

Healing Post-abortion Grief



Forgiven and Set Free: Helping People Afflicted With Abortion Grief

How do we grieve our past abortions and make peace with God and ourselves? How can we help people afflicted with abortion grief, face the truth of it, not to condemn, but to magnify the forgiveness and freedom offered in the gospel of Christ?

By looking at the research, we can see how abortion affects women directly and affects couples, the Church and society, indirectly. By sharing our own stories, we can identify how abortion has affected us personally and see the common pathways of grief. By looking to God and his word, we can experience the gospel as a cleansing and liberating power. We can be forgiven and set free!

But rarely does a grieving soul get healed by a singular event or prayer. Guilt and grief return to accuse and trouble us again. They must be met with a clear-eyed, growing confidence in Christ that turns the tables; turning our secret shame into our open testimony to what Christ has done for us. Then we are free. Therefore, we offer starting points, because that is the hardest part. But we also provide a study guide, because this allows people to work out the forgiving and freeing grace of God in their lives as it applies to their past abortion(s) over a period of weeks.

The Trauma of Abortion

Researchers investigating what women experience after abortion report only one positive emotion: relief. This emotion is understandable. Abortion does solve problems. It relieves the pressure and gets us what we want. It solves the immediate crisis.

Abortion then is like every self-centered choice we make. It provides some immediate benefit. But then, over time, the hook is revealed. Our sin works itself out as death. James 1:14-15 says, “Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”

Abortion starts with death for the unborn child and works itself out as death in all who participate in it. Immediate relief gives way to anger at others and personal remorse. Some women suffer physical damage, like infertility. Others develop self-destructive patterns, like drug and alcohol abuse, or sexual promiscuity. Most report depression. The toxic blend of guilt and grief, spreads like cancer. Darker and unseen forces are also at work. Satan, who tempts and goads us into child-killing, returns to kill again. Suicide rates among women who have abortions are six times higher than the general population.

Some Common After-Effects of Abortion

Physical	Emotional	Behavioral	Spiritual
Sterility	Crying	Insomnia	Guilt / Separation
Miscarriages	Tired / Exhausted	Constant sleep	Shame
Tubal Pregnancies	Loss of patience	Over-eating	Fear
Frigidity	Anxiety at mention of abortion	Bulimia	Anxiety on Mother's Day
Nightmares	No interest in children Excessive interest in children	Drug abuse Alcohol abuse	Inability to worship Inability to serve

All women experience the after-effects of abortion in their own way. They vary in depth, intensity and timing as to how soon they experience these symptoms. But one thing is certain, every woman is designed by nature to care for her own children. No matter what reasons compel her to abort, it hurts; and she is greatly changed by it.

Identify How Abortion is Hurting You/Your Loved One.

These questions are helpful in identifying how abortion is hurting you or your loved ones.

- Do you feel reluctant to talk about the subject of abortion, or do you feel guilt, anger or sorrow when discussing your own abortion?
- Do you tend to think of your life in terms of "before" and "after" the abortion?
- Do you have lingering feelings of resentment or anger toward people involved in your abortion, such as the baby's father, friends or your parents?
- Have you found yourself either avoiding relationships or becoming overly dependent in them since the abortion? Are you overly protective of any children?
- Have you begun or increased use of drugs or alcohol since the abortion, or do you have an eating disorder?
- Have you felt a vague sort of emptiness, a deep sense of loss, or had prolonged periods of depression?
- Do you sometimes have nightmares, flashbacks, or hallucinations relating to the abortion?

If the honest answer is yes, then hopefully you are ready to come clean regarding your abortion(s) and lay hold of God's amazing grace.

Starting Points for Grieving Abortion

Michaelene Fredenburg, writing from her own experience, (*Changed, Perspectives*, 2008) suggests the following starting points for grieving abortion.

Starting Points for Grieving Abortion

1. **Tell your story.** Follow a simple “before...during...after...my pregnancy” outline.

“Something very powerful happens when you document events that occur in your life. It may be difficult or even painful to tell your story. I remember how difficult it was for me. You may need to make several attempts to start or finish it. That’s okay. The important thing is to tell it—to acknowledge that your experience is real and that it’s significant. If you’ve experienced or been touched by more than one abortion, it’s helpful to explore the story of each one separately.

Leaders: Ask them to write out their story. Go over it with them. Help them remember.

2. **Build support.** Share your story with another.

“As you work through your own abortion experience or the abortion of someone close to you, it will be helpful to reach out to others for support. You don’t need to make this journey alone. In fact, I believe it’s best that you don’t. If you haven’t shared your experience with anyone before or if past attempts to talk about it haven’t gone well, then you may feel reluctant to reach out to anyone. This is certainly understandable. Sharing your experience entails some risk. Perhaps your abortion is a secret. Building a support system will require you to reveal your secret to at least one other person. I dreaded sharing my secret. I thought that I would be judged harshly—that I would be looked at differently. Fortunately, my fears were unfounded.”

Leaders: Promise confidentiality. Be available. Listen carefully.

3. **Explore your emotions.**

“People will experience a variety of emotions at different times and at different levels of intensity. This may be due to a number of factors including age, gender, cultural influences, and level of participation in the abortion. You may be numb to your emotions or you may be overwhelmed by your emotions. Two years after my abortion, the troubling emotions I experienced began increasing in frequency and intensity. I was so overwhelmed that I began contemplating suicide.”

Leaders: Help them identify, express their emotions before, during, and after abortion.

