't trust him to protect her either.

In working through anger, it is necessary for a woman to distinguish between healthy anger that longs for fairness and unhealthy anger that merely seeks revenge. Unhealthy anger seeks to control pain by directing one's energies toward getting back at those who've hurt us.

But vengeance is best left in God's hands (Rom. 12:19). We cannot afford to give the devil a foothold in our lives by nursing our anger against others (Eph. 4:26-27). Instead, we need to address the issue of anger as soon as we become aware of it. Otherwise, it can degenerate into a bitterness that alienates us from God and others and robs us of joyful living.

As a woman begins to realize what her abortion did to her, her baby, and to those around her, she may feel betrayed. She may need to face the anger she feels toward those involved in her abortion. Her anger may be directed at any or all of the following:

Anger At Her Family for pressuring her into an abortion or for refusing to support her in trying to carry her baby to term. Many teenage girls feel deeply betrayed by parents who demanded they get an abortion to avoid shaming the family with an illegitimate child.

Included in this group is the father of the baby who may have pressured her into the abortion by threatening to leave her if she didn't "take care of it." Ironically, less than half of those relationships survive 3 months after the abortion.

Anger At The Doctor for performing the abortion without answering all her questions and warning her of all the risks involved in an abortion. As she discovers more about fetal development, her anger may increase because of the web of deception that was created to prevent her from reconsidering her decision.

Anger At Herself for betraying herself and her child by allowing the abortion in spite of the ambivalence she may have felt.

Anger At God for allowing her to get pregnant and then not providing better circumstances or more supportive relationships that would have made it easier for her to have the baby.

As long as she can deny her anger, a woman will never fully face the pain of her losses. Once she faces her anger, however, she can move on to the next step of healing--grieving over her losses. (For further help in dealing with anger, see RBC's booklet [*When Anger Burns*](#) CB942.)

WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF HEALING FROM POST-ABORTION TRAUMA?

GRIEVING THE LOSSES

Facing the extent of the loss over an abortion is one of the most important steps in the healing process. But it can also be one of the most difficult. Having lived for so long in denial of her feelings, a woman who begins to face her losses can feel overwhelmed by the sorrow. She may find herself tempted to return to denial because the pain seems unbearable. This is when she needs the loving support of a group that is willing to weep with her as she faces her loss.

Working through grief is complicated in our society because we are impatient with or disgusted by someone who can't move on quickly following a loss. This is especially true when it comes to facing a loss that occurred many years ago.

Grief is the emotional suffering that is experienced following the loss of anyone or anything important. If a woman is to reconcile with her past, she needs to remember and weep for those losses that have left deep wounds in her heart. She may be comforted, but her losses will never be reversed.

Grief is unique for each woman. For some, significant losses caused by an abortion will include the loss of the child, the loss of the relationship with the baby's father, the loss of the woman's own innocence, the loss of the experience of motherhood, and the loss of a sense of control. Ambivalent feelings toward each of these losses will make grieving a difficult task.

Some women mourn the loss of never being able to hold their unborn child in their arms, to rock him, to sing to her, to touch him, or to see her face. Others have the added loss of not being able to have another child of their own because of the physical damage done during or after the abortion.

Many women who've had abortions identify with the grief of the women of Israel whose innocent sons were slaughtered by the wicked King Herod in an attempt to kill the baby Jesus. Matthew quoted the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:15 when he wrote, "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more" (Mt. 2:18). The feeling of the baby who is "no more" is a common theme.

Part of the grieving process involves honoring the memory of the person who was lost and saying goodbye. This part of the process is unique to each person who has suffered the loss.

Some find it helpful to give their baby a name so it is clearer in their minds that this was a child. This makes the grieving process more personal for them when they think of the child they lost.

Others decide to honor the child and say goodbye by having a memorial ceremony with a few close friends, family members, or a counselor. They feel that a more public ceremony honors the child that was never given a chance to live.

Some write a letter, a poem, or a song for their unborn child. Some plant a tree in a local park or give a gift to a crisis pregnancy center as a living memorial to remind them of the life that was lost.

There is no standard way to grieve or say goodbye. What is important is that a woman chooses some way that allows her to remember and grieve her losses, because it is in the process of mourning that God will comfort her (Mt. 5:4).

WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF HEALING FROM POST-ABORTION TRAUMA?

CONFESSING THE GUILT

Many women who have had abortions are so weighed down by the guilt and shame over what they've done in taking the life of their child that they cannot even imagine what it would be like to feel free. Some express that they feel "dirty" or "ugly." One woman admits, "I never look myself in the eye in a mirror. I'm afraid of the ugliness I'll see."

