

Overcoming the Shame of Abortion

✖ *Millions of women around the world suffer from the pain of post-abortion syndrome. But God has the key to setting them free.*

From the time I was a little girl, I knew what I wanted to be when I grew up—a wife and a mommy. But my life took a turn that would prevent part of this desire from ever being fulfilled.

As a teenager, I rebelled against God and my family. I ran with a rough crowd, did all sorts of drugs, and married a man who beat and abused me.

I got pregnant for the first time several months before our planned wedding. My “Prince Charming” convinced me I should “get it taken care of” so that the ceremony wouldn’t be ruined. Afraid of the embarrassment—but more afraid of losing him—I had an abortion.

The pain of that act haunted me. My drug abuse got worse. But months later when I became pregnant again, the decision to abort was easier than it had been the first time.

After all, I reasoned, the baby could have been damaged by the drugs. So I lay down on the abortion table and let them suck the life out of me again—all the time telling myself that one day, I would be a mommy.

I was wrong. After my fifth abortion, at the age of 22, I had serious complications that resulted in a total hysterectomy. My grief was so great, I could hardly breathe. I dulled my pain the best I could with more alcohol and drugs.

Years later, by the grace of God, I found my way back to Him.

On Easter Sunday 1989, after smoking a joint of marijuana in the parking lot, I walked into Phoenix First Assembly, and when Pastor Tommy Barnett gave the invitation to accept Christ, I surrendered my life to the Lord and dedicated myself to His service. At that moment God did some amazing healing in my life.

Later, through some special women in the church who had also had abortions, I learned that God—and my babies—had forgiven me for taking their lives. It was the most freeing moment of my life next to my salvation.

Today, I am married to a wonderful man, Jim Bakker. God has called me to help hurting women, and through the ministry Jim and I share, I have led countless numbers to find peace and forgiveness in the aftermath of abortion.

THE EFFECTS OF ABORTION

The Alan Guttmacher Institute says 43 percent of women will have at least one abortion by the time they are 45 years old. Almost 50 percent of these women have had one or more abortions before.

Everyone, even without participating directly, has been affected by this tragedy. Cardinal James Hickey writes that “more than 80 million parents, 160 million grandparents and countless relatives have lost a child through abortion.” It has broken up families and ended relationships. It has caused many women and men to feel estranged from Christ, from the people of God and from themselves.

The secret shame of abortion manifests itself in many ways: anger, guilt, shame, anxiety, panic attacks, fear, depression, addictions, nightmares, eating disorders, sleeping disorders, sexual dysfunction, self-hatred, hatred of men, fear of pregnancy, mistrust, indecision, relationship problems and uncontrolled weeping. The ultimate tragedy is the death of a woman’s personal decency. In order to kill, she must deny her

nurturing and bonding nature.

Post-Abortion Syndrome is a delayed reaction. Frequently, a woman may not experience any painful emotions until, on the average, five to nine years after the abortion.

When she does, the grief is often intense, the guilt almost unbearable. She feels ashamed, angry, sad and hopeless. She wants to block out the memories yet continues to cry over someone she never knew. She can't believe God will forgive her because she can't forgive herself.

If you can identify with this description, take heart. You're not alone!

Thousands and thousands of women traumatized by abortion have cried out in despair, experiencing the same feelings of sorrow, loss and anguish you feel. And God wants to help you as He has helped them. He wants to forgive you! He wants to hold you close and mend your broken heart.

Why? Because you are His child. You are a child of the King, and you were created to share eternity with Him!

Even more important, He loves you! Since the beginning of time, God has longed to share a warm, intimate relationship with humankind. But sin severed the bond between God and man. So our loving Father conceived a plan to buy back our freedom from sin and death.

He sent His only Son, Jesus, to die in our place. By shedding His precious blood on the cross, Jesus opened the gates of heaven for every man, woman and child.

Scripture tells us that Jesus now stands at the door and knocks. If we open that door, He will come to live in our hearts (Rev. 3:20).

All we have to do is ask God to forgive our sins and accept the atoning sacrifice of His Son. When we do that, the chains

of fear, guilt and despair fall away! Jesus cradles us in His loving arms, as He now cradles your child who is with Him in heaven.

God is our loving Creator. He created each one of us to take our rightful place in His kingdom. And there's no room for grief and despair in the lives of His children.

The Lord offers us a new life—and that's just about the best news anyone could possibly hear. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17).

THE PATH TO FORGIVENESS

How do you receive God's forgiveness?

First, talk to God. Tell Him how you feel. That's what prayer is all about—pouring out your thoughts, fears, hopes and dreams to your heavenly Father, who loves you and longs to hear from you. Try praying something like this:

Dear Lord, I need healing from the horrible feelings of grief, remorse and despair I feel about aborting my child. I believe that You can heal my wounds. Help me to forgive myself and find peace of mind.

Direct me to the people and resources I need to fully recover from this experience. Help me look forward to living life again. Help me break free from this prison of pain. Fill me with Your peace, love and hope. Amen.

When you invite Jesus into your heart and life, the Bible promises that your sins are forgiven, that you receive eternal life and that you are guaranteed a peace that passes all understanding! That's an offer that's hard to pass up!

In addition to praying on your own, it is sometimes helpful to attend a Memorial Healing Service designed to assist you in processing the grief associated with having had an abortion

and allowing God to heal you. You see, if you have had an abortion, there has been a death in your family. As with all other deaths, there must be a time of grieving before you can begin to heal.

A Memorial Healing Service is a one-day service that includes a time of sharing the abortion experience. The first part of the day is spent verbalizing memories. The Holy Spirit brings to mind the memories that need to be healed.

The next part is a forgiveness exercise. This is the most vital portion of the day! It is necessary to forgive all the people who participated in the abortion(s) in order to move on.

Then each woman receives a tangible symbol or symbols, one to represent each aborted child, and after some specially selected ministry music, she is left alone to think and pray. Women with post-abortion problems seem to have a deep emotional need to bond with their baby or babies, even after death. The symbolic bonding has the effect of releasing these women from the unfinished business or suppressed feelings they've struggled with.

The women then participate in a memorial service that involves placing their symbols in a tiny casket, lighting a candle on behalf of each child and praying. They then share communion and rejoice in God's love.

The Lord Jesus, through His Holy Spirit, comes to do the healing in these ladies' hearts. The leaders do not counsel. They simply direct the women through the steps of the day and watch as Jesus does what only He can do. There is no one to judge or condemn.

Many women who have gone through a memorial service remember it as the beginning of their healing. Many feel saved for the first time, in spite of years of praying and seeking God. "I feel as though my life has begun again," one woman said of her

experience.

Whether you are able to attend a Memorial Healing Service or not, God wants you to be free. Ask Him to forgive you; then forgive yourself and those involved in the abortion, and name and release your aborted baby to Him. Then set your heart to live your life for Him.

Read a companion devotional.

Lori Graham Bakker is the president of Mourning to Joy, a ministry that fosters healing and reconciliation for post-abortive women and men. Bakker travels worldwide to speak to audiences and encourage them to become the people of destiny God has called them to be. She and her husband, Jim Bakker, host The Jim Bakker Show.