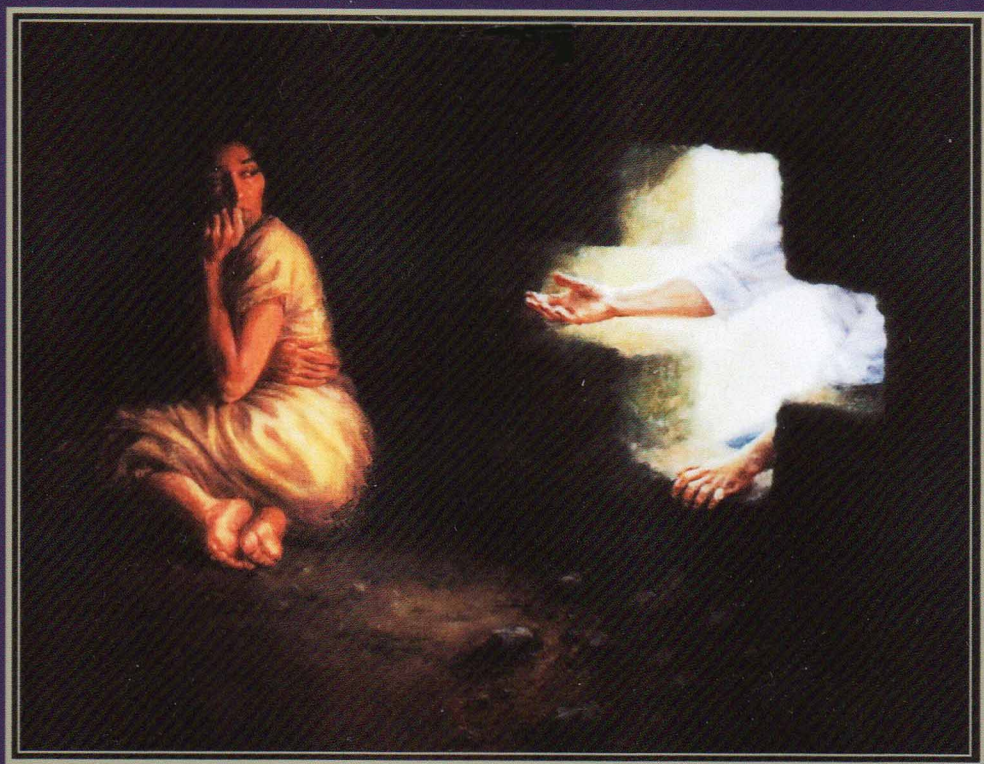


# The Jericho Plan

Breaking Down the Walls  
Which Prevent  
Post-Abortion Healing



David C. Reardon

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## **Breaking Down the Walls Which Prevent Post-Abortion Healing**

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Acorn Books  
Springfield, IL

*Dedicated to my parents, Tom and Joan,  
who offered their children examples of faith, hope and charity*

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## WHO SHOULD USE THIS BOOK?

One of the main goals of this book is to acknowledge and support women and men who have been abused, exploited, and traumatized by abortion—while raising awareness that most abortions are unwanted or coerced and the harm abortion causes to those involved. While this text is specifically directed toward clergy, there is no reason for this message to be confined strictly to the pulpit. Indeed, one of our requests of clergy is that they raise awareness of these issues among their flock and seek to make all their church members promoters of this message.

Therefore, if you know or someone who has had or been involved in an abortion (and chances are we all know someone in this situation, whether or not we are aware of it), you may benefit from this book. At the very least, it can help you to better understand these issues and so be able to offer words of encouragement and support, even in general conversations about the abortion issue. Even if you never are called to give a sermon or talk on this topic, you have the equally important task of showing God's love to everyone you meet in your daily, one-on-one contacts. This book can help free you from the fear of "saying the wrong thing."

If you have been involved in an abortion, it is our hope that this book will help address some of the concerns and questions you may have. Of special importance are its exploration of some of the troubling questions that may be most *difficult* to ask. It may also help you to see that you are not alone one. Others have and are walking this road, or wish to walk it with you. Their insights, support and friendship may help you to better understand what you have been through, why you may continue to struggle, and how to seek resolution and peace of mind and heart. While the pain of your experience may never entirely leave you, the walk can become easier and you may even find yourself experiencing remarkable joy and healing. We encourage you to draw upon the resources at the end of this book, especially for the purpose of connecting with others who have been on this journey. Because of their experience, they may be able to help make this journey easier.

If you or your partner are currently experiencing an unplanned or difficult pregnancy—or are facing lack of support, pressure, threats or the insistence of others that you have an abortion—we encourage you to seek help through the resources at the end of this book. You may be also able to find resources and support in your local community, church or place of worship. Please keep seeking help even if those whom you initially approach do not offer support. You have the right to information,

resources and support. No one has the right to push or pressure you into an abortion that you do not want or for which you are not prepared.

In short, this book is for everyone who cares about those who are at risk for abortion or exploitation, and those whose lives have been touched by abortion. While we encourage you to share this book with others who have been involved in abortion or are concerned about this issue (especially local clergy or other church leaders), don't do so without reading the book yourself. To provide the information to others is good, but our hope is that you too will become a source of support and healing for others, a witness of God's great love.

Our world desperately needs such healers and supporters. Don't be afraid. Be a healer.

## INTRODUCTION

Most of us do not enjoy talking or preaching about abortion. This issue touches a deeply personal and painful memory for many people in our congregations, and many of us would prefer to avoid it. But doing so does not help anyone. Instead, people on both sides of the issue need to look more deeply at this topic in a way they probably have never done before.

Those who are pro-life need to learn greater compassion and understanding about why women have abortions, including the fact that most abortions are unwanted or coerced. They need to understand what those involved in abortion go through afterward. Heaping shame and scorn on those who have had abortions is both counterproductive and unjust. It creates resentment and drives away those who may strongly need assurance of God's healing love.

At the same time, those who have been involved in abortion need to support and understanding. They may need help to see how they can break through the walls abortion may have created in their lives. They need to hear God's Word directly addressed to their own experience with abortion so that they can turn with confidence to the hope of being fully healed in Christ.

Finally, abortion defenders who have not personally experienced the reality of abortion need to learn that abortion is not a panacea for problem pregnancies. It is not a simple "do-it-and-forget-it" procedure. For many involved in abortion, it has a profound and lasting effect on how they see themselves, God and others. In many cases, it has a disastrous impact on every aspect of their physical, emotional, and spiritual lives, as well as on their families and others around them. At the very least, instead of blindly defending abortion as a necessary evil, we need to admit that the experience of abortion is a tragedy for everyone involved.

In short, we will never heal the division that abortion is causing in our churches by ignoring it. On the other hand, unless this issue is addressed in just the right way, it is guaranteed to increase resentments, arouse passions, and ultimately push people away from your community.

This book, then, is not about confrontation. Instead, it is about addressing the abortion issue in a healing and reconciling way. We must become diligent in tearing down the walls that often make those who have had abortions feel excluded from full participation in our religious communities. We want them to hear a welcoming message of support and healing, not the driving-away message of judgment and condemnation.

## DEFUSING TENSIONS

Is it possible to speak about abortion in a way that does not antagonize members of your church? Yes.

Is it possible to preach hope and healing after abortion without risk of encouraging it, or angering pro-lifers? Of course it is.

Is it possible to lead a congregation to greater compassion for both those who have had abortions and the unborn children who die from abortion? Absolutely.

Drawing on more than 20 years of involvement with those who have been involved in abortion, and speaking to mixed crowds of pro-life and pro-choice supporters, I want to share with you what I have learned about opening hearts and defusing the emotional anger surrounding the abortion issue. It is possible to do all of the above, and more. And it's really not that hard to do.

What it takes is an understanding of the factors that may lead women to undergoing an abortion—perhaps most importantly, that most abortions are unwanted or coerced—and what they may experience afterward. By understanding these issues, you can speak to what they know and have experienced. And your acknowledgment of these issues will help them to know that they are not alone in their pain and give them hope that they can find support and healing.

At the same time, by sharing this understanding with your congregation, you will help the whole community to better understand:

- (1) that most women do not want abortions, but have them because they feel they have no other choice;
- (2) that many struggle with emotional, psychological and spiritual wounds after abortion; and
- (3) that many desire understanding and healing. This understanding will create a more healing environment—and a less judgmental one.

## OUR LONG-RANGE GOAL

Our goal is simple. We want to create a society that is more conducive to post-abortion healing. We want to make our society *both* more pro-life and more pro-woman. And the place to begin this revolution is within the church. Who better than our pastors can, and should, promote healing and reconciliation? Who better than our pastors can help people to better understand themselves and others?

Surveys at abortion clinics have shown that 70 percent of women undergoing abortion believe abortion is morally wrong.<sup>1</sup> They are



having abortions against their consciences because of circumstances that make them feel they have no other options—including pressure or threats from others, lack of meaningful support, lack of viable alternatives, misleading counseling, abandonment by others, violence and abuse, and more. Most feel pressured to abort or uncertain about the decision, yet are not given the counseling or support they need.<sup>2</sup> A survey of women in post-abortion support groups found that more than 80 percent said they would have continued the pregnancy under better circumstances or with more support from those around them.<sup>3</sup> Given the high prevalence of coerced and unwanted abortions, it is not surprising that so many are traumatized or wounded after abortion.

These same women and men, however, also frequently face condemnation and judgment from others, or are dismissed by those who tell them they need to forget about it and move on with their lives. Many live quietly with their pain, often feeling that the abortion is a secret to hide from others. Others may lash out against those whom they feel don't understand what they've been through.

We must offer a message of hope and understanding that can help free them from the feelings of isolation, stigma and shame that can hold them back from fully participating in Christ's love. But it's often up to us to make the first move, and a move that encourages hope without increasing fears of condemnation.

## SHARING AREAS OF CONCERN

No matter what your views are on abortion, or what your religious tradition, this book will be useful to you and we encourage you to adapt it to your needs.

This book is prepared from what is clearly a Christian and biblical perspective. But the basic messages of reconciliation, hope, and community support are common to all faiths and can easily be adapted for use in any religious tradition.

This book is also prepared from a pro-life perspective; indeed it is a major part of our pro-woman/pro-life initiative. Our ultimate goal is to create a where meaningful help and support are offered to those in crisis, where no vulnerable woman or girl will ever feel she needs to have an abortion, and where those who have been hurt by abortion are allowed to grieve and heal from their pain.

We want people to know that abortion exploits and harms those involved and ends the life of their unborn children. But we also want them to know that our faith communities are places where those who have been involved in abortion can find support and help. We should be careful in what we say, think and do and conscious of the ways that our



response can drive away those hurting from abortion. We never want either our attitude or their own feelings of isolation or shame to prevent anyone from seeking, finding, and experiencing God's healing.

If you consider yourself to be "pro-choice," this book can still be helpful to you. For example, pro-choice pastors and other church leaders should be aware that there may be many people in your congregation who are hurting after abortion. Even if you feel they did the right thing, they still need assurance that God loves them and wants them to find healing from their experience. They need the assurance that their community will not reject them. They need the assurance that it is okay to grieve for the children who are now lost to them.

In addition, if you feel that some pro-life members of your congregation are too judgmental of those who have had abortions, you can help change their attitude by educating your congregation about the immense pressure, coercion and even force that leads many women to have abortions. Even from a pro-choice perspective, it is not necessary to convince the pro-lifers in your congregation that abortion is moral. It is sufficient to convince them that those involved in abortion are not evil haters of life, but are often facing immense difficulties that made them feel they had no other options.

In brief, this book is intended to help teach a greater understanding of the abortion experience in order to build bridges between those who are pro-life and those who are pro-choice, and especially between those who have had abortions and those who have not. The result, we believe, will be a society that is more committed to preventing the perceived need for abortion through a more active outreach to those facing difficult pregnancies.

## AN OVERVIEW OF THIS BOOK

*The Jericho Plan* lays out a multi-step process that includes the following steps:

- 1) Increasing the congregation's compassion and support for those who may be at risk of abortion, and especially for those who have already been hurt by abortion;
- 2) Fostering an attitude that will reduce the concerns of those who have been directly or indirectly involved in an abortion, and stimulating their desire to be understood;
- 3) Educating the congregation that most abortions are unwanted or coerced, and that abortion has destructive effects on the lives all involved—including women, men and families;

- 4) Explaining the obstacles to healing that can prolong psychological and spiritual suffering after abortion;
- 5) Building confidence in those who have been involved in or encouraged an abortion that they will be understood, accepted and supported by the community;
- 6) Stimulating the desire for emotional and spiritual healing; and,
- 7) Encouraging healing through acceptance of God's love and mercy, helping those facing a crisis pregnancy or unwanted abortion, and offering support to those who have been hurt by abortion and inviting participation in post-abortion recovery programs.

It is doubtful that all of these steps can be accomplished in a single sermon. Indeed, any attempt to do so would probably be rushing a process that really takes time. We suggest a series of at least three sermons.

The first sermon would address steps one and two. It would be directed principally at the congregation in general so that those who have been involved in an abortion, in any way, would see that others are being called upon to acknowledge and understand their situation.

The second sermon would cover steps three and four, which raises awareness that most abortions are unwanted or coerced and presents a closer look at the ongoing effects of abortion in the lives of women, men, families and others affected by abortion. This sermon reinforces understanding of the emotional hardships of those who have been involved in an abortion, while at the same time encouraging those affected to understand some of the ways in which unresolved issues related to the abortion may be weighing on their lives.

Lastly, the third sermon completes the cycle by calling on the community to create an environment of support and healing in your church. This would include fostering efforts to help those facing an unplanned or difficult pregnancy, or at risk of being pressured, coerced or forced into an unwanted abortion, by offering viable alternatives and empowering them to protect the life of their child. It would also include support and compassion for women, men and families who have been hurt by abortion—by connecting them with appropriate support groups and resources, offering prayers and encouragement and walking beside them in their struggles.

In all of these sermons, it should be stressed, we are never seeking to justify abortion. Instead, we are simply trying to raise awareness of the obstacles that often lead to abortion and the prevalence of unwanted and coerced abortions, and to show how these experiences have ongoing negative effects on the lives of those involved.

This book probably contains much more material than is needed for

three sermons. It includes a psychological profile of women who have had abortions, the testimonies of those who have been involved in abortions (including those who were pressured or coerced into an unwanted abortion), and stories of those who are seeking healing through God's grace and with the support of their faith communities.

It also includes facts, research findings, theological analysis, and Biblical words of grace and mercy. It is our hope that, by drawing on these resources, you will easily be able to develop sermons and other teaching materials that reflect your own style and your congregation's particular needs.

## NOTES

1. *Los Angeles Times* Poll, March 19, 1989. See also MK Zimmerman, *Passage Through Abortion* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1977) and DC Reardon, *Aborted Women, Silent No More* (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2002).
2. VM Rue et. al., "Induced abortion and traumatic stress: A preliminary comparison of American and Russian women," *Medical Science Monitor* 10(10): SR5-16, 2004.
3. *Aborted Women, Silent No More*, op. cit., 336.

## CHAPTER ONE

### FOCUSING ON WOMEN

The traditional framing of the abortion debate is based on the view that the rights of the unborn child are in conflict with the rights of the pregnant woman. But in fact, the rights of the mother and the rights of her unborn child are not in conflict—and in upholding the rights of both, we can create a society that is both pro-woman and pro-life.

In at least a few cases, the traditional adversarial position has led some pro-lifers to focus almost exclusively on the rights of the unborn child. A few even believe any effort to focus public attention on the physical and emotional consequences of abortion on women undercuts the moral high ground of opposing abortion simply because all human life is sacred.

Unfortunately, there are more than a few anti-abortionists who have very little sympathy for women who suffer problems after abortion. Some have even expressed their disdain for women injured by abortion with comments such as, “They deserve what they get.”

Less punitive pro-lifers are simply idealists. They want to believe that somehow, with just a better education program, or a more articulate argument, we will be able to awaken America to the moral superiority of our position. To advance this moral argument, evidence of fetal development is relevant but evidence of physical and psychological harm to women is not.

As this chapter will show, the pro-woman approach is not only consistent with the pro-life moral imperative, it is in fact a fuller and more complete expression of it.

### THE NATURAL ORDER OF THINGS

We begin with a very simple observation. In God’s ordering of creation, it is only the mother who can nurture her unborn child. All that the rest of us can do, then, is to nurture the mother. To help a child, we must help the child’s mother.

There is nothing startling about this observation. Crisis pregnancy centers have known this truth, and have been living it out, for decades. But we must explore this insight more deeply to understand all that it can teach us.

God has created a connection between a mother and her children that is so deeply personal and intimate that the welfare of each is dependent

on the other. As every mother knows from personal experience, this interdependence is for both good and ill. When a mother's children are joyful, their joy lifts her heart. When they are troubled by sorrow, their sorrows weigh on her as well. But in sum, one cannot help an unborn child without helping the mother; one cannot hurt an unborn child without hurting the mother.

This is why, from a natural law perspective, we know that abortion is inherently harmful to women. One does not need to be a "biased" pro-life Christian to see this truth. Consider the testimony of Dr. Julius Fogel, a psychiatrist and obstetrician who personally performed more than 20,000 abortions. According to Dr. Fogel:

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. When 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. I know that as a psychiatrist.<sup>1</sup>

If there is a single principle, then, which lies at the heart of the pro-woman/pro-life agenda, it would have to be this: The best interests of the child and the mother are always joined.

This is true even if the mother does not initially realize it, or if those around her are denying this bond and pushing her toward an unwanted abortion. Thus, the only way that we can help either the mother or her child is to help both. Conversely, if we hurt either, we hurt both.

This is not an optional truth. It reflects God's ordering of creation. This principle is so important that I must repeat it again: Only the mother can nurture her unborn child. All that the rest of us can do is to support and protect the authentic rights of the mother—rights that are exploited and abused by abortion—both for herself and so that she will be empowered to protect her child.

Research shows that most abortions are unwanted or coerced, and that many (if not most) women who have abortions would have carried to term if they had the necessary resources and support to do so. If we help women, then, we will also be helping their unborn children. Conversely, we can never hope to succeed in our efforts to protect the rights of the unborn without first and foremost protecting the true rights of women. Brute-force bans on abortion will not create a pro-life society.

But helping mothers through an aggressive defense of women's legitimate rights will.

It is in this very same sense that the late Pope John Paul II insisted that it is necessary for those who oppose abortion to become "courageously 'pro-woman,' promoting a choice that is truly in favor of women. It is precisely the woman, in fact, who pays the highest price, not only for her motherhood, but even more for its destruction, for the suppression of the life of the child who has been conceived. The only honest stance ... is that of radical solidarity with the woman."<sup>2</sup>

## LEARNING OUR LESSONS, TOO

Many pro-lifers scratch their heads in confusion, wondering, "How can God have allowed this to go on so long?" So many millions have died of unborn children have died, and so many women, men and families have been harmed. Yet we seem no closer to changing the situation than we were decades ago. How can God allow this to continue?"