The basis for these women's feelings is the realization that they violated God's design for them as nurturers. They identify with the woman who was caught in the act of adultery and brought to Jesus to see what He would do with her:

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do You say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing Him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with His finger. When they kept on questioning Him, He straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (Jn. 8:3-11).

Without her denial or anger to hide behind, a woman struggles with the horror of being exposed by her sin. Everyone now knows what she's done. She feels naked and ashamed with nowhere to hide. All is open before the Savior. She knows she deserves condemnation for what she has done. And that's what she expects. But that's not what she receives. Instead, He offers her respect and hope.

For a woman to move toward forgiveness, honest confession needs to take place in two areas. First, for the sin of violating the sacredness of life and taking the life of her child. Second, for living a life committed to self-protection.

Honest confession is something she needs to verbalize to God (1 Jn. 1:9) and to others who will prayerfully demonstrate God's love and acceptance of her in spite of her past (Jas. 5:16). Many women have found that crisis pregnancy centers offer this kind of opportunity for healing. But confession of her role in the abortion is not enough. Abortion is a symptom of something deeper.

The deeper problem is the woman's commitment to depending on herself, not God, to deal with whatever crisis she may encounter in life, including an abortion and its aftermath. The prophet Jeremiah reminded God's people that refusing to depend on God and relying on self-sufficiency are at the heart of our struggles: "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water" (Jer. 2:13).

Confession of her refusal to depend on God as her source of life clears the obstruction between God and the woman who has had an abortion, allowing her to begin enjoying the sweet fruit of forgiveness.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF HEALING FROM POST-ABORTION TRAUMA?

RECEIVING FORGIVENESS

Women who are struggling with the guilt of having had an abortion may say something like, "After what I've done, God couldn't possibly want to forgive me. Maybe He can, but I don't think He'd want to. How could He forgive me for killing the life that was growing within me?" But He can. Abortion is not an unpardonable sin. That's the glorious good news of the gospel. God offers forgiveness of all sins--without exception--to anyone who comes to His Son for mercy.

A woman who has had an abortion often has great difficulty accepting God's forgiveness for three reasons. She still feels condemned because of what she did. She feels she must do some sort of penance. And her confidence in God's ability or willingness to forgive is undermined by Satan, the accuser.

Some women still feel dirty and soiled. They cannot shake off the weight of what they've done. This is especially true in the initial stages of working through forgiveness. What they don't realize is that their forgiveness has nothing to do with what they've done. It has everything to do with what Christ has done for them (Ti. 3:5). It is "by His wounds we are healed" (Isa. 53:5-6). The Bible reminds us that "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Jesus paid it all. The debt has been canceled for all who have accepted Jesus' offer of forgiveness.

A woman's desire to do penance to atone for her sin is rooted in her old strategies of denial and pretense--when she worked to cover her sin. That's what the word *atonement* means: "a covering over sin." Doing penance reflects a refusal to accept salvation by grace through faith for what it is--an absolutely free gift (Eph. 2:8-9). Trusting someone else to do for her what she couldn't do for herself is still new to her.

Because the memories of a woman's abortion don't disappear after being forgiven, the evil one likes to dredge up those memories and wave them in front of her, causing her to doubt God's goodness (1 Pet. 5:8). That's been Satan's strategy from the start (Gen. 3:1-5). But we have an Advocate (Job 16:19), High Priest (Heb. 2:17), and Intercessor who is on our side.

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us (Rom. 8:33-34).

Paul reassured us that no sin--including an abortion--can outdistance God's grace, because "where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Rom. 5:20). So we can enter His presence with the confidence that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9).

When a woman accepts and experiences God's forgiveness, she will no longer see her abortion as the defining event in her life as she once did. Instead, the cross will become the defining event by which all other events are measured. It is at the cross that she will find her hope, her confidence, and her strength to reinvest in loving others.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF HEALING FROM POST-ABORTION TRAUMA?

LIVING PASSIONATELY

Two passages of Scripture have especially touched the hearts of women who are beginning to enjoy the freedom of forgiveness in Christ. Although they are addressed to the nation of Israel, they both reflect the passionate heart of God for His struggling people:

The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing (Zeph. 3:17).

I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt (Hos. 2:14-15).

There are two powerful images in these texts. The first image is that of God as a passionate lover who delights in singing to His people. The second image shows that singing is a passionate response of God's people to His wooing, reflecting their freedom to enjoy Him and others.

When was the last time someone was so excited about you that he sang to you? Have you ever dreamed that God wants to do that for you no matter what you've done? Singing reflects praise, joy, and worship. You know you are making good progress toward healing when your desire to sing returns. Singing reflects a gratefulness over seeing your abortion redeemed and a desire to give back something in return.