4. **Identify and grieve your losses.**

“These losses may include one or more of the following:

- Loss of child, grandchild, brother or sister, niece or nephew
- Lost opportunity to parent or grandparent
- Lost or weakened relationship with parents, family members, or friends
- Spiritual loss—feeling far away from or angry toward God
- Loss of relationship with your partner
- Loss of dreams, goals, or vision for your life”

5. Recognize unhealthy behaviors.

“In the beginning, unhealthy behaviors may be used as protective measures either to cope with or mask painful emotions or to deny grief and loss. If the behaviors are repeatedly used, then they may begin to take on a compulsive life of their own with seemingly no connection to the abortion.”

Leaders: Help them identify unhealthy behaviors:

Anger • Anxiety • Compulsive Disorders • Cutting/Self-Abuse • Depression • Eating Disorders • Difficulty Getting Close to Children, Your Partner, Friends • Frozen Emotions • Gambling and Overspending • Mood Swings • Overworking • Phobia • Risky Behaviors (Risk Taking) • Self-Medicating with Alcohol and/or Drugs • Sexual Dysfunction or Sexual Acting Out • Suicidal Thoughts • Unhealthy or Abusive Relationships • Violence

6. Begin healing.

“You’ve made the decision to be honest about your experience and the impact it’s had on your life and the lives of those around you. You’ve made a decision to grieve, to feel pain, to discard unhealthy behaviors - you’ve made the decision to begin healing. You’ve also made a decision to let go of the loss(es)... Your loss is no less real once you decide to let go of the pain. On the contrary, the loss takes its place as a part of your unique history - no longer hidden or suppressed, but integrated into your past and contributing to who you are now and who you will continue to be in the future.”

Abortion and the Gospel

But true healing and lasting peace involves being reconciled to God - obtaining his forgiveness and being washed clean. Then our secret becomes a testimony to his grace. The good news is that God sent Christ into the world to atone for our sin and to reconcile us to himself. On the cross Christ suffered the just and full punishment due for all our sins, including the ones we are most ashamed of. He shed his innocent blood to atone for us shedding innocent blood. He was raised from the dead to assure us that trusting in the sufficiency of Christ on the cross brings pardon and peace. As Hebrews 9:14 says, “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”

A Bible Study Outline – ‘Forgiven and Set Free’

The Word of God is a light unto our path (gives us understanding in how to move forward), including the pathway of abortion grief and guilt. Following is a suggested outline for examining the truth of abortion in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We call it “*Forgiven and Set Free*” because that is the testimony of many who have gone through the pain of self-examination and learned to stand on the promises of God. Suggestions for leading the group are below also.

Bible Study/Class Outline for Post-abortion Healing

- Class 1:** Hearing God's invitation and promises
Isa. 1:15-18, Jer. 29:11-14, 2 Cor. 7:8-10.
- Class 2:** Looking back and owning up to your abortion
Jer. 1:4-5, 1 John 1:9, Psa. 25:11
- Class 3:** Seeing the damage and bringing it to Christ
Psa. 32:1-5, Lam. 3:1-33, Isa. 53:4-6, Col. 1:15-23,
- Class 4:** Acknowledging that we blame others and cannot heal ourselves
Heb. 4:11-13, Gal. 1:10, Pro. 14:12, Psa. 32:3-5
- Class 5:** Fighting Depression and Self-Loathing through our faith in Christ
Psa. 38:3-11, Heb. 4:14-16, Rom. 4:16-25, Rom. 8:1-6, 1 Pet. 5:6-11
- Class 6:** Fighting sinful anger when it returns
Pro. 22:24-25, Pro. 29:22, Heb. 12:15, Eph. 5:25-32,
- Class 7:** Experiencing forgiveness and extending forgiveness
Psa. 51, Heb. 9:14, Mat. 6:9-14, 2 Cor. 2: 5-11, Mat. 18:21-35
- Class 8:** Affirming the humanity and mourning the loss of your child
Psa. 139:13-16, Ecc. 3:4, Lam. 1:16, Isa. 25:6-8, Isa. 35:10
- Class 9:** Memorializing your child, in the light of God's grace
Jer. 1:5, Psa. 27:10, Isa. 49:15, 2 Sam. 12:15-23, Gen. 18:25
- Class 10:** Going forward, alive in Christ, and serving him
Rom. 8:31-39, Titus 3:3-8, Eph. 2:1-10, Heb. 9:14, Eph. 3:14-21

Suggestions for Leaders

1. Have two to four women complete the Bible study together.
2. Choose a leader and a co-leader team.
3. Start and end with prayer. Pray for each other throughout the study.
4. Choose a memory verse for each class and strengthen each other with it.
5. Prepare discussion questions and insure full participation.
6. At the end of the study, ask each participant to refer someone they know to the next group, or help them to start a new group.
7. Share the Bible Study guidelines with others in your network.



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Authors:

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Pastor John Ensor teaches biblical theology and bio-ethics, and helps Christian communities stand for life through the establishment of pregnancy help services. For more information go to: www.passionlife.org

Another resource for post-abortion healing and recovery is **Linda Cochrane**'s more in-depth Bible study (with a similar name); *'Forgiven and Set Free: A Post-abortion Bible Study for Women'*. This can be used by individual women or by a small group of women. Linda wrote the book out of her own experience of being freed from the bondage of guilt and grief that followed her abortion. It covers: Relief and Denial, Anger, Forgiveness, Depression, Letting go, and Acceptance. It is available in Vietnamese from: baovemamsong@gmail.com