This is an important question. As Christians, we believe that from every evil happening, God can resurrect something good—at the very least, the healing of hearts and relationships, and often much more. And because the onslaught of abortion is so terrible, we must pray with hope that there is an awful lot of good which God intends to resurrect from this great evil. Greater respect for the unborn and for the rights and dignity of expectant parents, and for the sanctity of life is one lesson which our society is certainly intended to learn. But it is by no means the only lesson we are meant to learn.

## COMPASSION FOR THOSE FACING CRISIS PREGNANCIES

Pro-lifers have clearly done a tremendous job in the last several decades to offer support for those who are facing unplanned or difficult pregnancies, and for those who do not the support of a partner. But there is much more that must be done. Churches, families, friends, and employers must make even greater efforts to be supportive of every pregnant woman or single parent, no matter how the child was conceived.

There is no denying the fact that, in previous decades, righteous and judgmental Christians often discriminated against and shamed women who were pregnant out-of-wedlock. And it is equally true that this condemning attitude ended up causing some women to have abortions or led those around them to insist they abort. For this, we too share in the guilt of abortion.

If we are to be truly Christian, we must strive to live by and promote

the principle that every pregnancy, every birth, is a gift from God. No matter how the pregnancy occurred, no matter what the physical gifts or disabilities of the child, every child is a blessing from God, an opportunity and challenge to follow Him in the way of love. When this gift is received those who are not yet prepared to be parents because of their youth, the unstable situation in their lives, lack of marriage, or another reason, it can offer a tremendous opportunity for growth, love and self-sacrifice. Becoming pregnant should not be seen as a “punishment” for irresponsible or sinful behavior, but as a chance to change one’s live and start anew.

As a Christian community, we must cherish life and charitably invite others to seek God’s will in their lives. To do this, we must believe that every child is a gift from God and emphatically spread this message. Therefore, the birth of every child should be an occasion of joy, not of shame.

While some churches may fear that welcoming an out-of-wedlock pregnancy will encourage sinful or irresponsible behavior, we should remind our flock that having sex outside of marriage is not the greatest of sins, much less an unforgivable one. Embarrassed young people announcing a pregnancy do not need to be shamed and condemned, but supported in their efforts to take responsibility for the situation and discern God’s will for their lives. They need to know that we, their families, their church, and their society, want to continue to help them along that path, over which we too must struggle.

During the last several decades, Christians have truly come a long way in learning this first lesson. Concern for the unborn who are threatened by abortion has no doubt played a role in teaching this lesson. Nonetheless, the witnessing work of our many crisis pregnancy centers and the compassion of so many parents toward their single mother/daughters are evidence that this lesson is being learned.

Let us pray that it is never forgotten.

## COMPASSION FOR THOSE WHO HAVE HAD ABORTIONS

Many good-hearted people continue to react with quick judgements or even horror toward anyone who has been involved in an abortion. They may condemn the person involved and wonder silently or out loud how anyone could do such a thing. Those who react in this way usually do not know that most abortions are unwanted or coerced. They may not understand the level of pressure or coercion or the frequent lack of viable options for those who are pregnant in a difficult situation, or when those around them think they should not be pregnant. While this does not make abortion right, this knowledge can help people to



better understand and offer compassion for those who have been involved in an abortion.

This is such an important lesson that it is worth repeating: *most abortions are unwanted or coerced*. Many are forced. In a survey of American women who underwent abortions, 64 reported that they were pressured to abort by others.<sup>3</sup> Many abortions are primarily the result of lack of support, pressure, emotional blackmail, coercion, or threats from boyfriends, husbands, parents, employers, doctors, counselors or other people with influence over women's lives.

Polls show that up to 70 percent of women having abortions have moral qualms about abortion, yet end up aborting anyway because they feel they have no other options. Lack of information about options and risks can act coercively on such women.<sup>4</sup> Yet the above mentioned survey of American women found that more than 80 percent said they did not receive adequate counseling before abortion (67 percent said they received no counseling), even though more than half said they felt rushed or uncertain about the decision.<sup>3</sup>

Further, making abortion easily available has also made it easy for others to pressure or even force women and girls into unwanted abortions. If given real support, options, and resources to have their children, the vast majority of women having abortions would continue the pregnancy. Instead of receiving support, however, many find that they are pushed, coerced, lied to, or threatened until they undergo an abortion. In some cases, women have been assaulted and even murdered by their partners for refusing to have abortions—homicide is the leading cause of death among pregnant women.<sup>5</sup>

Raising awareness of these issues and resisting this exploitation and abuse of women is an act of justice toward women—and to their partners who may also be victims of coercion.

For pro-lifers who are primarily concerned with protecting the lives of unborn children, it is important to recognize that protecting the rights of women facing exploitation or abuse is a moral imperative both for the women themselves. Further, we can never hope to end abortion without protecting the rights of women and empowering them to protect the lives of their unborn children.

While this chapter is entitled “Focusing on Women,” it is important to realize that men may also be victims of coerced and unwanted abortions. The abortion may take place without their knowledge or their efforts to support their partner and unborn child may be dismissed or ignored by others who think abortion is the best solution. In the United States, men have no legal say over the fate of their unborn child. While some believe that abortion should be left to the decision of the woman alone, this does not stop men from being hurt or traumatized by their

involvement in an abortion.

Hearing the personal stories of women and men who have been involved in a past abortion, or working along side those who have experienced abortion, has helped to increase the understanding of pro-lifers. Understanding that anyone can be vulnerable to the injustice and exploitation fostered by abortion is the basis for offering real support and compassion to those hurt by abortion. Over the past several decades, this understanding has finally established a firm foothold within the pro-life movement, but it is still far from being universal all pro-lifers or Christians in general.

This issue, too, will be discussed at length in the following chapters. Let it suffice for now to say that Christians must refrain from condemning and judging the women and men who have been involved in abortions. To do so is not only wrong in and of itself, but it may also drive them into isolation and despair. Instead, we must treat them with the love, dignity and compassion that is the right of each human person. More, we must be willing to offer more than words of support—we must be willing to walk with them on their journey.

## REACHING THE MIDDLE MAJORITY

The “middle majority” of Americans believes that abortion is wrong, but they also believe that it should be legal, at least in some cases. There are many things that can be said about this mindset,<sup>6</sup> but for now it is enough to say that they are uneasy pragmatists. While they firmly believe that abortion is the killing of a human being, they also believe it is sometimes necessary and almost always beneficial to the woman.

This discomfort has sometimes made people seem resistant to efforts by pro-lifers to educate them about the humanity of the unborn child. While technological advances that allow a “window to the womb” and the efforts of pro-lifers have made inroads in this area (polls show that many people, including women, have a more pro-life attitude about abortion than in years past), many who are uncomfortable with the idea of abortion are still unwilling to “deny” abortions to women who may want or need them.

There are two ways to address this issue. First, evidence that most abortions are unwanted and coerced, that it leaves women and their loved ones vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, and that abortion has left many people traumatized and hurting, will help people rethink their position on abortion.

Second, allowing those who have lost a child to abortion the opportunity to grieve will not only help those who are hurting, but it will also help open the eyes of others to the humanity of the unborn child.

Wherever facts of fetal biology will not change hearts, the pain of those who have lost children to abortion can do so: "It was my baby who died that day!"

In this very real way, the issue of the unborn child's human rights is not replaced by a focus on post-abortion issues; it is subsumed into it. Leaving aside the exploitation and abuse experienced by so many, it is the humanity of their lost unborn child that makes abortion such a painful issue for so many mothers and fathers.

Thus, the best thing for us who have not had abortions to do is to give women and men who have experienced abortion an opportunity to grieve and to speak of their loss. Not only will this help those who are suffering, but it will also forward our efforts to create a society in which no mother or father feels compelled to undergo an abortion. This does not leave the unborn voiceless; rather, it offers their parents a chance to be heard and to speak for their unborn children.

Let me be clear, however. This effort is not about using those who have experienced abortion to promote our own agenda. Nor am I saying that appeals on behalf of the unborn child are ineffective. Rather, it is about recognizing that we all share the same concerns as those who have experienced abortion, showing our support, and allowing those who can best speak for their children the chance to do so.

### **A PRO-WOMAN/PRO-LIFE PERSPECTIVE**

In a very real sense, this pro-woman/pro-life perspective offers a path by which our society can emerge from a "culture of death"—a culture that sacrifices the lives of unborn children and causes great harm to all those touched by the experience—toward a "culture of life" in which both unborn children and their mothers (not to mention their fathers and families) are treated with dignity and respect. It is a process which follows the reverse path of the pro-abortion movement.

The pro-abortion movement was born from a social vision which separated the mother's interests from her unborn baby's. If their interests are separate, then there is a potential conflict between the woman's rights and her unborn child's rights, and only one of them can prevail.

We cannot accept any part of this reasoning. We must reject every ideology which frames the abortion issue in terms of a mother versus her child. We are both pro-woman *and* pro-child.

We believe that we can and should help both the mother and her child. We believe that the legalization of abortion was not an advance for women's rights, but an advance for social engineers and others who are exploiting women and men in times of personal crisis.

## SUMMARY

The pro-woman/pro-life approach to the abortion issue places defense of women's rights at the center of our national debate. It is pro-woman because it recognizes that fact that harming the unborn child harms the mother. And it is pro-life (in the sense of being "pro- unborn child") because it recognizes the fact the only way to help the unborn child is to help the mother. Defending the authentic rights of women is necessary if we are to call ourselves followers of God.

This focus also acknowledges abortion's destructive affect on men and other family members, and will promote the father's ability and role in supporting his partner and their unborn child.

By giving those who are hurting because of a past abortion a voice, we are acting rightly to recognize and help heal their pain and trauma. We are also giving those who are best able to do so the chance to speak on behalf of their children. In this sense, we are not ignoring the unborn. We are instead recognizing the concerns we share with their parents that these children be acknowledged and grieved, and to help support other unborn children and their parents.

This pro-woman/pro-life perspective is offers a path for our society from a "culture of death" that sees the right of the child and the rights of the mother in conflict, toward a culture of life in which both the mother and the unborn child (and the fathers and families) are treated with dignity and respect.

None of what I have presented in this chapter is novel, as is demonstrated by a letter which Dr. O.E. Worcester wrote to the Journal of the American Medical Association over 100 years ago. Dr. Worcester wrote to complain against her male colleagues who treated women who were pregnant out-of-wedlock with great disrespect. When a colleague asked her to help perform abortions, she refused, saying, "I loved woman too well to help her add murder to her other sin. If mother love and the touch of baby fingers did not save her to God and womanhood, nothing could. That it could, I had proof in many cases where forsaken mothers had, in spite of all, carved for themselves and their fatherless children an honorable place in the world."

Dr. Worcester concluded her reprimand of her colleagues with a pointed condemnation of misogynist abortionists, an appeal to the inseparability of woman and child, and a plea for true compassion:

I have never seen cause to hold the male element less responsible for the slaughter of the innocents than in the days of Herod. Then, as now, men seem to fear the coming of Christ born of woman....

This is my plea: "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder," in the medical profession or elsewhere.

Let men and women join forces under the banner of Him who said: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her," and also: "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more."

Let us join forces all along the line, and fight this hydraheaded monster to the death and save our nation.<sup>7</sup>

To this plea I can add only one word: Amen.

## NOTES

1. Colman McCarthy, "A Psychological View of Abortion," St. Paul Sunday Pioneer Press, March 7, 1971. Dr. Fogel, who did 20,000 abortions over the subsequent decades, reiterated the same view in a second interview with McCarthy in 1989, in which he disagreed with the Koop report. "The Real Anguish of Abortions," The Washington Post, Feb. 5, 1989.
2. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 207.
3. VM Rue et. al., "Induced abortion and traumatic stress: A preliminary comparison of American and Russian women," *Medical Science Monitor* 10(10): SR5-16, 2004.
4. *Los Angeles Times* Poll, March 19, 1989. See also MK Zimmerman, *Passage Through Abortion* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1977) and DC Reardon, *Aborted Women, Silent No More* (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2002).
5. I.L. Horton and D. Cheng, "Enhanced Surveillance for Pregnancy-Associated Mortality-Maryland, 1993-1998," *JAMA* 285(11): 1455-1459 (2001); see also J. Mcfarlane et. al., "Abuse During Pregnancy and Femicide: Urgent Implications for Women's Health," *Obstetrics & Gynecology* 100: 27-36 (2002).
6. See DC Reardon, *Making Abortion Rare: A Healing Strategy for A Divided Nation* (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2009).
7. O.E. Worcester, M.D., "From A Woman Physician: An Open Letter to Dr. W.W. Parker," *JAMA* 22:599, 1894, reprinted in "JAMA 100 Years Ago," *JAMA* 271(15), April 20, 1994.

## CHAPTER TWO

# A PLAN FOR HEALING

For many women and men, abortion is a profoundly isolating experience. Most abortions are unwanted or coerced by the woman, her partner or both—and only undergone with extreme reluctance and the feeling that there are no other viable options available. Lack of support, pressure from others, or the feeling that those around you are upset or angry about the pregnancy and expect you to “do the right thing” only add to the sense of being alone. For many, particularly teens, the abortion may be a secret or there is at least a feeling that one should not talk openly about it with others.

If those around you insist that abortion is the “right” or “only” to do, having doubts or ambivalence beforehand, or feelings of grief and trauma afterwards, is dangerous. For many people, attempting to talk about the experience afterwards is met with a dismissal or the advice that, “You did the best you could. Now you just need to put it behind you.” Some may fear condemnation from pro-lifers or those whom they believe would not approve of the abortion.

As one woman who had an abortion as a teen noted, “The people who told me beforehand that this was the best thing weren’t there for me afterward.” Another woman said, “When I tried to confide in friends, they shook their heads with disapproving looks. It made me feel so alone.”

For those who have been involved in an abortion, then, the first impulse is often to bury their feelings, to pack them away in a box marked “The Past—Do Not Open.” Instead, they try to focus on the future. If they do not succeed at this, and the physical, psychological, or spiritual effects of abortion become so severe that they can no longer be denied or ignored, then the second impulse is to believe that they deserve to suffer for having or being part of the abortion.

This is one of the ways in which abortion is like rape. Both rapists and abortionists injure women in a way which creates so much shame that their victims actually help to conceal the crime. Furthermore, the victims of rape and abortion are both inclined to blame themselves for the “stupidity” of being exploited and injured by someone else.

## CREATING A HEALING ENVIRONMENT

Before we can develop an environment in our churches that will help foster acceptance of God’s love and healing, it is essential that we first

heal ourselves. We, the pro-life movement and the Church, must learn to foster compassion and understanding instead of judging the culpability of others. This does not mean condoning abortion, but it does mean learning to see that those who have undergone abortions are just like us in our need for God's love, mercy and acceptance. It is only the overflowing grace of God that puts each of us right with Him and helps restore us to peace and healing.

We also need to remember that our concern for the unborn child should always be one with our concern for the unborn child's mother and father, as well as anyone else harmed by the abortion. As previously discussed, it is only through supporting the unborn child's mother, and others who can empower her to protect her child's life, that we can help the unborn child.

From another perspective, while we do mourn the deaths of the children killed by abortion, we should really be more concerned about the ravages of abortion on the lives and souls of the women and men who have been touched impacted by this experience. As one pregnancy counselor noted, "When I began this work, I was mostly concerned about the unborn. But after working with so many young girls who have had abortions, what saddens me most is how abortion destroys the joy of their youth, and strips away every last shred of their innocence. Nothing can make a young girl feel more worthless and despicable than having had an abortion."

I sincerely believe that this attitude is the only one which has any hope of creating a truly pro-life society, and therefore, one that is also pro-woman (since, as previously discussed, we cannot be pro-life without being pro-woman). By seeking to reach out in understanding and empathy toward those who have been involved in abortion, we will create a ripple effect which will truly transform the world.

## REDUCING JUDGMENTALISM

When we look at the various points in our lives where we don't feel we are at our best, our response is usually one of humility or shame. Humility is the sense that we are not perfect, that we have flaws, weaknesses and sins to overcome, but that with God's grace and help we can do so. Shame, on the other hand, is a feeling that we don't deserve love or grace and that we are a worthless being. It may be a way in which we deny our hurt and pain, by telling ourselves that we deserve it. It may also make us feel resentful or even hateful toward anyone who aggravates the negative feelings that we are trying to deny. We may feel that no one can understand us and fear (rightly or wrongly) that those around us are prepared to condemn us.



Indeed, when it comes to abortion, these feelings of shame are often so great that some women who underwent a coerced or unwanted abortion may be hesitant to acknowledge the role that others played in her abortion. One counselor who worked with many post-aborted women over a number of years reported most denied that their abortions were coerced even when the circumstances indicated otherwise. The same can be true of men who, despite doing all they could think of to stop the abortion from happening, blame themselves for their “failure” to protect their unborn child. Yet failing to look honestly at the true circumstances surrounding the abortion may keep a person trapped in shame and self-hatred for not “doing enough” to protect their child. An acknowledgment that one was overwhelmed or felt powerless, while not excusing responsibility for an abortion, may help the person to see themselves as a human being who is not perfect and needs God’s grace rather than someone who is so awful that they don’t deserve love or healing.

This is our task then: to reduce feelings of shame by increasing our own level of understanding and compassion. Through compassion, we seek to eliminate the hurdles women and men face along the way to acknowledging and accepting God’s mercy and love. This is part of the journey that can take them on the path to deeper healing and peace of mind and heart. It is therefore extremely important for the pro-woman/pro-life movement concentrate its public relations efforts on counteracting the image that pro-lifers are judgmental and replace it with a message of willingness to “walk alongside” with those who are facing difficult pregnancies and those who have been wounded by abortion. This message must be prominent in all of our campaigns, but it must especially be proclaimed in our churches.

We are calling upon you, our clergy, to make this call for compassion and support the bedrock everything you say about the abortion issue (including your sermons). This can be done without in any way condoning abortion. Through the stories of those who have been involved in abortions, especially those whose abortions were unwanted or coerced, you can remind people of the very great need for support and advocacy that is needed for those facing difficult pregnancies. And while knowing the realities women and men face does not lessen the seriousness of abortion, it does lessen our tendency to blame and condemn rather than being witnesses of God’s love and mercy.

Church communities need to be reminded that we are not in a position to judge the culpability of those who have had abortions—they will do that for themselves, perhaps more harshly than we would. Nor should we worry about reminding them of the humanity of the child or the sinfulness of abortion, because these truths are implicitly known by all who have been involved in abortion. Even if they defend the abortion as moral or “necessary,” they know, at least on some level, that a life was

destroyed and they are now mourning their lost child.