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF THE HEALING PROCESS?

The results of the healing process will be a growing confidence in God's redemption of and restoration from her abortion.

1. Redemption Of The Abortion. Laurie and Lynn, the women mentioned earlier in the booklet (pp.1-6,9), have effectively worked through the healing process. They no longer define themselves by their abortions. Instead, their abortions are remembered along with the other life-shaping events that God used to draw their hearts back to Himself. The work of Christ on the cross and His forgiveness for *all* their sins has now become the most important event to them. Their abortions no longer dominate them and silence their singing. Instead, the cross becomes their reason to sing again.

The irony of redemption is that God honors a woman's abortion not because it was good but because He wastes nothing (Rom. 8:28). It became her "desert wandering" where He drew her back into a relationship with Himself by speaking tenderly to her. He honors the past because His intent is to restore what was marred.

2. Restoration From The Abortion. The restoration from an abortion takes two forms. First, God begins to restore a woman's inner beauty (1 Pet. 3:3-6). She becomes a woman of strength who is free to laugh again because her confidence is in God (Prov. 31:25). She's free to enjoy healthy relationships with others.

Second, out of gratefulness for God's forgiveness, she is motivated to nurture life again. She reaches out and encourages others in their healing journey. Like the woman who bathed Jesus' feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, and anointed them with costly perfume (Lk. 7:36-47), she knows what it means to be forgiven of the enormous burden of her sins. That's why she delights in giving something back to help others.

God restored joy to Laurie and Bill's relationship as a result of dealing with the aftereffects of the abortion. Today, they are married and working together at a crisis pregnancy center (CPC). She coordinates client services and he manages the daily operations. Lynn is an administrator of a post-abortion counseling ministry. They have seen God restore opportunities for service they never thought possible.

STOPPING ABORTION BEFORE IT OCCURS

In spite of all the data available about the dangers of post-abortion trauma and the potential aftereffects of an abortion, more than a million deadly decisions will be made in America this year. Only a few of these women will be adequately informed about these dangers prior to their abortions. Most will be desperately seeking a quick solution to a crisis problem. It is a decision that can haunt them for years. They deserve to be told the truth.

Women need to be told the whole truth about what abortion is and what the aftermath can be. That should include information about fetal development, the visual reality of an ultrasound, and the possible physical, emotional, and relational impact of an abortion. They should also be given the chance to talk with someone who has been through it--to ask and have all their questions answered so they truly can make an informed choice.

If you've had an abortion, you have something unique to offer a woman who is struggling with a decision about her own pregnancy. Like Laurie and Lynn, you have a story to tell. Your story of crisis and tragedy will powerfully touch more lives than any television ad. Please consider nurturing life again by sharing your story. You cannot bring back your baby, but God may use your story to encourage someone else to choose life for her baby. Be a volunteer at a local CPC or be available to talk with women in a crisis pregnancy in your church so that you can help prevent them from making the same irreversible mistake.

A WORD TO MEN

Men also wrestle with the legacy of an abortion. In spite of their reluctance to talk about feelings, many men battle with guilt, anger, grief, and loss. A sense of violated manhood and lost fatherhood are at the core of their struggles. They feel like failures at being providers and protectors. As with women, these unresolved feelings can lead to emotional turmoil, self-destructive addictions, violence, and broken relationships. Men who have been involved in an abortion also need compassion, understanding, forgiveness, and healing.

It's time for the church to stand up for the oppressed and the innocent who cannot speak for themselves.

Healing begins when a man bears the weight of his own responsibility. Far too many men have abdicated sexual and parental responsibility in conceiving a child. Subsequently, they pressure the mother to abort the baby or threaten to abandon her to "handle the problem" on her own. While more than 64 percent of the women who struggle with the aftereffects of an abortion felt "forced" into it, over 84 percent said they would have had the baby under better circumstances or with the support of loved ones.¹⁹ Husbands and boyfriends top the list of those most influential in a woman's abortion decision. It stands to reason that if a woman in an unplanned pregnancy has the loving support of a strong man--the baby's father, her own father, a brother, or a friend--she probably would not choose an abortion. Abortion, then, *is* a man's issue.

Men who've pressured a woman into an abortion bear an enormous burden of guilt. Not only do they feel guilty for their sexual irresponsibility, they also feel unforgivable for pushing the woman to take the life of their child. The story of how God forgave King David for adultery and murder speaks powerfully to these men of how God can forgive and restore what seems to be unforgivable and irreversibly broken (2 Sam. 12:1-14; Ps. 51).