The knowledge that the human fetus, the human embryo, or even the human zygote, is in fact a human being is as undeniable as the answer to the child's question: "Where do babies come from?" While a child might be temporarily diverted from the answer to this question, no child's curiosity is completely satisfied until the full truth is revealed. Life begins at conception. Babies are created by the uniting (hopefully in an act of love) of a man and woman, the sharing of the substance of two selves becoming one in the flesh—both symbolically, in the sexual act, and most truly, in the conception of a new life. Every adult remembers when they learned this amazing truth as a child. Everyone's biology bears constant witness to it. And it is this truth, no matter how much one tries to ignore it, forget it, or bury it beneath slogans or philosophical quibbles—it is this truth, that makes everyone uneasy with abortion.

For those who are struggling with a past abortion, especially if it was the result of exploitation or abuse, they might not be ready to confront the full reality of this situation yet—and they may need the guidance and support of others when they are ready to do so. Attempts to force them to confront it before they are ready, or to educate others on the humanity of the unborn child, will likely only lead to feelings of anxiety, fear, resentment, and anger. In short, walls go up. On the other hand, showing that we have learned what abortion does to women and men makes walls come down because this is what they know, this is what they feel and have experienced. The knowledge that one's church community understands what one has experienced can itself bring some healing.

## **BUILDING BRIDGES WITH EMPATHY**

Through this approach of taking down walls of defensiveness, we can help those who are hurting in our churches and communities experience the truth of God's great compassion and love. When they are ready, and with the help of trusted guidance, they will be able to confront the reality of the abortion and whatever role they played in it, accept God's mercy and love and begin to find true freedom and peace. In our willingness to walk beside them, and share our own suffering from whatever we have personally experienced in their lives, we can offer them hope. In short, the message of God's mercy and grace must always come first, for it is only after those in our churches have been wounded by abortion have found some peace and healing that people will be able to accept the pro-life message about the sanctity of life.

To create such a healing environment in our churches, we must begin by being willing to explore our own sufferings, griefs, pain and regret

about our pasts. If our churches become places where people who are suffering from the effects of trauma, sin, abuse, addiction, death, and other serious issues can find acceptance and love, then those dealing with a past abortion may see hope for themselves as well.

Finally, we need as a church to acknowledge the ways that our silence, ambivalence, fears, unwillingness to speak out or get involved, lack of support or other failings have lead to abortion within our own communities. Acknowledging the role, however small or indirect, that we have played in creating such a culture will show our own willingness to look at our sin and failures, to seek God's mercy and resolve to begin anew.

Most of all, we, their church community, must be ready to walk beside those who are aware of their loss. We all need and desire healing, and our faith teaches us that God freely offers us His love, mercy and forgiveness. None of us are condemned to a life of shame. All of us are sinners, all of us have painful experiences in our past that may still cause us hurt. But through God's grace, all of us can find peace again.

## **A HEALING ENVIRONMENT BUILDS STRENGTH**

By our promise of compassion we break the bonds of shame which are an obstacle to healing. In this way, by creating a more healing environment, we will be encouraging more people to seek post-abortion healing. This healing is a good end in and of itself. But it will also help them become active witnesses for the sanctity of life, which is so needed in our society.

The psychological and spiritual healing which can follow an abortion is never automatic. As with all healings of the spirit, it is always the result of the Lord's initiative and the person's response in faith, including a sincere change of heart, and acceptance of God's mercy

Those who experience this healing will help strengthen the Church as well as themselves. They may find new faith, or a restored faith they had been weakened or lost. Many become deeply spiritual. Having experienced the depths of despair, they become marvelous witnesses to hope.

They also strengthen our efforts to create a culture in which the dignity and rights of each human person is accepted and upheld. They are the voice of experience, the unimpeachable witnesses of abortion's dangers. As readers of their stories know, there is no more powerful testimony on behalf of the unborn, in condemnation of abortion's exploitation of women, and in the appeal for social and political reform than the testimony of those who have been involved in a past abortion.<sup>1</sup>

## TOWARD CRITICAL MASS

In physics, critical mass is the point at which a fusion reaction takes place and becomes self-perpetuating. I pray for the day when this healing will reach "critical mass." At that point, there will be an explosion of interest in, and demand for, post-abortion healing services. On that day, public empathy for those who have been hurt by abortion will have overcome the pro-abortion bias against "traitors" who speak out against abortion. On that day, movie stars, athletes, politicians, and other public figures will be able to publicly confess their pain over a past abortion and proclaim their healing to others without fear of destroying their careers. Everywhere, the witness of those who have been there will lead others to seek and accept this healing, and make our society more willing to find real solutions and resources for those facing crisis pregnancies.

Still another aspect of this healing which should not be missed is its impact on family members. Many people remain silent about abortion in general because they do not want to hurt loved ones who have had abortions. But when these loved ones begin to witness to the pain and injustice caused by abortion in their own lives, this same loyalty among family members which previously fostered silence will now encourage them to speak up and support reform. This effect should not be underestimated. For every woman who has had an abortion, there are numerous people who remain neutral on abortion, or hide their true sympathies, out of deference to her feelings. The same is true of men who have been involved in abortion. Every person who is healed will bring with them new allies in our call for true reform in our society. This is our key to a broad segment of the middle majority who are presently avoiding involvement in the abortion debate.

## SUMMARY

Millions of men and women silently carry the grief of a secret abortion in their hearts. They are often silenced by fear of dismissal or condemnation from others, or by feelings of shame and self-blame. They may be silenced by trauma or abuse that led up to the abortion. And they may be silenced by the belief that they are alone and that no one can understand their pain. Indeed, they fear may that "it's just something wrong with me. No one else feels this way after an abortion."

These walking wounded need to learn that we do understand, and that many of us have struggled with similar feelings over painful circumstances in our own lives. They need to know that it is normal and necessary not only to grieve after an abortion, but also to seek emotional

and spiritual healing. It is our obligation, as Christians, to walk beside them and offer our support, to help them escape feelings of shame and to find peace in God's mercy. Most of all, we must help them to forgive themselves.

It is critical, therefore, that the pro-life movement and the Church break through the media-imposed image that we are judgmental and condemning of those who have had abortions. Our rhetoric must hold fast to the defense of the twin truths of the sacredness of human life and God's love for all sinners, among whom we number ourselves.

We need to overcome the fear of some pro-lifers that, if we stress God's mercy, we will be encouraging women to abort now and simply seek forgiveness later. I believe this is an unwarranted fear that stifles the display of understanding and compassion which is truly needed to create an environment conducive to post-abortion healing. It is only through such a healing environment that we will finally build a culture where the dignity and rights of each person is upheld. Only then, when the grief and suffering abortion causes to women, men, families, and society are known by all, will abortion become truly unthinkable.

## NOTES

1. For examples of testimonies, see DC Reardon, *Aborted Women, Silent No More* (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2002) and M Tankard Reist, *Giving Sorrow Words* (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2007). You can also visit our web sites at [www.afterabortion.org](http://www.afterabortion.org) and [www.theunchoice.com](http://www.theunchoice.com).

## CHAPTER THREE

### CONQUERING DESPAIR

**A**bortion is an act of despair. Despair is not only the driving force behind most abortions, it is also the greatest obstacle to post-abortion recovery. Until pro-lifers understand this, they will never be effective at helping those at risk of abortion—or who are trying to recover from a past abortion.

In describing the despair which leads abortion, author Frederica Mathewes-Green gives us this compelling word-picture: “No woman wants an abortion as she wants an ice cream cone or a Porsche. She wants an abortion as an animal caught in a trap wants to gnaw off its own leg.”<sup>1</sup>

This quote is so powerfully accurate that it has even been reprinted by Planned Parenthood. Why? Because pro-abortionists have long wanted to diffuse the notion that women abort for selfish or casual reasons. They want the public to sympathize with the desperation of women seeking abortions because they want to convert sympathy for women into support for abortion.

Actually, the fact that most women do not want abortions is one of the few areas of “common ground” in the abortion debate. Most, if not all, counselors and researchers, on both sides of the political issue, would agree that most abortions involve elements of fear and despair. Many would perhaps even agree that most women don’t want abortions, but feel they have no other alternative. But while “pro-choice” activists and many sitting “on the fence” may translate this to mean that women need abortion to be available, pro-lifers know that we cannot and should not accept the position that the rights of women and the rights of unborn children must be in conflict. Instead, we need to work at offering real support to women, their partners and those around them, thus empowering them to protect their unborn children (this point was discussed earlier in Chapter 1).

Indeed, even if an abortion is unwanted or the woman is in doubt, this does not make the abortion morally acceptable—even to the woman herself. In fact, research suggests that the more a woman agonizes over the abortion decision. Maternal desires, moral doubts and feelings of being exploited or abused do not disappear after an abortion. They continue. They grow. They can become sources of constant reflection or stifling avoidance. They can even become the source of crippling feelings of shame and self-condemnation.

## ESCAPE THROUGH SELF-DESTRUCTION

Returning to Mathewes-Green's analogy of an animal gnawing its leg off to escape a trap, we see that abortion is actually an act of self-destruction. Many women, especially those undergoing unwanted or coerced abortions, describe it as destroying themselves. Remember how Dr. Julius Fogel, a psychiatrist and obstetrician who personally performed more than 20,000 abortions, also described it this way: "Every woman . . . has a trauma at destroying a pregnancy. . . . This is a part of her own life. When she destroys a pregnancy, she is destroying herself."

When pro-abortionists view a woman in this desperate situation, their solution is to offer the woman a supposedly clean, legal way out of "cutting off the offending leg." For those undergoing unwanted abortions, this may not seem like a way out at all, but a form of abuse. But even if the woman thinks abortion is the best solution, she is not told that the loss of her "leg" will leave her crippled. Like many amputees, they she may experience the feeling of a "phantom" part of herself, a missing piece that will leave her feeling less whole and less capable. And at times this missing piece may cause an indescribable ache or a flood of uncontrollable tears. In escaping the trap, she will have lost a part of themselves.

Contrast this approach to that of crisis pregnancy centers where pro-lifers are committed to finding a way to open the jaws of the trap to save both the woman and her "leg." Pro-lifers insist that there is always room for hope. There is always a way to avoid a destructive amputation—a way which, in the long run, will be appreciated by both the woman and her "leg."

What we see in these two perspectives is the difference between despair and hope. Despair inevitably leads us to believe there is no other way out. Hope always leads us to embrace life.

Hope is a virtue that is centered on God, the source of all hope. Despair is one of Satan's greatest weapons.

## THE WEAPON OF DESPAIR

Despair involves a loss of faith and trust in God. In the case of abortion, those involved may have lost faith in the promise that God has a plan for the parents and for the child's life. Or they may never have been exposed to this idea. This could include not just those directly involved in the abortion but anyone who encourages, pushes or pressures for an abortion out of a belief that this is the "best" or "only" option—a form of despair.



When we are desperate, we try to take control. We are left believing that means saving what we can by doing whatever needs to be done, even if it means pushing or encouraging someone else to undergo an unwanted abortion or undergoing one ourselves.

For example, when the Nazis undertook the extermination of millions of Jews, the sheer magnitude of their task required them to develop ways of soliciting the cooperation of the victims. There were too few soldiers to contain millions of rebellious Jews. So it was necessary to manipulate their victims so that they would choose to cooperate for at least one day at a time. The Nazis did this by exposing the Jews to limited threats; the victims were always left with the bit of hope that by submitting to the present indignity, there was something else which could be saved. According to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman:

At all stages of the Holocaust, the victims were confronted with a choice (as least subjectively—even when objectively the choice did not exist any more, having been pre-empted by the secret decision of physical destruction). They could not choose between good and bad situations, but they could at least choose between greater and lesser evil. . . . In other words, they had something to save. To make their victims' behavior predictable and hence manipulable and controllable, the Nazis had to induce them to act in the "rational mode." To achieve that effect, they had to make the victims believe that there was indeed something to save, and that there were clear rules as to how one should go about saving it.<sup>2</sup>

These "choices" were presented in a way that discouraged reflecting on the decisions from a moral perspective. Instead, the victims were pressured to make rational decisions based on the rational need to "save whatever we can."

Using this demonic strategy, the Nazis encouraged the empowerment of Jewish ghetto leaders who would see to the needs of the people, coordinate distribution of medicine and materials, maintain morale, etc. These same leaders were then manipulated into cooperating with the Nazi extermination program. They were confronted with the agonizing choice of cooperating with the Nazis or witnessing the slaughter of their people.

At first, the cooperation was in "small" things, maintaining a ghetto police force, providing lists of names, selection of ghetto residents to be sent to "resettlement" projects, providing transportation to pick-up points, and the like. In some cases, when the Nazis wanted to punish the entire community for some infraction, Jewish leaders were even forced to select and arrest the desired number of victims who were to be publicly executed by the Nazis.

And always, no matter what the request, the leaders were told that by cooperating they were saving the lives of the majority who remained. Leaders who didn't cooperate were eliminated. Leaders who did co-

operate saved the lives of their families, at least for a time, but were left to agonize over their actions.

The similarity between Nazi manipulations of the Jews and the abortionists' manipulation of those faced with a crisis pregnancy—women, men, teens and families—is striking. The manipulation is further practiced on society itself in getting people, including those in a position to influence pregnant teens and women, to believe that abortion is a “necessary evil” to ensure the health and well-being of women.

Just as the Jews were forced to choose between losing everything or “just a little,” so abortion counselors encourage those involved in the abortion to view the pregnancy as a threat to their security—one’s relationships, family, career and entire future. The woman and her partner or family are assured that by sacrificing this one thing (a tiny unborn child), they can save the rest. During this process, they to view the abortion decision not as a moral choice, but as a rational necessity to “save what you can.”

The situation is further complicated when one considers that the woman and her partner may indeed be in a highly vulnerable situation, one that excludes their making a free choice. Poverty, youth, lack of viable employment, disability or poor health, a negative prognosis for the health of the unborn child, broken or abusive relationships, or threats of the loss of one’s job or housing leave those involved in a situation of despair.

But in fact, just as those who reluctantly cooperated with the Nazis discovered, the bargain is a false one. The demands on ghetto leaders to sacrifice more and more victims never stopped. And so it is with those involved in the abortion. After the abortion, they may face self-condemnation, lower self-esteem, difficulty with relationships, substance abuse, career problems, a cycle of repeat abortions, suicidal thoughts. For the woman or girl, she may experience an intense desire for a replacement pregnancy to “atone” for her lost child, and she becomes a single parent—the very problem she sought to avoid in the first place—but now she also has to deal with the emotional scars of an abortion.

## THE DEVIL VERSUS CHRIST

It is significant how differently Christ and the devil appear before and after any situation involving despair—in this case, abortion. Before the abortion, Christ stands, with His arms outstretched to block the way, telling those involved in the abortion: “Do not do this thing. The sacrifices you must make now will be rewarded a hundred fold. I will be with you in this situation (or your daughter, wife, girlfriend, son, etc. I offer life, so that all may live life abundantly. Place your hope in Me and

I will not abandon you."

The devil, on the other hand, insists, "You must get rid of it. You have no choice. Your (or your daughter's, wife's, son's, etc.) future will be destroyed. You (or they) have already gotten yourself into this problem. There is only one way out. Do this one thing and things will be the way they used to be." And for those being pushed, pressured or forced into abortion, he might add, "Do this one thing and those who are threatening, hurting or failing to love and support you will leave you alone. This situation is too unsafe to bring a child into it. This is the only way to be safe."

Christ asks us to trust in a plan for the future which we do not yet fully understand; Satan urges us to act now, to take control, to save what we already have. Christ asks us to make a moral decision rooted in hope; Satan asks us to make a "rational" decision based on present needs, desires, and fears.

For those of us not directly involved in an abortion, for those on the sidelines, Christ calls us to get involved, to offer hope and encouragement, to open our hearts to those in need. Satan tells us to despair: that the problem is too big to fix, too divisive, will make us seem judgemental or will ask too much from us.

But after an abortion takes place, how do they appear? Afterwards, Christ continues to offer hope: "Come to me. I want to share your tears. I want to comfort you. I am here to offer you My mercy, love and peace."

Satan, on the other hand, continues to fan the flames of despair. He who pretended to be on her side now stands as her fiercest accuser. "Look at what you have done! You were involved in the death of an innocent (or your own) child! Can there be anything worse than that? There's no hope for you now. You are nothing. You're beyond redemption! You may as well seek what little comfort you can in the bottom of a booze bottle, in the silence of suicide, or in the embrace of an affair.

"And if you get pregnant again, you've already had an abortion once, so you might as well do it again—it may even help you to get tougher and more immune to this pain. It makes no difference now. You've proven you can murder. Nothing can be worse. And, oh, how you must hate those people who led, pushed or forced you to do this Your partner, your parents, your doctor. There is no one you can trust. There is no one who can love *you*. You are alone. Your best hope is to bury your past. Hide it from others. Hide it from yourself. But remember it will always be yours alone to bear."

Before the abortion, Christ calls us to hope, while Satan calls us to despair. After the abortion, Christ continues to offer hope, while Satan offers only despair.<sup>3</sup>

This is the devil's bargain. He encourages us to accept or submit to abortion to avoid a "greater evil." Afterward, he tries to keep us trapped

in despair so as to strip away everything else. Indeed, Satan pumps as much despair into our lives as he can generate. For those involved in an abortion, this involves not only the lives of the mother and father, but the grandparents, siblings and everyone else he can touch with the poison of abortion. His purpose is threefold: to generate misery, to encourage sin, and to create doubt in the unfathomable mercy and love of God.

## DON'T DESPAIR

For those who have been involved in an abortion—whether as a direct participant or as someone who encouraged, pressured or even pushed for the abortion—God's mercy and forgiveness are precepts that they can mouth, but which are difficult to digest. How can God forgive abortion? Many know that they must believe in God's mercy, and they do so as an act of faith. But how can they feel forgiven, when deep down they cannot forgive themselves?

I certainly do not have a complete answer to this complex question, but I do believe we can offer more than the simple answer that, "God can forgive anything, even having an abortion or pushing someone else into it." While this is a revealed truth, it is also a conclusion for which we can develop a greater appreciation if we look at some of the reasons behind this truth. As we look, I believe we will discover not only truths which must be shared with post-aborted men and women, but also truths which explain why our focus must be on ministering to them, not accusing them.

Assume that I am driving a car at night. I see a flash of light and feel a bump. I know I've hit someone. I run to the victim. He's dead. An innocent man has been killed, whether through carelessness, my negligence, ignorance or simply because I failed to see him in time. My feelings of guilt are very real. But a moment later my victim jumps to his feet alive and uninjured. Now the guilt is gone! I am spared, not by my virtue, but by his immortality.

In just the same way we have all been forgiven of murder. Because of our sins, of whatever type, each of us is guilty of crucifying Christ. Because of our sins, He was killed on the cross. His blood is on our hands. Yet on Easter Sunday, He rose from the dead. He is not dead at all! The guilt has been lifted.

But the parent of the child lost to abortion may respond that his or her child did not rise from the dead. He or she is truly dead, and the parent (or others involved) may feel guilty over the child's death. Yet this is another way our feelings of guilt may be twisted into despair.

When someone dies, we are encouraged to entrust their future into the hands of God. For "God is not the God of the dead but of the living.

All are alive for Him." (Luke 20:38).

When a pregnancy occurs, God gives us the gift of a new life. But because of the circumstances, the parents of the child or those around them may have failed to trust in God's plan for the future. (If the abortion was a result of coercion or force, the failure to trust may have been the failure of people other than the parents.) But even when we despair, God continues to offer us the gift of hope. He has a new plan for the future, a second gift that he passionately desires for those who will accept it—the gift of His forgiveness, the rebirth and renewal of the spirit.

"For I know well the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, not for woe! Plans to give you a future full of hope. When you call me, when you go to pray to me, I will listen to you. When you look for me, you will find me. When you seek me with all your heart, you will find me with you, says the Lord." (Jeremiah 29:11-14)

We can accept this mercy, not because we deserve it, but because God loves us. Further, He can use us as instruments for showing the abundant glory of His mercy. Accepting the gift of God's mercy is the first step toward a new life that is rooted in both faith and hope, and it is your only escape from the pit of despair.

## THE WORST EVIL

In a sense (and I write this asking the reader's forbearance for my inability to express this more precisely), since immortal persons cannot be destroyed, the greatest tragedy of abortion is what does to those involved. This does not deny that the unborn child has been unjustly deprived of life, but we trust that God will be merciful toward these innocent victims. Our concern is the effect the abortion has on the souls of those involved.

Even Socrates, a pagan philosopher, recognized that, in terms of preserving the nobility of our character, inner virtue, and our very souls, it is better to suffer evil from others than to do evil ourselves. Specifically, Socrates argued that those who do unjust acts are becoming unjust; those who reject their obligations to others are becoming irresponsible.

Because he believed that moral character was more important than physical well-being, Socrates believed that harm which is done to one's body is less important than harm done to one's "inner self" as the result of immoral choices (whether the choice of the parents, their families, the abortion counselors, medical personnel or others in positions of authority). If one accepts this argument, then the harm done to the souls of those involved is a greater moral evil than the physical wrong suffered by the unborn child, who remains innocent.

There is nothing in this argument which is contrary to Christian thought. Indeed, Scripture teaches not only that it is preferable to suffer evil than to commit evil, but that those who suffer from wrongdoing can even rejoice in being called upon to share in the suffering of Christ (1 Peter 4:13-16). As we have suggested above, and will discuss further in the next chapter, the unborn child who suffers physical harm from abortion is an immortal being who can be entrusted to the care of God. But the spiritual damage done to those who are involved in abortion, directly or indirectly, individually or socially, is immeasurable.

Let us look at the spiritual meaning of abortion from another perspective. We begin by recognizing the Judeo-Christian teaching that children are always a gift from God. Because God is the author of all life, no child is conceived by accident. Each has a part to play in God's design. This providential purpose includes not only the child's destiny, but the destiny of those whom the child's life touches. The conception of a child may be intended to lead the parents, their families or others who might be in a position to help toward greater generosity, responsibility, and understanding of the meaning of unconditional and sacrificial love.

No life is created without a purpose. It is our role to simply find and cooperate with that purpose. As members of the body of Christ, we are called upon to support new life, not reject it. When that new life has been rejected, through own actions or those of others, we are called to be mirrors of God's mercy through seeking His forgiveness where we have done wrong and reaching out to those who have been wounded through the rejection of that life by themselves or others. While we can do nothing for the unborn children in heaven, there is much we can do for those who have been so spiritually wounded by abortion.

## SUMMARY

The greatest tragedy of abortion is that it is the result of despair, and leads to despair, for those involved. This despair can stop us from trusting God's future plans for ourselves (or the lives of those whom we love) and the new life that has been created. After abortion, that despair makes us doubt that we are worthy of God's love or mercy and can lead us to lose faith in Him.

This despair can lead to self-destructive behavior, including substance abuse, abusive relationships, suicidal thoughts and other serious problems. We may run from life, burying ourselves in everything from pointless work to joyless parties—anything that distracts us from reflection.

Abortion is, of course, not the only sin which separates us from God. But for those who have been involved in an abortion—directly or indirectly, through their own choice or the choice of others—abortion al-

most always creates a great rift. To return across this chasm, they need our support, offered graciously and abundantly. This hope is a reflection of the love God has shown to us in our lives and wants to show in the lives of others as well.

## NOTES

1. Frederica Mathewes-Green, *Real Choices* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1994), 19. *Real Choices* is another excellent book examining the pressures which push women into unwanted abortions.
2. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 130.
3. This general description of the stance of Christ and Satan before and after sin is drawn from the recording "The Devil" by Archbishop Fulton Sheen and is applied here specifically to the case of abortion.



## CHAPTER FOUR

# TRUSTING GOD'S MERCY FOR UNBORN CHILDREN

There is still one more hook of despair which Satan can use to deny peace of mind to the mothers and fathers of aborted children, or to others who have been involved in an abortion. This is the fear among Christians who believe that baptism is necessary to salvation, that their unborn children will be deprived of heaven because they were denied baptism.

This fear that unbaptized infants will be denied heaven is also used by Satan to build a wall of separation and prejudice between pro-lifers and those who have been involved in an abortion. Some Christians have coldly turned their backs on those who have been involved in an abortion, believing that they have deprived God of the souls of these unborn children. They may not wish those suffering after abortion ill, but they cannot bring themselves to offer them comfort, either.

There are two reasons why the issue of the final repose of the unborn is a very important one, not only for those who are seeking healing after an abortion, but also for the pro-life movement as a whole. First, if we truly believe that the unborn are in heaven, then anger and resentment will be dissipated. Second, concern for the living will not only be easier, it will be more compelling.

## THE ISSUE: THE NECESSITY OF BAPTISM

The question of salvation for the unborn arises from an interpretation of Christ's solemn pronouncement to Nicodemus that "no one can enter into God's kingdom without being begotten of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). The necessity of baptism is further supported by Christ's statement, "The man who believes in it [the good news] and accepts baptism will be saved; the man who refuses to believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

Note, however, that condemnation is pronounced for those who refuse to believe. Nothing is said regarding those who have not had the opportunity to believe. Indeed, we are also told that no one will be judged guilty simply because of his or her ignorance (John 9:41).

What are we to make of this, then? Baptism by water is clearly the

way God has given the Church for bringing new members into His Body. When it can be done, it ought to be done. However, God's mercy is not limited by human failings, nor are His means limited by the physical reality which defines human interaction. Indeed, it is clear in Scripture that God has at least one other way of bringing sanctifying grace to those who have died without having the opportunity to receive baptism by water.

The most obvious example of unbaptized persons who were saved is that of the Old Testament saints, including the patriarchs, the prophets, and untold others. For the sake of these departed, Christ went in death to preach to them "in prison" (1 Peter 3:19) so that they "might live in the spirit in the eyes of God" (1 Peter 4:6). Yet another example is shown in the good thief, who followed Jesus into Paradise (Luke 23:42-44) without the benefit of baptism by water.

In fact, the Church has always recognized that martyrs who die for the faith before they have the opportunity to be baptized are reborn in a baptism by blood rather than water.<sup>1</sup> Baptism by either water or blood has been recognized as having the same efficacy and the same source. This view was defended by the prominent Christian apologist Tertullian around 203 A.D., who wrote:

We have one and only one Baptism in accord with the Gospel (Eph. 4:4-6). ... [But there is] a second font, one with the former [water]: namely, that of blood, of which the Lord says: "I am to be baptized with a baptism" (Luke 12:50, Mark 10:38-39), when He had already been baptized [by water]. For He had come through water and blood, as John wrote (1 John 5:6), so that He might be baptized with water and glorified with blood. He sent out these two Baptisms from the wound in His pierced side (John 19:34), that we might in like manner be called by water and chosen by blood, and so that they who believed in His blood might be washed by the water. If they might be washed in the water, they must necessarily be so by blood. This is the Baptism which replaces that of the fountain, when it has not been received, and restores it when it has been lost.<sup>2</sup>

Tertullian's argument that baptism by blood can be a substitute for baptism by water is further supported by the fact that Christ offered the sons of Zebedee the baptism of suffering as one with the cup of salvation (Mark 10:38-39). Furthermore, Scripture tells us that before Christ's death, John's baptism by water was only a baptism of repentance (Acts 19:4, Luke 3:3). It was only after Christ's baptism in blood that the baptism of water was raised up to become a baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, John 16:7).

Clearly, then, the understanding that God has a means to save those who through no fault of their own have been denied the opportunity of baptism by water is not novel. Indeed, it is revealed by Scripture. Therefore, if we are to properly interpret Christ's insistence on baptism by water, we

must admit that it is a binding command on the living, while recognizing that this precept does not preclude God from offering some other spiritual means of rebirth for those who die without this opportunity.<sup>3</sup>

## GOD'S SPECIAL LOVE FOR CHILDREN

We know as part of our revealed faith that God desires the salvation of all (1 Tim. 2:4, Rom. 8:32) and that his mercy endures forever (Psalm 136). Though all are stained by original sin, all whom Christ claims for Himself will live in Him (1 Cor. 15:22-23). That Christ should not claim the unborn as His own is unimaginable, contrary to both reason and revelation. Furthermore, Paul teaches that God's mercy and providence extend even to the unborn, who have done neither good nor evil (Rom. 9:11), and Christ himself repeatedly expressed His special love of infants and children.

And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them, and said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:15-16).

See how Jesus describes heaven; it is filled with infants such as these! And are not His words a warning against those who would forbid these children entry into His heavenly kingdom? And look at yet another occasion:

[The disciples asked Jesus:] "Who is of greatest importance in the kingdom of God?" He called a little child over and stood him in their midst and said: "I assure you, unless you change and become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of God. ... See that you never despise one of these little ones. I assure you, their angels in heaven constantly behold my heavenly Father's face.... Just so, it is no part of your heavenly Father's plan that a single one of these little ones shall ever come to grief" (Matt. 18:1-2, 10, 14).

Other renderings of this last line are that none of these little ones should ever "perish" or be "lost." These passages suggest a promise of universal salvation for the innocents, for (1) they are numbered among those of greatest importance in God's kingdom, (2) their angels pray for them before the Father, and (3) the Father wills that none of them should be lost. Notice also that the small child standing before Christ was unbaptized.

Reason, too, demands our acknowledgment of God's saving grace for the unborn. Christ's love is so great, He died to bring salvation to sinners who deserve nothing (Romans 5:6-9). Yet, if He would save sinners like us, would He not do at least as much, if not more, for the unborn who have not sinned?<sup>4</sup> Of course He would. Those who doubt it must defend

the absurd notion that God's judgments are less merciful than human judgments.

## THEORIES OF SALVATION

While the method of salvation for the unborn is not revealed, there are some theories which are useful to consider, remembering always that they are only theories. Some Christian theologians speculate that at the moment of death, God enlightens the minds of the "incompetent" so that they can freely choose for or against Him. This possibility would be analogous to the free choice for or against God which the angels made at the time of their creation.

Others believe that children who die without formal baptism, or other incompetents who are incapable of understanding or freely choosing baptism, acquire salvation through a "vicarious baptism of desire" — that is, through the desire of their parents, the Church, or someone else.

Along these lines, it is a common practice within the post-abortion healing movement to encourage mothers and fathers of aborted children to offer a solemn prayer in which they entrust their children to the care of Jesus. This is an important part of the healing experience for many women and men. There have also been reports of mystical experiences in which the dedication of the aborted child was prompted by an interior voice of the Holy Spirit,<sup>5</sup> and others who have prayerfully dedicated an aborted child to God have reported remarkable healing for the post-aborted mother and father or relatives who were not even aware that the prayer was made.<sup>6</sup>

Another theory, which was once widely taught in Catholic parochial schools, is that of Limbo. Contrary to popular belief, this theory has never been a dogma of the Catholic Church. It has always been nothing more than a theological speculation which offers one possible solution to the puzzle of God's judgment of unbaptized innocents.

According to the Limbo theory, God's justice precludes punishment of the innocent, but the requirement of baptism precludes the unbaptized from enjoying the actual presence of God, heaven. Given these two constraints, one can conclude that God must at least supply these souls with a place where they enjoy a state of natural happiness, free of all suffering, where they would lack only the beatific vision of God. This place would be analogous to the place where Abraham and Lazarus were at rest prior to the opening of heaven by Christ (Luke 16:22).

While Catholics are free to believe in Limbo, the official Catechism encourages believers to hope for more, trusting that God has another means for admitting unbaptized innocents into heaven.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the teaching documents of the Catholic Church exclude any theory which

would hold that salvation of unbaptized innocents is not possible.<sup>8</sup>

At the very least, Catholics are invited to trust God's mercy for the salvation of children who die without baptism. In his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*) the late Pope John Paul II wrote to parents that "[t]o the same Father and His mercy you can with sure hope entrust your child."<sup>9</sup> In short, while the Catholic Church does not teach the salvation of aborted children as a dogmatic certainty, it strongly encourages us to hope for their salvation through trust in God's mercy.

## THE HOLY INNOCENTS

Nancyjo Mann, the founder of Women Exploited by Abortion, once suggested that the slaughter of infants has always preceded the coming of a savior. Infant boys were slaughtered by Pharaoh before the coming of Moses. The infants of Bethlehem were slaughtered by Herod, who sought to prevent the Messiah from gaining his throne. Perhaps, she speculated, the slaughter of millions of babies by abortion throughout the world is a precursor to Christ's return.

No one knows when the Second Coming will be (Mark 13:32). Indeed, the moment we begin to feel certain that we do know is the moment we almost certainly prove that we are wrong (Mark 13:33). Throughout the ages, Christians have looked at the world's sinfulness and said, "Certainly He will come to judge us now." Our age is no different. Few Christians would doubt that the horrors of our generation demand judgment. But while we should all pray for Christ's return tomorrow, we must never neglect our task of building up His kingdom today.

It is true. This sinful age, with its own slaughter of innocents, will not be allowed to go on forever. God will not be mocked. So there are only three possibilities: (1) Christ will return; or (2) God, who is the Lord of History, will crush our modern civilization, adding its dust to the ruins of all the other proud empires which have gone before us; or (3) to glorify God's own Mercy, the Holy Spirit will conquer our love affair with death by bringing about a time of awakening, healing, and spiritual renewal. I do not know which of these God has ordained, His return, our culture's destruction, or our culture's spiritual healing. I do know that we, His followers, can only contribute to the latter. This is our task now, as it was from the beginning, to spread the good news of God's mercy and forgiveness.

But I have strayed a bit. My real reason for bringing up the Holy Innocents who were slaughtered by Herod is that they have been traditionally considered as assured of heavenly repose by virtue of the fact that they died in an attack on Christ. This was a form of martyrdom. They did not die in defense of their faith, for they did not know it, but

rather as victims of mass murder directed against the Messiah.

If we believe the Holy Innocents are in Heaven, then this belief, too, should encourage us to believe in the salvation of the unborn who die by abortion. For whether Christ's return is imminent or not, abortion in our culture is clearly the result of a diabolical attack on Christian values. In the larger scheme of things, it is an attempt by Satan to usurp the Lord of Life and install a cult of death. It is an attack against the Body of Christ, His Church, which includes the vast majority of aborting women and men, who belong to the Church by virtue of their own baptisms. In this attack on Christ's body, unborn children are the innocent casualties. It is therefore reasonable to assume that, like the Holy Innocents, they too are baptized in their own blood, and, in this way, will be brought into a share of Christ's own bloody baptism.

## SUMMARY

We must be confident of God's mercy, not only toward us, but also toward the unborn. If God has mercy on anyone, certainly He will be merciful with them.

Those who seek post-abortion healing must recognize that fears about the salvation of their unborn children are a temptation toward despair — a temptation which must be resisted. If they desire to be reunited with their aborted children, they must not worry about the salvation of their children, but rather about their own salvation, to which end they must build up lives of faith, hope, and charity. Of these, the virtue of hope precludes doubts about whether God will have mercy on the unborn.

For those who seek an end to abortion, confidence in God's mercy toward the children killed by abortion should undergird efforts to minister to those who have lost their children to abortion. By helping them to find spiritual healing, we will be helping them to become instruments of God's will. As His instruments, it is they, speaking with the wisdom of their own experiences, who will bring an end to abortion. We must remember that this is their battle even more than ours. By helping them, we help the cause of respect for all human life.

## NOTES

1. Cyprian, *Letters*, 72[73]:22 (A.D. 255).
2. Tertullian, *On Baptism*, 15:1; 16:1-2 (A.D. 203).
3. What this way is has not been fully revealed. On the other hand, since it is a spiritual baptism which is outside the responsibilities of believers on earth, it is not something about which we need to know the details. It

is enough for us to know that it is possible. Once this truth is recognized, we can then confidently trust God's mercy and justice.

4. This type of a fortiori argument, "If Y is true, then how much more likely that Z is true," was frequently used for teaching and theological deduction by Jesus and Paul. See Matt. 7:11, 10:25, 12:12, Luke 11:13, 12:24, 28, Romans 11:12, 24, 1 Cor. 6:3, Heb. 9:14.

5. Jack Hayford, *I'll Hold You in Heaven* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 47.

6. Dr. Kenneth McAll, *Healing the Family Tree* (London: Sheldon Press, 1986), 27, 33, 34, 48, 52. McAll, a Protestant who was initially resistant to "prayers for the dead," provides a good discussion on the practices of the early Church regarding prayerful committal of the dead and how these accord with Scripture. See pages 88-97.

7. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 1261.

8. Vatican II documents, reflecting on God's saving will, include the dogmatic statement that "since Christ died for all (Rom. 8:32) ... we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). This statement would seem to weigh against the theory of Limbo. If an unborn child is denied the opportunity of baptism by water, then "the possibility of being made partners" in Christ's redemption must mean that some other means of sanctification is available.

9. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*), 99.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# SAMPLES OF THE JERICHO SERMONS IN THREE STEPS

The following three sermons are intended as an example of a series of sermons which build upon each other to cover all seven steps of the *Jericho Plan* as previously outlined in the introduction.

Because some people may not hear all three sermons, each sermon is also designed to stand on its own, at least in the sense of achieving two principal objectives: (1) establishing at the very beginning an attitude of understanding, compassion, and non-judgmentalism toward those who have been involved in abortion; and (2) in all cases building up hope that those who have been involved in abortion can be released from any shame or guilt which continues to hold them bound to their secret.

These sermons are meant only as examples of what can be done. Additional issues, topics, quotes, testimonies, and topic “bits” suitable for formulating your own sermons are provided in the following chapters.

## SERMON ONE

### Goals

- 1) Increasing the congregation’s compassion and support for those who may be at risk of abortion, and especially for those who have already been hurt by abortion; and
- 2) Fostering an attitude that will reduce the fears of those who have been involved in an abortion, and stimulating their desire to be understood.