If you are a man in a relationship with a woman who has had an abortion, be gentle, caring, patient, understanding, available to listen, and supportive as she works through her loss. Even if the abortion was in a previous relationship, it can still be divisive to your marriage. Walk through the healing process with her and allow her to lean on you. Your willingness to support her will greatly enhance her healing and restoration while deepening your relationship.

A WORD TO THE CHURCH

It's time for the church to stand up for the oppressed and the innocent who cannot speak for themselves. At current rates, an estimated 43 percent of women will have at least one

abortion by the time they are 45 years old.²⁰ Unfortunately, many of these women are "the walking wounded" because no one is talking about it. There has been an unwritten policy of "don't ask, don't tell." It's time to change that policy. The church needs to become a healing community by:

1. Being an advocate for the truth. Teach the Word faithfully and effectively (2 Tim. 4:2; Ti. 1:9). Desperate and hurting people need to have their hearts and minds plowed up regularly with the truth of God's Word so that the Spirit of God has fertile soil in which to plant His seed that will bear fruit in His time (Jn. 15:5).

2. Developing a small-group caring ministry. People need community. They need to feel connected at church. That rarely happens in a large preaching service. A place where people feel understood and loved can provide the opportunity to wrestle honestly with real-life struggles. A small group can become an excellent setting to live out the "one another" commands given to the New Testament church (Rom. 12:10-16; Gal. 5:13; 6:2,4; Eph. 4:2,25,32; Col. 3:9-16; 1 Th. 5:11).

3. Becoming a safe place for women to talk about their pain. Women who are struggling with issues of post-abortion trauma or who are considering an abortion need a safe place to talk about their struggles. They need to know that what they share is confidential so that it doesn't come up as a request in a midweek prayer service. Pray and ask God to raise up some leaders to develop a women's issues group.

4. Working in conjunction with a CPC to start a PAT recovery group. Build relationships with the staff of a local crisis pregnancy center. They not only will be a good source of referrals for your staff, but you may be able to network with them on leading some small groups, training leaders of small groups, teaching youth groups about abortion and sexuality, and participating in "Sanctity of Human Life" Sunday services.

5. Openly addressing these issues from the pulpit and in small groups. Take advantage of opportunities to talk openly about issues like purity, sexuality, promiscuity, crisis pregnancy, and abortion. Demonstrate genuineness and transparency about personal struggles in a way that reinforces the reality that everyone struggles with something. Invite people to share their stories of healing with the congregation. Make your church more like a teaching hospital that binds up wounds, promotes healing, and encourages healthy living.

6. Developing a crisis pregnancy support system. Given our sexually permissive culture, unplanned pregnancies will always be a problem. Condemning a woman or teenage girl for being sexually promiscuous and getting pregnant doesn't provide help where she needs it the most. Work to restore her and provide creative options to help her with the choice to give life to her baby regardless of how it was conceived.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Aborted Women: Silent No More, David C. Reardon (Crossway Books, 1987).

A Season To Heal: Help And Hope For Those Working Through Post-Abortion Stress, Luci Freed and Penny Yvonne Salazar (Cumberland House Publishing, 1993).

Forgiven And Set Free: A Post-Abortion Bible Study For Women, Linda Cochran (Baker Books, 1996).

Healing A Father's Heart: A Post-Abortion Bible Study For Men, Linda Cochran and Kathy Jones (Baker Books, 1996).

Her Choice To Heal: Finding Spiritual And Emotional Peace After An Abortion, Sydna Massé and Joan Philips (Victor Books, 1998).

ORGANIZATIONS

Institute For Pregnancy Loss: Vincent Rue, Ph.D.
P.O. Box 279
Stratham, NH 03885-0279
603-778-1450;
FAX: 603-775-0561
e-mail: rue@nh.ultranet.com

The Elliot Institute: David C. Reardon, Ph.D.
P.O. Box 7348
Springfield, IL 62791-7348
217-525-8202; FAX: 217-525-8212
e-mail: www.afterabortion.org

For help in locating a post-abortion recovery group in your area, call:
America's Crisis Pregnancy Helpline: (1-888-80-WOMAN)
Care Net: (1-703-478-5661)

OTHER RBC COUNSELING BOOKLETS

[How Can I Live With My Loss?](#) (CB921)

[When Hope Is Lost](#) (CB973)

[When Help Is Needed](#) (CB931)

[When Forgiveness Seems Impossible](#) (CB941)

[When Trust Is Lost](#) (CB922)

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16. Linda Bird Francke, *The Ambivalence Of Abortion* (Random House, 1978), p.61.

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