### Sermon Outline

- 1) Approach the topic of abortion slowly so that by the time your listeners know what you are talking about, they already know that you are not seeking to condemn them.
- 2) Build first on our general duty to avoid judging the culpability of others, while maintaining the rightness of judging the objective moral content of specific acts.
- 3) Clarify the distinction between objective evil and subjective culpability.



- 4) Build a basis for understanding the many pressures women face which make abortion appear to be their “only choice.”
- 5) Share a testimony so that everyone can empathize with why women feel pressured into abortion and how deeply they can suffer from it afterwards.
- 6) Preview some of the emotional baggage carried by those who have been involved in abortion and suffered its detrimental effects on their lives.
- 7) Close with an appeal for compassion and understanding so that, as a community, we can help to alleviate the powerful sense of shame which obstructs repentance and healing.

### JUDGE NOT, LEST YE BE JUDGED

“Judge not, lest ye be judged.” How often have we heard that warning? Yet it is such an easy one to forget, especially when another person’s sins seem to be so grievously wrong, so obviously wrong. Sometimes we can’t help but ask ourselves, “How could anyone do such a thing?”

It’s so easy to think that the sins or failings of others are the result of a terrible selfishness, callousness, moral bankruptcy, or some deep flaw in their character—one that we are ourselves don’t think we share. But the truth is that we all are susceptible to flaws and sins, and might end up doing so when the pressures or fears we face seem too much for us to handle.

When we see the failures or sins—or even the presumed failures or sins, because we cannot know another’s circumstances—we need to be humble enough to recognize we ourselves are in need of God’s grace and mercy in our own lives.

If we have been spared knowing this sin or that, it is the grace of God alone which has protected us, not any virtuous excellence of our own character. We are all flawed. We all make bad judgments. We all make decisions in haste, ignorance, and confusion. We all have made bad decisions based not on moral reflection, but on the basis of emotions such as fear and despair.

Another reason we should not judge others is that we are in no position to judge their culpability, their personal responsibility for a sin. For example, stealing a man’s wallet is a grave sin which always offends God—that is, it is never approved by God. But if a young child, such as Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*, is told by a trusted adult that taking the wallet is a “game,” the child’s culpability is lessened, or even eliminated, by ignorance or uncertainty about what is right or wrong.

Or if, instead of being ignorant, Oliver had been threatened with injury to himself or a loved one unless he stole the merchant's wallet, that, too, would lessen or even eliminate his guilt because then his decision to steal was not truly a free choice.

In either case, the act of stealing is objectively sinful. Let us make no mistake about that. Stealing, under any circumstance, offends God. But because God understands when our choices to sin are the result of coercive pressures, confusion, or ignorance, He may not hold us fully responsible for the consequence of our actions.

In this way, God is like any good father or mother who knows that we must judge the behavior of our children with both firmness and compassion. Parents know that it is important to always disapprove of acts which are objectively wrong, yet, at the same time, they understand that their children may not always be fully responsible for their actions. This knowledge tempers both their judgment and punishment of their children.

Another way of looking at this is to remember that we should always condemn acts which are morally wrong, but we should never condemn the persons who commit these acts because we can never know what was in their minds or hearts that may have lessened their culpability.

To live our lives in defense of the truth, we must be able and willing to judge the morality of acts. But the judgment of individuals must always be left to God. He alone knows the hearts and minds of us all. He alone knows how to judge how culpable we are for any of our actions. The old saying that we should "hate the sin, but love the sinner" is intended to remind us that we must be compassionate and understanding. Indeed, out of humility and generosity, we should always assume, and pray, that the sins of others are mitigated by some sort of ignorance or lack of freedom which will lessen their culpability in the eyes of God.

This reminder that we should not judge others is especially important with regard to the issue of abortion. It is extremely unfortunate that at least a few pro-lifers have become so preoccupied by the horrible reality of abortion that they immediately assume that those who have abortions are horrible people. It's simply not true. It is even extremely unfair. Those who have been involved in abortion are often acting out of ignorance or fear, or facing tremendous pressures, coercion or even threats from others that can prevent them from making a free choice.

Indeed, research shows that most abortions are unwanted or coerced, rather than freely chosen. Many abortions are primarily the result of lack of support, pressure, emotional blackmail, coercion, or threats from the woman or couple's family, employers, doctors, counselors or others whom they need to support them. Many are lied to or given no information about the development of the unborn children, the risks of abortion or available alternatives. Most end up having abortions because they do

not believe it is possible to do otherwise.

Consider, for example, this testimony from an eighteen-year-old girl I'll call Tracy, who had an unwanted abortion:

My family would not support my decision to keep my baby. My boyfriend said he would give me no emotional or financial help whatsoever. All the people who mattered to me told me to abort. When I said I didn't want to, they started listing all the reasons why I should. They said it would be detrimental to my career, and my health, and that I would have no social life and no future with men. Could I actually do it alone? I started feeling like maybe I was crazy to want to keep it.

I finally just told everyone that I would have the abortion just to get them off my back. But inside, I still didn't want to have the abortion. Unfortunately, when the abortion day came, I shut off my inside feelings. I was scared to not do it because of how my family and boyfriend felt. I'm so angry at myself for giving in to the pressure of others. I just felt so alone in my feelings to have my baby.

While Tracy's circumstances do not make abortion okay, they also may make her less culpable for what happened. She was faced with tremendous pressures and confusion and had no support to help her do what her heart told her was right. Instead, she was being "socially aborted"; she was being cut off from all of the social support she needed and expected from her family, friends, and boyfriend. This was not a true choice—yet is a situation that thousands of women and girls face every day.

Researchers have found that well over half of the women who are undergoing abortions would have been willing to carry their children to term if they had received support to do so by the important people in their lives. But without this support, or indeed when faced with threats that could cost them a job, a home, or a relationship they need to be able to continue the pregnancy, they may believe there is nothing else they can do. They need support and help, not abortion—yet too often this is the only option offered.

We also know from the testimonies of women who have had abortions, and dozens of former abortionists like Dr. Bernard Nathanson and Carol Everett, that there is a tremendous amount of deceit and manipulation which goes on in abortion clinics. Women are not only denied the truth about their unborn children and about the damage abortion will cause to their lives, they are also carefully maneuvered into believing that abortion is their only choice. After all, abortion clinics are operated to maximize profit. So-called abortion counselors are really specialists at only one thing: selling abortion. They treat abortion like a cure-all for every unplanned pregnancy. If a young woman says, "I would really like to have this baby," the counselor is trained to identify her fears and anxieties and then push all the right buttons to convince her that the

idea of having her baby is just a romantic dream. "Where will you get \$6,000 to pay the hospital bills?" they ask. "How will you ever pay for food or diapers? You've already hurt your parents once, don't make it worse. Don't make yourself into a burden on everyone. Besides, you're not ready to be a parent, and who will be the one to suffer from your mistakes? Your baby."

Yes. Abortion counselors are trained to make women feel guilty about not having an abortion. Every day, young girls are being made to feel that they are doing their unborn babies a favor by having an abortion. Some are even told that their desire to keep their baby is "selfish"; they are told that only by submitting to an abortion will they be acting with maturity and taking "responsibility" for their lives.

The fathers of unborn children may be victims of this situation too. They may wish to support their partner and their unborn child, but not be given the opportunity or the right to do so. Indeed, even if they wish to stop the abortion from happening, they have no legal right to do so.

In today's society, the pressures and coercion to abort is so great that all of us should truly admire the women, men and teens who stand up to those who insist that they abort and say, "No." To admire the families and friends who are willing to help a scared teen or young couple continue their pregnancies. To admire the single parents, and the those who give the child they love into the hands of adopting parents. We should admire these courageous parents. But we also need to refrain from judging the culpability of those who were too desperate to say "No." This does not make abortion right, but we cannot know what this is like until we have been in such a situation ourselves.

We must also have the greatest of empathy and compassion for those who have been involved in abortion in any way because the impact of abortion on their lives can be truly devastating. Many live with the memory of a child they have never been able to hold. They may suffer from feelings of self-doubt, lowered self-esteem, and grief. They may be their own most fierce condemners, often doubting even God's ability to love them. The emotional pain of those who have had abortions can be extremely intense, and it can cause all kinds of disruptions in a person's life.

For Tracy, the girl I mentioned earlier, the negative reaction began immediately after her abortion. In this, her case is actually unusual, since many women and men don't begin to confront their emotions for a long time—sometimes many years—after the abortion. They may be told to put it "behind them" or to "just get on with your life." They may end up pushing down, hiding or denying their negative feelings for quite a long time.

But in Tracy's case, she immediately experienced enormous feelings of pain, self-loathing and trauma. To her, there was never any doubt that

the abortion had taken the life of her child—a child she wanted.

Two days after her abortion, Tracy took her father's gun out of its case and held it to her mouth to commit suicide. Thankfully, she heard her father coming home, and was unable to bring herself to pull the trigger while he was in the house. So instead, she went upstairs and had lunch with him, and by the time he left, she was trembling with so much fear she couldn't go through with it. It was then that she came upon the idea of trying to make up for the abortion by tricking her boyfriend into making her pregnant again.

This desire for replacement pregnancies to make up for an abortion is very common. But many times, women face the same pressures to abort that they did the first time, and so many end up having another abortion, or even a third or a fourth.

For some women, repeat abortions can become a form of self-punishment. Each time they abort, they are hurting themselves and trying to harden themselves to the pain of the first. For other women, repeat pregnancies and repeat abortions are like a reenactment of what they suffered before. Each time, they hope on some level to break free of the cycle, and sometimes they do, but sometimes they don't.

So we must understand that, when women have more than one abortion, it does not mean that they were not bothered by their first abortion. It probably means exactly the opposite. It means that their first abortion has left them so psychologically disturbed that they can't help but get into situations where they face another abortion decision. So even when a woman has had more than one abortion, we must not make assumptions about her culpability. God alone can judge this.

In our dealings with those who have been involved in abortion—whether in one or thousands of abortions, as in the case of an abortion provider, or a woman or man who has lost a child to abortion, or a frightened parent who pushed his or teen into an abortion—we need to be generous in offering them our understanding and compassion. We must do this because all of them, on one level or another, have been deeply bruised and battered by their abortions. By judging them harshly, we are putting up walls between them and the Church; we are driving them away from the God of Judgment instead of toward the God of Forgiveness.

If we truly desire to transform the world, then we must begin by replacing judgmentalism with true, perfect charity. We must help each other past the feelings of shame in our lives—for whatever situations we may have been involved in—that make us afraid to seek reconciliation and healing in Christ. We must be people who can listen to the words, "I've been involved in an abortion," and react not with horror, but with compassion.

To do this, we must first transform our own hearts. Instead of con-

demnation, we need always and everywhere to offer hope to all those who have ever been involved in an abortion—the same hope that has helped us get past our own sins, failures and painful circumstances. We must show that we will be understanding, not condemning. And even more importantly, we walk with each other in the hope that, by turning ourselves over to the loving mercy of God, we, each of us, can and will be healed and transformed into the champions of life and love that God is calling us to be.

## SERMON TWO

### Goals

- 3) Educating the congregation that most abortions are unwanted or coerced, and that abortion has destructive effects on the lives all involved—including women, men and families;
- 4) Explaining the obstacles to healing that can prolong psychological and spiritual suffering after abortion;

### Sermon Outline

- 1) Continue to raise awareness of these among your the members of the congregation in general. This will serve the goals of education those who have not been involved in abortion, while also helping those who may be struggling after an abortion become more aware of the impact on their lives and the desire of your faith community to offer support to them.
- 2) Review and reinforce the need to have compassion for those involved in abortion and the desire to promote healing and reconciliation.
- 3) Discuss how despair can keep us from recognizing God's plan for us and keep us away from being reunited with God.
- 4) Describe some of the psychosocial problems caused by unresolved abortion issues related to abortion. This overview is important to help those who have been involved in an abortion and their loved ones recognize how abortion has hurt them. This will help break through the denial abortion doesn't hurt affect those involved.
- 5) Discuss the emotional and spiritual importance of overcoming avoidance behavior and working through abortion related trauma, pain and other issues. Note that this may be difficult to do at times, but that there is lots of help available, especially from people who have been through the same experience.

- 6) End with an affirmation of the community's support.

## THE DEVIL'S BARGAIN

I've spoken to you before the need for compassion and support for women, men and families who have been involved in an abortion. Indeed, we all need compassion and support for the sufferings in our lives, whether this suffering results from our own actions or those of others. The temptation to judge others' culpability and condemn them for their real or perceived faults, sins and weaknesses is a great evil. Such attitudes push people away from the embrace of God's healing, build up walls and drive people away from God and each other. When it comes to abortion, we must recognize that while we can never condone abortion, many people feel that they have no other alternative. We must also recognize the great need they may feel afterward for compassion and support from the community and for God's healing love and mercy.

We should also recognize the many ways in which we, as individuals or as a church, have failed to support or help those facing an unplanned pregnancy. Where our apathy, selfishness or unwilling to get involved has left others feeling alone or even contributed to their abortion experiences, we are and must be truly sorry.

When women and men are faced with an unplanned pregnancy, their lives are often turned upside down. They may face tremendous pressures to abort from other people or their circumstances. They may be coerced into having an abortion they don't want to have.

Many women are openly threatened by loved ones that if they continue the pregnancy, they will lose the love and support they need from those around them. They may face losing what they need to continue the pregnancy—a home, a job, financial support, practical help or even just the support that will give them confidence to continue the pregnancy. Their lives may seem like an out of control and unsafe situation in which to bring a child. They may even be told that it is better to end the pregnancy than to bring a child into the world who “surely suffer.”

Those around her—her partner, family, friends, medical providers and others—may believe that abortion is for the best. Even men who want to support their partner or unborn child may not be given the right or chance to do so. Her family may be told that she cannot or should not have a child due to her age, disability, poverty, lack of education or even her race.

It reminds one of those old cartoons with the devil sitting on one shoulder and the angel on the other. It may even seem like there is no angel at all, only a devil speaking words of lies and despair. The news that you, your spouse, or your child is facing an unplanned or difficult

pregnancy, and that no support is available other than abortion, may make you feel trapped.

The message from our guardian angel would be to trust God with the situation—to entrust to him ourselves, our loved one and the unborn child. That God has a plan and a purpose for these lives, that the sacrifice we may be called to make now will be rewarded a hundred-fold.

But the devil has another message, one that is repeated through what we often hear from those around us: “You can’t have a baby now. You’re not ready. You’ll ruin your own life, the baby’s life and the lives of those who care about you, who are already counting on you. You and the baby will be just another burden. You can stop all that by making a sacrifice of what you want, and of the baby who will only suffer from being here anyway. It’s selfish to think of having a baby—think of those around you. You can always have a baby later.”

God asks us to trust Him no matter what, to risk everything on a future that may seem impossible to us now. The devil feeds on despair and asks us to get rid of what we would often rather hold on to, if only we had the support. He tries to make it sound like a small thing, but we know it isn’t—and this only feeds the despair. He tries to tell us that its no big deal—if we do “just this one thing” we’ll be able to save ourselves and those who are already counting on us.

But the devil’s bargain is a false one. Abortion does not turn back the clock. It is not something a person can have and forget. After an abortion, everything is still changed. After the abortion, Satan, who used despair to drive us toward abortion, now uses despair to destroy us in an other ways. He becomes the accuser: “You’ve been involved in killing a child—maybe your own child. You’re a terrible person. You betrayed yourself and this child. God will never forgive you. He’ll punish you. Sooner or later, He’ll get you.

“And everyone else will despise you, too. So you had better keep this one a secret, especially from those who don’t know what it’s like. They will only condemn you or tell you that you deserve to suffer. They may just tell you that you need to get over it and move on. So if you need a little comfort, you might as well find it in the embrace of an affair, the bottom of a bottle, or even in the silence of suicide. You were alone before, you’re alone now you will have to live with situation—alone.”

So it is that Satan tries to use the same feelings of shame, fear, and despair that drives us to abort to keep us them from finding the healing love of God and support of our church community. That is Satan’s agenda.

But what is Christ’s agenda? Does He desire punishment for those who have had abortions? No. He wants to offer us reconciliation, love and healing. He stands with open arms, saying, “Come to me, all who are weary and heavily burdened. I want to share your tears. I want to comfort you. Know that I love you and want to give you My peace.”



This is the difference between Satan and Christ. Satan uses despair to drive us to abortion and despair to keep us from God afterward. He deceives and condemns us. Christ, on the and, offers hope both to overcome the situation and hope after abortion. He offers us mercy and peace.

But Satan does not want us to be reconciled with God. So he tempts us to fear God's judgment and to fear the judgment of people around us.

No matter what our sins or our past sufferings may be (through our own sins or the sins of others), we must always resist the temptation to despair of God's love. Although we don't deserve it, and can never earn it, it is a gift that He wants us to have. He has a new plan for us, offering us a rebirth of our spirit through Him.

And we must all play a role in bringing the healing gift of God's love and mercy to others. As one woman who had an abortion has written, "It takes the blood of Jesus to deliver us from guilt, but it takes the acceptance of others to deliver us from shame." By this, she is telling us that the road to recovery from an abortion is not always simple and easy. Even after one accepts God's forgiveness, there is still the temptation to not forgive ourselves and to live in dread of the judgment of others. Such fears and doubts create obstacles to developing and maintaining open and loving relationships. They rob us of the joy in life which God wants for us.

This is why the emotional consequences of abortion are so severe. Women who have abortions are four times more likely to engage in drug or alcohol abuse. They are more likely to have difficulty maintaining good relationships with men and to experience sexual dysfunctions. They have higher divorce rates, are more likely to seek psychological counseling, and are more likely to be less healthy physically. Approximately half of the women who have had an abortion experience suicidal thoughts, with over one in five actually reporting having attempted suicide. Many experience difficulty bonding with later children because they have not finished going through the necessary process of mourning the loss of their aborted children.

Others become obsessive mothers; they are overprotective because they feel a need to make up for their abortions or because they fear that God will punish them by hurting their living children. Some struggle every day with intrusive thoughts of their abortion, which can make it difficult for them to concentrate on their work or family. Others struggle to avoid thoughts of their abortion; news or discussion of abortion may make them anxious and upset; they may hate the sound of vacuum cleaners because it reminds them of the suction aspirator; or be bothered by the sight of little children who would be the same age as the child they lost during their own abortion. They may have unexplained feelings of depression every year, during the month when the abortion took place, or during the month when the child should have been born,

or on Mother's Day or at Christmas.

Men, too, may struggle with feelings of grief, shame and trauma over the abortion of their child. They may be blame themselves for failing to protect their unborn child, even if they didn't want the abortion. They may see their relationships fall apart or turn to reckless or self-destructive behavior to hide their pain. They are the often overlooked victims in the abortion experience. So too are the families involved—the grandparents and siblings of the aborted child, and others who may see how the abortion has so painfully changed their loved one.

In these and a hundred different ways, abortion can cast a pallor the lives of everyone involved. And in many cases, it can result in severe physical and emotional problems from which it can take years, or even decades, to recover. One study has found that, on average, it takes over eight years for a woman to even begin dealing with the emotional baggage of a past abortion. Most of those involved simply suffer silently because they feel that no one will understand. After all, in our society, abortion is supposed to be something that “helps” women. So most people endure their suffering and doubt in silence, or try to push them down and deny that they have those pains and doubts simply because they fear it would be too hard to confront them.

But by creating a healing environment, one which can help all of who are hurting because of our own sins and weaknesses or the sins and weaknesses of others, we can all learn how to reconcile with God, ourselves and each other. This is the only way to eventually be free from the pain and despair that is so often present in this world or ours. This the only way to find the joy and peace of mind that God desires for all of us.

But when it comes to abortion, many of us (including myself at times) may want to just let things be. Why not let memories of an abortion remain buried and forgotten? There are a lot of answers to these questions, but one is that these buried memories don't stay buried—they eventually come to the surface.

As long as they remain unresolved, they will continue to bubble up in the form of problems and disruptions in our lives. They demand our notice precisely because we try to ignore them. And the more we ignore them, the more trouble they are likely to cause.

Perhaps most importantly, the failure to reconcile a history of abortion or other sins and traumas has spiritual consequences. We may try to run from the past by pretending it doesn't matter, or because the pain is too much to face. We sometimes end up trying to convince ourselves and others that the abortion was somehow for the best, or didn't harm us or others. This forces us to deny an objective moral truth. It leaves us living in darkness rather than in the light of Christ.

Even if we know how abortion has harmed us, being unable or unready to deal with may lead us to try and push it out of our minds. We

may become compulsively busy with work or hobbies or our social life or volunteering for good causes. We may try to bury the pain in drug or alcohol abuse. We may avoid moments of contemplation, and thus end up avoiding prayer. When we avoid prayer, we avoid God—the only One who can free us from the past.

These things are true for other experiences that result from our sins or the sins of others—not just abortion. When we try to rationalize our sins and failures of those or others, we are actually holding ourselves back from the embrace of Christ's mercy. We end up being entrapped by those sins and failures instead.

We all need to look at our lives and find the ways in which we have sinned, or are suffering as a result of the sins of others in a way that affects our relationship with God, ourselves and each other. God truly loves, and wants us to open our eyes to the truth—so He can make us whole and give us the peace He wants us to have. That's the whole reason He came to die for us in the first place. Rather than hiding from the past, we must confront it and give it over to the Christ. This is not always easy to do. But with prayer, God's grace and the help of others, we can begin to do this in our lives.

## SERMON THREE

### Goals

- 5) Building confidence in those who have been involved in or encouraged an abortion that they will be understood, accepted and supported by the community;
- 6) Stimulating the desire for emotional and spiritual healing; and,
- 7) Encouraging healing through acceptance of God's love and mercy, helping those facing a crisis pregnancy or unwanted abortion, and offering support to those who have been hurt by abortion and inviting participation in post-abortion recovery programs.

### Sermon Outline

- 1) Build up hope in the truth that God can resurrect good from any evil.
- 2) Encourage those who have lost children to abortion to entrust their child's soul to God's care.
- 3) Build up faith that even our worst moments can be used by God to make us into better people.
- 4) Invite those who have been hurt by abortion (or other traumatic issues) to accept and embrace God's mercy and love.

5) Let those involved in a past abortion now that they are not alone and that they can begin a journey of healing.

6) Invite the members of your community to help each other and those who have been involved in an abortion to find healing together.

## MIRACLES NEVER END

The Resurrection! It is the miracle par excellence. It is filled with more meaning than we can ever fully contemplate.

It is not just the miracle of Jesus coming back to life. Others have been raised from the dead: the widow's son, who was raised by the prayers of Elijah; Lazarus and the daughter of the synagogue leader, who were raised by Jesus; and Tabitha, who was raised by the prayers of Peter. But the meaning of their resurrections was confined to a display of God's power and love. The resurrection of Christ was a display of God's forgiveness.

Unlike the other biblical characters who died from disease and were raised back to life, Jesus died after being tortured and executed. In the person of Jesus, God handed Himself over to be killed by sinners who represent all the sinners of history, including us. He died because of our sins. We are responsible for His death.

Imagine the guilt you would feel if you ran down an innocent pedestrian with your car, causing his death. You may have not known he was there until it was too late. Maybe you were upset or careless, not paying attention. Maybe you were driving recklessly. But even if it was only an accident, you would no likely feel regret, fear and shame.

Even if the law doesn't punish you, you may try to hide being involved in the accident, knowing that others will react badly. Or you may admit being in the accident, but insist that it has not affected you badly in any way.

But now imagine that one day a person comes to your door. It is the same person you killed, but now he is alive. He was truly dead, but through a miracle of God, now he is alive! And not just alive, but alive with a heavenly splendor which is so beautiful and majestic it is almost terrifying.

Why, you wonder, has he come to you? Has he come for vengeance? For retribution? You know you deserve whatever penalty he might demand of you. But no. Your victim has not come to condemn you, but instead to offer you forgiveness. His only desire is to free you of the guilt which has haunted you for so long. All you have to do is to believe and accept this truth, and your guilt is gone. You will be saved not by your virtue, but by your victim's immortality. He is not dead. He is alive, and

your guilt is gone because he lives.

This is just how Christ treats us. Because by our sins, of whatever type, each of us is guilty of crucifying Christ. Because of our sins, He was killed. His blood is on our hands. Yet on Easter Sunday, He rose from the dead. He is not dead at all! And our pain is lifted.

In the Resurrection, God shows not only his mercy, but also His unbounded ability to turn tragedy into triumph. From any defeat, He can draw out a victory. From any sin which brings death to the soul, He can bring forth sorrow, renewal, and a rebirth into a glorious life which was unthinkable before.

In the Resurrection we learn that the experience of sin need not conquer us; instead, Christ can use it to bring us back to Him with greater love than we have ever known before. In acknowledging our sin, we find humility. And in humility, we find Mercy—for Jesus is Mercy incarnate. And in accepting Mercy, we experience the unconditional love of God which will transform our lives forever.

But the miracle of the Resurrection is not limited to our relationship with God. This miracle also extends to our relationship with each other. In the Resurrection, we learn that death is an experience, not the end our being. For “God is not the God of the dead but of the living. All are alive for Him.” (Luke 20:38.)

What of the innocent children who are killed by abortion? Jesus Himself assures us that it is our heavenly Father’s plan that not a single one of these little ones shall ever be lost. (Luke 18:14.) We can entrust these innocent unborn little ones (and indeed all children who have died without baptism or a chance to know Christ) to the care of our Heavenly Father.

The late Pope John Paul II wrote especially for those who have been involved in an abortion:

The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. ... But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust [to God]. ... [To the] Father and His mercy you can with surely hope entrust your child. With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people, and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life. Through your commitment to life, whether by accepting the birth of other children or by welcoming and caring for those most in need of someone to be close to them, you will become promoters of a new way of looking at human life.

One of the greatest mysteries of God’s grace is that He can use our most painful experiences, even experiences that result from our sins or

the sins of others, to help heal us and to make us better people. It is perhaps His way of calling us to rely completely on Him, to trust in His mercy and love.

For those of us struggling with the pain of a past abortion, whether it was our choice or the choice of others around us, I hope that these words offer a measure of encouragement and hope. We need to remember that there is no limit to God's love. It is life-transforming. It can lift the great and terrible weights we may be carrying from our shoulders, or help to ease the burden. And in the experience of new life that God offers us—through freedom from feelings of shame and self-loathing, from feelings of worthlessness and pain over past abuse or rejection, from feelings of pain and anger toward others, from crippling grief at the death of our child—we can experience new life in Christ. It is an invitation to truly and deeply share in the Resurrection of Christ.

This invitation is there for all of us, even over pain or shame that we have carried with us for many years. It does not always happen in just a moment, because Satan tries to use the memory of our sins to hold us back. Even after we accept Christ's mercy, Satan will try to use doubt, fear, and despair to deny us the full experience of healing that God wants for us. We can take heart in knowing that there are other people who have already been down this road, who understand what we have been through because they've been there too.

We can walk this road toward healing together. The first step is prayer. The second step is trusting in others to help you along the way.

I invite all of us who wish to walk this road together, especially with those of us in our faith community who have been involved in an abortion, to contact me [or another named church leader] about how you can help to build an effective outreach and healing effort in our community.

I also want to invite any of you who have had or have been involved in abortions and are still troubled by it in any way, to come speak with me in private, or to participate in post-abortion healing programs offered in our area, or to call a counselor at one of the national hotlines listed in the bulletin.

Finally, I would ask everyone to pray for each other, especially those of us in our congregation, our city, and our nation who continue to struggle with the pain of a past abortion. Let us join together in prayer for all of us who are traveling, or who are about to begin this journey toward healing. (Lead the congregation in spontaneous prayer or in the Lord's Prayer.)

## CHAPTER SIX

### MISCELLANY

This chapter contains material suitable for publication in your weekly bulletin, “bits and pieces” for your sermons, and an assortment of thoughts which will help you to gain further insights into the needs of women and men in your community who are scarred by abortion.

#### SCRIPTURE VERSES

“The Lord is close to the broken-hearted, and saves those who are crushed in Spirit.” Psalm 34:18

“For I know well the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, not for woe! Plans to give you a future full of hope. When you call me, when you go to pray to me, I will listen to you. When you look for me, you will find me. When you seek me with all your heart, you will find me with you, says the Lord.” (Jeremiah 29:11-14)

“I am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake and remembers your sin no more.” Isaiah 43:25.

“No matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can take it out and make you as clean as freshly fallen snow. ... I can make you as white as wool.” Adapted from Isaiah 1:18.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9.

“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long, for day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover my iniquity ... and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” Psalm 32:3-5.

“Rachel mourns her children, she refuses to be consoled because her children are no more. Thus says the Lord: Cease your cries of mourning. Wipe the tears from your eyes. The sorrow you have shown shall have its reward. There is hope for your future.” Adapted from Jeremiah 31:15-17.

## CATHOLIC POINTS

From *Evangelium Vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*), an encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II, March 25, 1995, paragraph 99:

I would now like to say a special word to women who have had an abortion. The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. To the same Father and His mercy you can with sure hope entrust your child. With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people, and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life. Through your commitment to life, whether by accepting the birth of other children or by welcoming and caring for those most in need of someone to be close to them, you will become promoters of a new way of looking at human life.

Pope John Paul II, writing about abortion in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (206-207):

... [W]e are witnessing true human tragedies. Often the woman is the victim of male selfishness, in the sense that the man, who has contributed to the conception of the new life, does not want to be burdened with it and leaves the responsibility to the woman, as if it were "her fault" alone. So, precisely when the woman most needs the man's support, he proves to be a cynical egotist, capable of exploiting her affection or weakness, yet stubbornly resistant to any sense of responsibility for his own action....

...[I]n firmly rejecting "pro-choice" it is necessary to become courageously "pro-woman," promoting a choice that is truly in favor of women. It is precisely the woman, in fact, who pays the highest price, not only for her motherhood, but even more for its destruction, for the suppression of the life of the child who has been conceived. The only honest stance, in these cases, is that of radical solidarity with the woman. It is not right to leave her alone. The experiences of many counseling centers show that the woman does not want to suppress the life of the child she carries within her.

If she is supported in this attitude, and if at the same time she is freed from the intimidation of those around her, then she is even capable of heroism. As I have said, numerous counseling centers are witness to this....

## THE GIFT OF HOPE

"Hope is not something we can grab at on our own. ... You cannot demand hope of other people; you can only give it to them. When those



close to us do not have any hope, the reason may be because we have failed to give them any. ... [Hope requires] an investment (rather than a withdrawal) of ourselves in the lives and struggles of others.

“Hope is transferred only through human beings; hope comes when we are able to reach each other or it does not come at all. Hope is not outside us; it sings in our bruised hearts when some person reaches out to us at the moment we feel like giving up. The Spirit works through the touch of the person who believes in us enough not to give up on us; this action of another makes the dead-end filaments of the soul glow once again; it is through persons who give us their light when we are in darkness that we experience the power of Resurrection. Hope comes to life at any moment when one man reaches out sincerely to another.”

—Eugene Kennedy, *The Joy of Being Human*  
(Garden City, NY: Image Books, Doubleday, 1977).

## ABORTION AND TEENS

Abortion deeply affects who we are and what we believe. Abortion does not simply turn back the clock of time. It is a profound experience that touches every aspect of a person's emotional and spiritual being.

For a young teenage girl who is pregnant, the choice is not simply between having a baby or not having a baby. It is a choice between having a baby or having an abortion—a trauma. It will affect how she sees herself as a person, her sexuality, her maternity, and her familial relations. It will shape her self-image and determine if she views herself as good or bad, generous or selfish, courageous or cowardly.

Parents who urge their daughters to have abortions are doing so with the sincere hope that they are saving their child's future. But what is really happening is that they are shaping their child's future, replacing the burdens (and joys) of parenthood with the lasting trauma and pain of abortion. They do not realize the tremendous barrier the abortion will become between their daughter and themselves. They do not realize that the impact of abortion on their daughter's self-esteem is very likely to aggravate hostility and rebellion against them and to drive her to seek escape in alcohol, drugs, promiscuity, replacement pregnancies, or even suicide.

## ABORTION AND TEENS, II

Abortion is especially traumatic and life-altering for teenagers because their lives are in a critical stage of emotional and spiritual formation. When a father who has expressed his love and support for his daughter

for her lifetime offers to pay for an abortion, or even insists on an abortion, what does this do to her concept of love? When a mother who is the model of maternity for her daughter encourages thoughts of abortion, what does this do for her concept of motherhood? When those who say they love her, including her boyfriend, say they cannot love her unborn child, or even that she should not love her unborn child, what are they doing to her view of what love, family, and marriage mean?

### TO THOSE WERE INVOLVED IN SOMEONE ELSE'S ABORTION

If any of you have ever been involved in encouraging or pushing someone else to have an abortion, pray that person has been touched by God's healing. Pray for forgiveness because you, too, were ignorant, afraid, and perhaps selfish. And then, if it is at all possible, even if it makes you very uncomfortable, go to that person and let her know that if she has ever regretted her abortion, if it has ever caused her any pain, you are sorry that you didn't offer her the encouragement and hope she needed.

Offer to be there for her now, or in the future, if ever she needs to talk through what she has experienced. In doing so, you may well open up to her the possibility of being freed from the pain and despair which she has felt it impossible to share with anyone else. Because you know of her abortion, because you have broken the silence with words of apology and hope, the opportunity for sharing and healing will be restored. Do this for love of the person you encouraged to abort. It may be the greatest gift you could ever give her.

### ANGER

Anger is a normal reaction to being hurt. We can even experience anger if we are the ones who have hurt ourselves.

Have you ever noticed that when you feel a bit guilty about something, you become more edgy and tend to lash out more at others? This is because guilt can make us angry at ourselves, and sometimes it is very easy to release some of this anger by directing it toward others.

Feelings of unresolved guilt can also make us very uncomfortable in receiving the love of others. Their love can actually remind us of the guilt which we are trying to forget. When this happens, we can sometimes become angry at even the slightest irritation caused by those who love us. Why? Because we don't feel worthy of their love. With our anger, we are pushing away the love of those who remind us of our guilt. We are isolating ourselves because we don't know how to forgive ourselves, or

how to ask the forgiveness of others.

In the same vein, those who carry about an unresolved guilt may become obsessively preoccupied with work or play because they need to keep their minds occupied on anything other than their private thoughts. They are afraid to sit back and seriously reflect on their lives because they know they won't feel happy with what they find, and they don't know how they could ever go about fixing it.

Still others who carry about a burden of unresolved guilt may find themselves becoming irritated and cynical about the joyful things happening in other people's lives. Why? Because they resent those who are happy, because on some level they feel that their own unresolved guilt is depriving them of that same joy.

We see, then, that anger and guilt can often become very intertwined and confused. If we are troubled by anger toward ourselves or others, there is a very good chance that this anger is rooted in guilty feelings which we have not yet given over to God.

For example, those who have had abortions can feel a great deal of anger toward themselves. Anger that they allowed themselves to become pregnant. Anger that they allowed themselves to have an abortion. This anger can lead to feelings of self-hatred or may manifest itself in forms of self-destructive behaviors such as substance abuse, promiscuity, recklessness, and suicidal behavior. Some women and men project all of their anger at those who oppose abortion. They want to believe that, if only the anti-abortionists would shut up, they would stop feeling so bad about themselves.

Some of the women who had abortions back when it was illegal describe how they projected all of their anger at the law. They told themselves that their guilt and grief was caused by the laws which forbade abortion. They desperately wanted to believe that if only abortion were made legal, women wouldn't suffer so much emotional pain from having abortions. But they were wrong. Women still experience the same great emotional loss; the only difference is that now there are five to ten times more women suffering this loss every year.

After an abortion, some women focus all of their anger at themselves. As they enter into post-abortion healing, however, these same women may feel tempted to refocus their anger at all of the other people who were involved in their abortion. They may feel anger, or even hatred, toward their male partners, their parents, their abortionists, or even the pro-lifers who failed to be there to stop them. They can feel anger at those who encouraged the abortion, those who did not discourage it enough, and even those whom they were simply too afraid to tell about the pregnancy. They feel lied to, deceived, manipulated, abandoned, victimized, or simply let down by any or all of these people. In many cases, this anger is justified. These other people did fail them. And it is right to

recognize this truth. An abortion is seldom the result of the woman's choice alone. Other people are involved, either for being there or failing to be there for her.

One woman, Holly Trimble, has written that, for a time, she became obsessed with trying to "assign degrees of guilt. I agonized over questions like the following," she wrote.

Was it mostly my fault or more the fault of those who urged me to have an abortion? How much was the counselor's and doctor's fault for giving me false information? Was it partly my parents' fault because I didn't feel I could face them with my pregnancy? Am I refusing to accept responsibility if I don't say it was all my fault? And so on. The conflict I felt in trying to assign degrees of blame was terrible.

I finally realized ... my degree of guilt really didn't matter any more and neither I, nor anyone else, could judge percentages of blame. My responsibility before God was to acknowledge that what I had done was wrong and ask for His forgiveness [for both myself and everyone else]. ... While I stopped trying to assign degrees of blame, it was very helpful to look at my situation at the time of my abortion realistically and it paved the way for an experience of self-forgiveness. One afternoon I was praying about my feelings regarding my abortion and I felt a wave of compassion for the 16-year-old girl I had been. I saw her pain and confusion and felt her grief. ... I also felt compassion for the woman I was, who had suffered so terribly. I wanted to comfort that girl and that woman, who was myself ... instead of accuse and blame her. I wanted her to know that she was now a loving mother and wife, not a terrible person. I found myself crying "I forgive you! I forgive you!" And I was talking to me.

You can pray for self-acceptance as I did. Ask God to help you to stop accusing yourself and to feel compassion and forgiveness towards the woman or girl you were. ... Ask Him to help you see your situation realistically and accurately; not to deny your own responsibility, but to give you some insight as to why you chose abortion. Ask Him to help you see yourself through His eyes and to give you hope that you can grow to be a person who is stable and loving and capable of living a life pleasing to God.<sup>1</sup>

## HANGING ONTO GUILT

In describing her process of recovery following her abortion, Holly Trimble writes,

"When I was struggling with trying to forgive myself, I realized I was afraid to stop chastising myself. It was as if I thought that was how I could let God know how really sorry I was. I think I was afraid that if I

didn't keep punishing myself, God would punish me. But as I learned more about the nature of God's forgiveness, I realized this was irrational thinking—that actually God wanted me to accept his forgiveness and be at peace ... 'for the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces repentance without regrets, leading to salvation.' 2 Cor. 7:10."<sup>2</sup>

## GRIEF

"Grief is a necessary part of coming to terms with a death. Although seemingly unbearable at times, it causes us to grow and gain insights in ways that might not be possible otherwise. No one who has experienced an intense period of grieving will ever be the same again. If a person turns to God in his or her grief, God can use that pain and sorrow to draw that person close to Him and to teach that person His ways. The Bible tells us that God is near to those that grieve. 'The Lord is near to the broken-hearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit.' Psalm 34:19."<sup>3</sup>

## OTHERS HAVE GONE BEFORE YOU

"Before I knew other women who had suffered as I did, I thought I was the only woman who had such a serious reaction to abortion. It helped immensely when two friends shared with me that they also had abortions and experienced similar trauma and grief. I felt a relief in talking to other women who knew what I was feeling because they had had the same experience. It was an encouragement to me to see that they had been able to overcome their pain and lead normal lives. The support and understanding women can offer each other is scriptural and, I believe, part of God's plan for restoration after abortion. The Bible talks about the comfort we can give each other in this way: 'Blessed be God ... the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our afflictions so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.' 2 Cor. 1:3,4."

## ENTRUSTING YOUR CHILD TO GOD

"While it can be very difficult to release your child to God, it is crucial. You can pray for God's help to do so. I came to realize that I didn't want to totally release my child to God because my grief was all of my child I felt I had left. A pastor helped me to see how badly I needed to trust God completely for my baby and had me relinquish him to God verbally in

prayer. A few months after this I ... [heard] a woman representing an adoption agency [who] spoke about how pregnant girls who come to them can choose an adoptive family for their baby. ... While driving home, I began to fantasize about how I could have done the same thing. ... I told myself I could have trusted the family with my baby and been at peace about it. But then God spoke to me in my heart, "So, you could trust human parents with your child, but you won't trust Me?" That really showed me how I had to stop fantasizing about the 'what might have beens' and truly trust God. A scripture came to mind: 'Trust the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.' Proverbs 3:5. [After that,] a peace began to grow and I have become more and more able to fully release my child to God."<sup>5</sup>

### ALL THINGS CAN BE MADE TO SERVE GOD

"When I was so ill with depression and guilt [after my abortion] I was continually confronted with one particular scripture: 'And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.' (Romans 8:28)

"I had a difficult time believing that this could apply to something as destructive and devastating as my abortion. After all, my baby had died and I was completely shattered, unable to function in a normal manner. ... [Eventually] God began to patiently show me how this scripture could be fulfilled in my life. First, I began to recognize that the pain I was experiencing had given me insights on suffering, sin, and forgiveness. It also gave me a great desire to live in obedience to God; in fact, my depression was the catalyst for both myself and my husband to come to know the Lord. ... [I also came to realize that] my struggles to overcome my emotional pain could lead me into becoming a better person than I ever would have been without the need to struggle.

"I do not want to be misunderstood. I am not thankful I had an abortion. But I am extremely grateful that God has used such a tragedy to bring me to Him and to teach me. I am very grateful that He has used this to ultimately make me into a stronger person, concerned about serving Him instead of just living for myself.

"God has a plan for your life, too. Be patient with yourself. Spend time in prayer and studying God's word. Let God bring healing to you. Each day dedicate yourself to Him and you will see Him work in your life in truly miraculous ways. You will see how even a tragedy such as abortion can be used by God to work for good. 'For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.' (Philippians 1:6)."

## NO PLACE TO TURN

One great difficulty faced by women and men who are burdened by the weight of a past abortion is that they are afraid to reveal to others the secret grief they feel over a past abortion. They fear the reactions of both those who are pro-choice and those who are pro-life.

On one hand, they are afraid that those who defend abortion will scoff at their need to grieve. After all, if abortion is “no big deal,” if what they aborted was not really their child, why should they grieve? Some abortion defenders would even consider such grief to be irrational.

On the other hand, those who have had abortions are afraid that if they share their grief with those who condemn abortion they themselves will be subjected to condemnation. They can just imagine their pro-life friends gaping at them with horrified expressions saying: “How could you ever do such a thing?!” They not only fear losing the respect of their pro-life friends, they also fear that such a rejection will only intensify their feelings of guilt and loss.

What post-aborted women and men really want, and need, is to be understood. They need their grief to be acknowledged and authenticated. They need the opportunity to share their grief with people who will respect their pain—not turn it into a political statement.

If we want to be a community of healers, then, we must not allow our political or philosophical views of abortion to push away those who are suffering from post-abortion grief. Those who are pro-choice must not deny that there is anything to grieve about when a child is lost through abortion. And those who are pro-life must not treat an expression of post-abortion grief like an opportunity to say, “I told you so.”

Both sides of this political debate must simply make room for those who need to grieve. This grief is authentic and meaningful. It must be met with compassion. Not with excuses or condemnations. But simply with compassion and understanding, which are the keys to emotional healing.

## “LET’S FACE OUR FEARS”

### **Am I just too busy to get more involved?**

Much of what we are called to do for pro-life does not take more time. Rather, it takes more spirit. It doesn’t take any extra time to preach on abortion than to preach on any other topic.

### **Am I afraid of being confrontational?**

Being confrontational is not the same as being uncharitable. Our Lord, who ate with sinners, also confronted sinners. Love demands

confrontation because it cannot rest if the beloved is entangled in evil. Many think of the price of confrontation, but forget that there is also a price to be paid for NOT confronting. That price is that evil continues to flourish, relationships become shallow and superficial, and true leadership vanishes because the leader is no longer able to point out the right path, and will eventually lose the respect of those who look to him for guidance.

### **Am I afraid preaching on abortion will drive away women who have had abortions?**

A letter we received from a woman who had an abortion urges us *not* to fear speaking out. "I can't help but think that if I heard in church that abortion was wrong ... I might have chosen to keep my baby instead of killing my baby." [Some women reporting similar feelings say that they ended up leaving or resenting the Church because their ministers had been silent. Some blame their mistakes, and their grief, on the failure of their clergy to give them solid moral guidance.] ...We can help [women and me] on the path to healing by proclaiming the truth about abortion and the reality of forgiveness. When we address abortion, it tells [them], "We care." Our silence tells [them], "We don't care."

### **Am I afraid of "dividing my parish?"**

The fact is, every parish is already "divided" in the sense that you will find people on different sides of the abortion issue. If we never speak of the issue, we may cover over the division for a while, but that is not the same thing as unity. Unity is founded on truth and is fostered by a clear exposition of truth. ... The Word itself causes [division]. "I have come for division" (Luke 12:51). It is the division between truth and error, grace and sin, life and death. [Unity can best be fostered by preaching a message of support for those vulnerable to abortion and those who are hurting because of a past abortion.]

### **Am I afraid of political issues?**

Does the fact that politicians talk about abortion require us to be silent? ... Some clergy will be silent, saying it is a "political issue." Then, some politicians will be silent, saying it is a "religious issue." If abortion is immoral, where do we go to say so? ... If being afraid of political issues is the problem, how much more should we fear spiritual ones, in which the powers at war are much more awesome and the stakes much higher!

### **Am I afraid that I lack the skill to adequately address the topic of abortion?**

[If there is a lack of self-confidence] we need to strengthen our confidence by becoming more informed about the issue. ... There is sometimes



a fear that we will give the issue the wrong emphasis (“coming down too hard,” “fostering guilt,” “sounding uncaring”). To help counteract this, we can resolve that our speaking on abortion will always include reference to the help available to women in need, as well as the peace and forgiveness Christ offers through His Church.

### **Do I feel the people already hear and know enough about abortion?**

Most people still do not know the extent of abortion ... or the harmful physical and psychological aftereffects of the procedure on the mother [or on others involved. Nor do they know most abortions are actually unwanted or coerced]. Many know abortion is evil, but they do not realize how evil it is. Moreover, knowledge is not virtue. [We must be especially fervent in exposing the lie that most women are not “affected” by their abortions. This widespread lie leads people to encourage, tolerate or even push for abortion. It also compels women to hide their grief over a past abortion because it is now considered to be socially “abnormal” to grieve over an aborted child.]<sup>6</sup>

## NOTES

1. Holly Trimble, *Healing Post-Abortion Trauma: Help for Women Hurt by Abortion* (Stafford, VA: American Life League, 1989), 22–24.
2. Trimble, 23–24.
3. Trimble, 25.
4. Trimble, 26.
5. Trimble, 29–30.
6. Excerpts from a series of articles by Rev. Frank Pavone published in *Priests for Life* newsletter, volumes 4(1) to 5(2).

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### TESTIMONIES

**I**t is important to share stories of women who have had abortions with your congregation for two very special reasons.

First, they help those who have not had abortions to better understand the realities and obstacles that are often faced by those undergoing abortions. This understanding can lead to a greater compassion for and desire to reach out to those who have had abortions.

Second, they help those who have been involved in abortion know that they are not alone and that others have walked this road before them. They give those who have been involved in an abortion a voice to speak out: to speak for their unborn children who can not speak for themselves, to tell how abortion and other traumas hurt and exploit those involved, and to advocate for the defense of the legitimate rights of women and unborn children. Finally, these stories are meant with a compassionate response in our churches, those who have been there will know that this is a “safe place” for them to grieve and seek healing.

Following are some very brief quotes followed by longer testimonies, which you may wish to read or reprint in part or in their entirety.

#### TAKEN FOR ABORTION FROM SCHOOL — GAYLENE

Every Tuesday, a bus picked up students from all the area high schools and took them to the Planned Parenthood clinic. ... It was all so organized. ... They were all particularly careful to find out when my parents would not be home ... On the bus, I felt as though I had no control over what was happening to me... still today, I feel like I did not decide to have the abortion.

#### HE TOLD ME TO GET RID OF IT — MARY

The night I told him I was pregnant, he destroyed our apartment. He was screaming at me, telling me I was a whore, slut, pig ... you name it. He told me that the kid would be retarded, abnormal, and to get rid of it. NOW! The whole time he cornered me in the bedroom, throwing things and killing me with his words. ... He was so mean. ... His eyes were so black with anger. ... The abortion ripped my world apart.”<sup>1</sup>

### MY PARENTS KICKED ME OUT — TERESA

[My parents] told me to leave the house and forget that I was their daughter. I left the house with no job, no money, no home and nowhere to turn, feeling utterly abandoned and alone. Still, I was certain I would not get an abortion. I wanted my child. ... my father sent several messages urging me to have an abortion. I refused. But as I began to feel more desperate, I shut down my feelings ... functioning more like a surreal observer than someone in control.

### COERCED BY THE COUNSELOR — GENEVIEVE

I collapsed in sheer exhaustion. I told [the counselor] that I had been outside for hours. I cried hysterically, curled over with my head in my hands, on my knees. I said, "I feel like [the abortion is] depriving my child of life." Our conversation was cut short by the doctor. The pressure was on. ... [T]he counselor told me that if I was going to abort then I would have to do it right now. [She] said, "Look, I'll give you five minutes and when I come back, I want your answer. I couldn't believe it. Now I was going into a state of panic and shock. ... The counselor glared at me, sighed a deep sigh and impatiently said, "Look, they're all waiting for you, you know."<sup>2</sup>

### THE EFFECTS ON MEN ARE REAL AND DEVASTATING

My role in two abortions has been long-lasting. I can tell you that the mental and emotional effects on a man are real and devastating. I really don't let anyone get close to me because I don't want to let them down. I've had a divorce, no current relationship with my two living sons, countless unfinished projects, and several jobs left before true success--mainly because I never felt I deserved it.

### NOT PREPARED FOR THE PAIN

I had more "counseling" when I went to have breast implants than when I went to have an abortion. ... There were no warnings of possible risks, i.e. perforated uterus, hemorrhaging, sterility, breast cancer, depression. I was told that an abortion was safer than carrying a child full term. I was totally unprepared for the pain, both physical and emotional, that I would endure.

## **MY SISTER BECAME A DIFFERENT PERSON**

Our mom made my sister have an abortion. At age 14 my sister became a completely different person. She got into very hard drugs and would use them every day. She had attempted suicide at least 3 times that I know of and has horrible huge scars on her arms from [this].

## **THE ONGOING LOSS OF ABORTION – KATHY, AGE 16**

What followed [the abortion] were years of turmoil, confusion, emotional death. The boy I thought loved me couldn't handle what had happened to me. The relationship dissolved. So did my belief in love. I felt worthless. I got an apartment as soon as I was of age. I drank too much, did drugs, and entertained any man who would look at me. I was starved for acceptance. I put myself in the most dangerous situations possible. I had a death wish.<sup>3</sup>

## **TRYING TO FIND PEACE – AUDREY, AGE 72**

I was devastated after a broken engagement in early 1945. The abortion ruined my life, and made me feel completely unworthy. I'm old, tired and in pain. I have to get ready to meet my Maker in Peace! I've prayed, and cried, and felt I had to atone for it all my life. I miss my daughter and need her so much.

## **MEN GRIEVE ALONE**

Most of the men I talk to think about the abortion years after it is over. They feel sad, they feel curious, they feel a lot of things; but usually they have talked to no one about it. It's a taboo.... With a man, if he wants to shed a tear, he had better do it privately. If he feels that the abortion had denied him his child, he had better work through it himself. He does not share his pain with a clergyman, a minister; he does not share it with a close male friend.... It just stays with him. And it stays for a long time.<sup>4</sup>

## **A GRANDMOTHER'S PAIN**

The thought of abortion in our family is a terrible thing. Our granddaughter, age 21, had an abortion. We did not know about the abortion just before her death when she tried suicide by cutting her wrist. ... She told her mother what she had done. They took her to the hospital, kept

her five days [and] released her. ... Three days later she killed herself. She said her boyfriend made her do it [the abortion]. She dearly loved children. ... If someone could have talked with her, she might be alive today.

### WANTING TO END THE PAIN — JANET

With quiet deliberation, I took my handgun from under my pillow. ... I chambered a round, walked into my living room, sat in a chair, put the gun to my head and pulled the trigger. To this day, I cannot think why the gun did not fire ... I find it amazing in retrospect, how we can function so well in front of others, while suffering like that.

### NOWHERE TO TURN — MARION

Marion was raised in a chaotic, abusive family, which resulted in her parents' divorce when she was thirteen. After the divorce, her mother began abusing drugs and alcohol and became promiscuous with men she would pick up at bars. Desperate for affection, Marion deliberately became pregnant at the age of fifteen, hoping to be able to move out and have her own family.

When she went for a free pregnancy test at Planned Parenthood, however, the counselor encouraged her to abort. Marion left without saying anything, thinking "I don't want to do this. Abortion is killing." Though she had never been to church, Marion decided to go to a church for help, thinking that even if they yelled at her at least they would help her.

I picked out a church that was pretty; it had stone and vines and window boxes and I thought, "If God lives, He'd live here." So I went in, sat down in the minister's office, and blurt, blurt, blurt.

Well, he hit the roof. Got up and started like Jimmy Durante, "what's-this-generation-coming-to" kinda thing. Then he sits down, opens the bottom drawer of his desk, and hands me \$150 in greenbacks.

I'm fifteen, I don't ask any questions. That would imply that I don't understand and that would be not-adult. So I took the money, put it in my pocket, and he shoves me out the door. I was standing outside the church thinking, "What does he want me to do with this?" Then I realized. God wants me to have an abortion.

I was surprised that this was what God wanted. But it was what every adult I talked to told me was best. I was sad and I couldn't go home right away. So I walked by the river and sat on the bridge. I swung my feet and talked to my baby.

... I think about that little girl sitting there and I get upset. In my high school ... I was the whore, I was the girl they called when the football team wanted to have a party. Nobody told me about God; it was going to take more than \$150

given to me in five minutes to solve my problem. I was going to be a problem for a long, long time. And we don't want to deal with people like that. We care about people getting saved, but we don't care that much. Not enough to inconvenience ourselves.

... So I sat there and swung my feet and told my baby, "I've wanted to have you since I was five years old. I wish I could have you—but I can't. 'Cause there's crazy people at my house, and they'll hurt you. ... And I wonder if you're a girl, or a boy, and I'm really sorry—that I have to kill you—but God wants me to."<sup>5</sup>

After her abortion, Marion suffered from extreme guilt, low self-esteem, self-hatred, intense grief, and a downward spiral into drugs and alcohol. To make up for her abortion, she tried to become pregnant again and again. The second time she became pregnant, her mother coerced her into a second abortion. The third time, she miscarried after being beaten by her father.

With her fourth pregnancy, she finally convinced the father of the child to marry her, but she was still severely emotionally scarred by her abortions. She continued to be dependent on drugs, and her ability to mother her child was severely distorted by the unresolved grief she was still carrying for the children she had lost. As an example of how the abortions affected her mothering, Marion says, "I got in the habit of just dropping the baby into the crib so he'd cry and need me."

But eventually, Marion and her husband became Christians and found healing, mercy, and strength from the only source of true healing, Christ. But Marion's path to recovery was not easy, and it was not just between her and Christ alone. God uses people to touch each other, hug each other, and cry with each other. Today Marion works in a crisis pregnancy center, helping young girls to avoid the same mistakes that she made. From her own personal experience, she knows that she must become personally involved in the lives of troubled young women, not because it is convenient but because it is necessary.

## ABORTION FOLLOWING RAPE—NANCY

In May 1973 I became pregnant from a date rape. I had tried to hide it from my parents, but of course they found out. Then the pressure started. "How are you going to go to college with a baby?" "How are you going to support it?" "It is only a blob of blood. It's not a baby yet." Before I had time to think about what I wanted, the abortion was over.

The abortion itself was like a living hell. I thought my guts were being pulled out. It was degrading, and I was terrified. When it was over, something made me ask the doctor, "Was it a boy or a girl?" He answered, "I can't tell. It's in pieces." The counseling consisted of throwing some birth control pills at me.

It's so hard to put into words how the abortion affected me. Looking back and knowing what I know now, I realize that I was going through almost classic Post-Abortion Syndrome. I slept with anyone and everyone. I engaged in unprotected sex, and each month when I wasn't pregnant, I would go into a deep depression. I was rebellious. I wanted my parents to see what I had become. I dropped out of college. I tried suicide, but I didn't have the guts to slit my wrists or blow my brains out. I couldn't get my hands on sleeping pills, so I resorted to over-the-counter sleep aids and booze.

When that failed, I then tried to make relationships work with men, any man. I was driven with a need to have a child and knew if I was married my parents couldn't do anything about it. Then I married in 1975. While my husband and I are still together, we have had to work extra hard because I married him for all the wrong reasons.

Five months after we were married, my first child was born. I was in heaven. I doted on that baby. In three months, I was pregnant again. But this time, we lost our baby at six months. Then the depression that I had conquered came back full force. I can remember thinking, "I deserve this pain. I killed a baby and now God has taken one from me. I deserve it." The doctor said that I had a weak cervix, a common aftereffect of abortion, and that the weight of the baby was too much for it and she just fell out. Four months later I was pregnant again.

It is hard to explain this need to keep having babies, but I did. From 1976, with the birth of my first living child, to 1985 at the birth of my fourth and final living child, I was pregnant a total of eight times. With the birth of my last child, the doctor didn't leave me any choice but to quit having children if I wanted to live to see the ones I had grow up.

In trying to deal with the abortion, I had to face what I had done and beg forgiveness from my God. The hardest thing of all is trying to forgive myself. It is a daily struggle to accept the forgiveness I know the Lord has given me. And I will never forget it. Only now, I don't want to forget it, because it keeps me from getting complacent. I know if it helps others, I can talk about it. It always makes me cry, but if it saves just one mom and baby the pain, it's worth it.

I joined our local Right to Life and crisis pregnancy center. I have also had to forgive my parents. I can still remember when I walked into my Mom's house and threw down a picture of an aborted fetus and snarled, "See what you made me do?" She has since become pro-life herself and has told me how sorry she is. I still have to fight against my anger at my Dad, because he still won't admit the abortion was wrong, at least for me.

Do all these things help? That's a hard one. Sometimes it does and sometimes the depression is too strong and time has to pass. Not a day goes by that the abortion doesn't cross my mind. It is a constant struggle trying to overcome my guilt and depression, even knowing I have been

forgiven.

But I had yet to learn that while it takes the blood of Jesus to deliver us from guilt, it takes the acceptance of others to deliver us from shame.

God knew that I needed this small, intimate group, made up of abortion victims like myself. I could be confident in their acceptance of me. Through this sharing with others like myself, I began my journey to be free of my shame.<sup>6</sup>

## MY DOCTOR SAID MY LIFE COULD BE IN DANGER — A COUPLE'S STORY

I grew up in a small town and was honored as one of the top ten at my high school graduation. I have always been outgoing with many good friends. I met and married a wonderful Christian man, finished college, became a middle school science teacher, and had a beautiful son.

[When I was 26] my doctor discovered a tumor on my bladder. Our whole church prayed for me, and I believed it was an answer to prayer when I was admitted into a program to try an experimental drug that held great promise as a cure for intercytital cystosis.

Soon after I started this medicine, I became pregnant. My husband and I and our whole family were excited, especially three-year-old Jonathan. But my doctor wasn't happy. Because of the medication, he told me that I could not have this baby because my life could be in danger and that my baby could be a monster. He said, "You must decide quickly to have a D and C before the heart starts beating." He never talked to me about alternatives.

I was seven weeks pregnant, and at the time, I did not know a baby's heart is beating just three weeks after conception. Looking back, I don't know why the doctor gave me the wrong information or why he would not use the word "abortion" to describe what he wanted me to do.

I was overwhelmed by the doctor's words and very scared. I left his office crying and immediately called my husband to ask him what we should do. We called our parents and other close family members and they prayed with us. I honestly thought I had to get this "cleaning out" so I wouldn't die. The thought of not being there to raise my son added to the pressure. Also, I thought I would never forgive myself for delivering "a monster." My husband was primarily motivated by his concern for me. We decided to heed the doctor's advice. I thought I had no other choice.

My doctor sent me to a Planned Parenthood facility. I wondered why my doctor didn't do the procedure and care for me himself since this was an at-risk pregnancy.

As my husband drove into the clinic parking lot, people on the sidewalk solemnly held up signs that read, "Save your baby." I huddled



down in the seat and said, "Oh, honey, they don't know why we are here, do they?" I still thought this was just tissue that had to come out of me.

Surely this wasn't a baby, I thought. The doctor said the heart wasn't beating.

Inside, I signed in and paid the fee. No counselors spoke to me and soon I was ushered into a cold, stark room with bare walls. I was lying on a table that was so cold I shivered. A nurse told me it would be over quickly and I could return to work the next day. She said it wouldn't hurt.

She was absolutely wrong!

A man came in. I presumed he was a doctor. He didn't say anything. As soon as I heard the suction machine, I began to wonder, What is happening to me?

After the procedure was over, I was taken to another room and told to sit for a while. Several younger girls were sitting in chairs lined up against the wall. A girl who looked like she was about 16 asked, "Was yours a boy or a girl?" I was shocked! What did she mean? Surely this wasn't a baby. Not yet!

On the way home, I was in excruciating pain. At home, standing in my kitchen, I began hemorrhaging. My husband helped me to the bathroom where I passed more bloody pieces. After I got into bed, I called my mother, but she said that maybe we shouldn't talk about it. I felt too ashamed to call the doctor. Although the doctor called it a D&C, I knew Planned Parenthood did abortions.

Oh God, what did I do? I cried myself to sleep that night.

Because I was having such a terrible time dealing with my loss, the doctor suggested that I get pregnant right away—as though this would replace the child I lost and fill the empty void. So after I finished the medication for my tumor, I got pregnant again. During this pregnancy, I asked God to punish me by giving me a deformed child or by taking my life. I am now thankful that God didn't give me what I asked, but instead blessed me with a healthy baby born one year after my abortion.

I was overly protective of my sons. I was fearful of injury or death, afraid that harm would come to them as my punishment. I wouldn't let them out of my sight.

For 12 years, I tried to push the experience out my mind, talking only to my husband about it. Many nights I cried myself to sleep in my arms, although I still justified my abortion as different because I had to do it.

My husband and I both believe our child was a girl, and we named her Jill Allison. I often dreamed about my little girl, but I couldn't talk about her to others. We wouldn't get to celebrate her first birthday or her first day of school, or push her in a swing or see her smile. I know some might say, "If you had died or your baby was a 'monster,' you could not have enjoyed those events." That may be. But because I chose

abortion, I will never know. I do know that my baby's size, the level of her physical and mental development, and her possible dependency and special needs did not justify her death.

I became addicted to work and had low self-esteem and repressed anger. I had difficulty making decisions and being close to friends, and I was unable to relax. I had pelvic infections and endometriosis, and eventually had to have a hysterectomy.

During this long, desperate time, if it had not been for my relationship with God, I think I would have lost my mind. At times, I'm sure my husband thought I had lost my mind. When the abortion clinic nurse told me, "This will be over quickly," she didn't tell me that I would regret it for the rest of my life. Even though my situation might be viewed as a "tough case" and one that many people would consider a justifiable reason for abortion, I still consider it a tragic and irreversible decision that has caused me deep pain and regret.

Finally, I took positive steps to begin the healing process. I earned that grieving, which is so important in healing, is quashed by a society that doesn't want to hear and doesn't understand. My feelings of guilt and shame also caused me to keep my secret hidden. Until women identify their need to grieve their loss and are encouraged to do so, they will continue to experience psychological and emotional trauma.<sup>7</sup>

## NOTES

1. T. Burke, *Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion* (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2007) 225.
2. M. Tankard Reist, *Giving Sorrow Words: Women's Stories of Grief After Abortion* (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2007) 181-182.
3. Linda Bartlett, *From Heartache to Healing* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 29.
4. Thomas Strahan, "Portraits of Post-Abortive Fathers Devastated by the Abortion Experience," *Association for Interdisciplinary Research in Values and Social Change* 7(3), Nov/Dec 1994.
5. Adapted from a testimony recounted in Mathewes-Green, *Real Choices* (previously cited), 198-202.
6. *The Post-Abortion Review*, Winter 1994, 2(1): 7-8.
7. B. Horak, *Real Abortion Stories: The Healing and The Hurting* (El Paso, TX: Strive For the Best Publishing, 2007) 79-82

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# A CHECKLIST OF ACTION STEPS

- 1) Give a series of sermons on compassion, grief, and forgiveness, such as outlined herein. Review these points at least twice a year for the benefit of new members of the congregation and for the old members who didn't quite believe it all the first time.
- 2) Use audio- or video- recording to record these sermons. Make them available on your church website or social networks such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. Have copies on CD or DVD available for those who don't have access to the Internet. Periodically publish a notice that these materials are available online or for loan. These frequent reminders reach out to new members and remind the general congregation that your church is a haven of support and healing for those who have been scarred by abortion.
- 3) Publish pro-woman/pro-life "blurbs" in your weekly bulletin or make them available on your parish web site (if you have a pastor's or ministry column, this is a great place to put this). You may wish to pick a paragraph or two from this book or other books on post-abortion healing, or compose your own words of encouragement.
- 4) Publish and share personal stories, poems, songs, reflections and other writings from those who have been involved in an abortion in your church bulletin or online. Many can be found online and can be reprinted by asking for permission.
- 5) Start a peer group or ministry to provide post-abortion healing. National organizations such as those listed in the "Resources" section of the book can provide information and materials to help you get started. Allow volunteers the option of having their names omitted from any public notice by handling all requests for help through the church office, email or web site.
- 6) Place literature on post-abortion trauma and post-abortion healing in your church information rack and church library.
- 7) Start a small prayer chain within your congregation of women and men who agree together to pray each day for the healing of those who have been involved in abortion.

8) Hold a prayer service (perhaps along with other churches) for mothers, fathers and families who have lost infants through abortion, miscarriage, or stillbirth.

9) Organize an interdenominational awareness and outreach effort for victims of coerced and unwanted abortions and post-abortion trauma. You can find resources and information about how to do this at [www.theunchoice.com](http://www.theunchoice.com).

10) Encourage your congregation, either as a church body or as individuals, to give financial and other practical support to crisis pregnancy centers and post-abortion ministries. Recruit volunteers to help these ministries through your church. Put information about these resources, both for those who need the service and those who want to support it, in your church bulletin or newsletter and on your web site and social media sites.

12) Where Life-Chains are held, encourage the use of the sign "Abortion Hurts Women."

13) Invite speakers from pregnancy centers and post-abortion ministries to address your congregation during your regular service or during a special event.

14) Invite women, men and family members who are comfortable speaking about their involvement in a past abortion to share their testimonies in your church. If this is not possible, invite people to read the testimonies of others (available in many books and online) aloud. Make sure you have permission for this and make it clear that the person is sharing someone else's story.

14) Encourage those who know someone who has been involved in abortion and is seeking healing to attend an introductory meeting at your church's or community's post-abortion healing ministry. The friend who makes the invitation should offer to go along for support.

15) Encourage those in your church who regularly speak or discuss abortion to evaluate their messages in order to make sure that they are expressing compassion and support for those at risk of abortion, those who have experienced unwanted or coerced abortions and those suffering from post-abortion trauma.

16) Add materials on post-abortion healing to your church lending library. Study these yourself, so that you will be prepared to help women or men who come to you before you refer them to a post-abortion specialist.

17) Donate a supply of books and pamphlets on post-abortion healing to

your local public library and your area's high school and college libraries.

18) Encourage fellow clergy and other church leaders to join you in preaching a pro-woman/pro-pro-life message that expresses compassion and support for those who have been involved in an abortion (women, men and families). If you have found this method to be successful, explain to them how this approach has helped to heal divisions over the abortion issue within your congregation.

19) Join our Church Awareness Project at [www.afterabortion.org/churchawarenessproject/about.htm](http://www.afterabortion.org/churchawarenessproject/about.htm). The goal of the Church Awareness Project is to a) raise awareness that most abortions are unwanted or coerced and the harm caused by abortion to all involved; b) move our churches to the forefront of advocating for the legitimate rights of both women and unborn children; and c) foster an atmosphere of support for those vulnerable to abortion or those who have been hurt by abortion.

20) Send your ideas, recommendations, and success stories to us. You can do so at:

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[elliottinstitute@gmail.com](mailto:elliottinstitute@gmail.com)

# RESOURCES

The following is a list of additional resources which you may turn to for personal study, and lists of organizations to whom you may refer women and men for counseling or additional information. Inclusion on this list does not constitute an endorsement.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION & RESEARCH

The Elliot Institute is an internationally recognized leader in the field of post-abortion education, research, and outreach. Our mission is to raise awareness that most abortions are unwanted or coerced; expose the injustice, exploitation and harm caused by abortion to all involved; and highlight the need for real alternatives and support.

The following resources provide more information:

### **Get Our E-Newsletter**

Get the latest news, information and resources with our free e-newsletter at: [www.afterabortion.org/subscribe.html](http://www.afterabortion.org/subscribe.html)

### **Find More Information Online**

For information and free resources on unwanted, coerced and forced abortions, visit [www.theunchoice.com](http://www.theunchoice.com). Join the Church Awareness Project at [www.afterabortion.org/churchawarenessproject/about.htm](http://www.afterabortion.org/churchawarenessproject/about.htm)

## HELP FOR THOSE FACING A CRISIS PREGNANCY

The services offered by help/healing groups are confidential and, in many cases, free. Inclusion in this list should not be taken as an endorsement of any group's programs or philosophy.

The organizations listed are national organizations with affiliates throughout the country. You may also find local resources listed in the Yellow Pages under "Abortion Alternatives."

### **Carenet/Option Line**

1-800-395-HELP (4351)

[www.optionline.org](http://www.optionline.org)

Offers pregnancy tests, maternity clothes, medical and professional services, and care for single mothers. Trained consultants take phone calls

and email 24 hours a day.

**Birthright**

1-800-550-4900

[www.birthright.org](http://www.birthright.org)

Offers pregnancy testing, clothing, parenting classes, adoption services, medical care, family counseling, and referrals for legal assistance.

**Heartbeat International**

1-888-550-7577

[www.heartbeatinternational.org](http://www.heartbeatinternational.org)

Offers pregnancy assistance, maternity homes, and adoption counseling.

**The Nurturing Network**

1-800-866-4666

[www.nurturingnetwork.org](http://www.nurturingnetwork.org)

Nationwide network of volunteers provides support for women facing crisis pregnancies. Offers assistance in finding employment and help with medical, residential, and financial resources.

**Bethany Christian Services**

1-800-238-4269

[www.bethany.org](http://www.bethany.org)

Offers pregnancy counseling, foster care, housing for pregnant women, family and marital counseling, and adoption services.

**BeNotAfraid.net**

[www.benotafraid.net](http://www.benotafraid.net)

An online outreach to parents who have received a poor or difficult prenatal diagnosis, especially those who have been told they should terminate the pregnancy. Includes stories from families, articles, resources and other links to offer encouragement and hope.

## **HELP FOR WOMEN WHO HAVE HAD ABORTIONS**

The services offered by help/healing groups are confidential and, in many cases, free. Inclusion in this list should not be taken as an endorsement of

any group's programs or philosophy.

The organizations listed are national organizations with affiliates throughout the country. You may also find local resources listed in the Yellow Pages under "Abortion Alternatives."

### **Abortion Recovery Network**

National toll-free hotline at 1-866-4-MY-RECOVERY (1-866-469-7326)  
[www.abortionrecovery.org](http://www.abortionrecovery.org)

A network of ministries that provides information and counseling for those suffering after abortion. Their web site helps locate post-abortion ministries both in the U.S. and internationally. Also provides help to men, family members, medical personnel and those in prison who have been affected by abortion.

### **Rachel's Vineyard Ministries**

National toll-free hotline at 1-877-HOPE-4-ME (1-877-467-3463)  
[www.rachelsvineyard.org](http://www.rachelsvineyard.org)

Rachel's Vineyard offers post-abortion weekend retreats and weekly support groups in 42 states and 4 countries. The retreat is Christian, and is offered in interdenominational, Catholic and ecumenical formats. Offers training for counselors and laypeople.

### **Ramah International**

Phone (941) 473-2188.  
[www.ramahinternational.org](http://www.ramahinternational.org)

This Christian group supports post-abortion ministry through training programs, resources, research and promoting awareness of post-abortion issues. The recovery book, "Her Choice to Heal" is available. You can also find e-mail support through the Ramah website.

### **The National Office of Post-Abortion Reconciliation and Healing (NOPARH) / Project Rachel**

National toll-free hotline at 1-800-5WE-CARE.  
[www.hopeafterabortion.com](http://www.hopeafterabortion.com)

Project Rachel is a post-abortion outreach of the Catholic Church, while NOPARH is intended as a non-denominational referral source for post-abortion help. Catholic dioceses that have their own Project Rachel can also be a source for local referrals. By calling the national office at 1-800-5WE-CARE, you will generally be referred to the local Project Rachel office nearest to you. That office can then refer you to helpful and trained



clergy, therapists, retreats and support groups.

### **Local Pregnancy Center Based Support Groups**

Some Pregnancy Resource Centers (PRCs) and Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs) host post-abortion support groups. These groups typically meet weekly for a period of anywhere from 8 to 16 weeks, and use a variety of recovery guides.

To find out if there is a PRC or CPC offering post-abortion help in your area, check with the following group:

#### **Carenet/Option Line**

1-800-395-HELP (4351)

[www.optionline.org](http://www.optionline.org)

## **HELP FOR MEN WHO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN ABORTION**

The following are links to organizations and web sites offering information, counseling, research and resources on men and abortion. Inclusion in this list should not be taken as an endorsement of any group's programs or philosophy.

Some crisis pregnancy centers and church-based groups that offer support for women after abortion may also have programs for men as well. Look in the Yellow Pages under "Abortion Alternatives" for groups that might offer such support.

#### **Reclaiming Fatherhood**

[www.menandabortion.info](http://www.menandabortion.info)

This website includes research, articles, personal stories, information and healing resources for men. It also includes information for counselors and others who provide post-abortion help to men.

#### **Fatherhood Forever Foundation**

602-334-7651

[www.fatherhoodforever.org/index.html](http://www.fatherhoodforever.org/index.html)

Dedicated to helping men find healing and hope after abortion by creating awareness that abortion does have an impact on men and providing encouragement to those seeking help. Lists resources, including books, articles and healing/support organizations.

**Rachel's Vineyard**

National toll-free hotline at 1-877-HOPE-4-ME (1-877-467-3463)  
[www.rachelsvineyard.org/men/index.htm](http://www.rachelsvineyard.org/men/index.htm).

Provides support for women and men struggling after abortion through weekend retreats and email support. Women or men whose partners have experienced abortion are also invited to attend the retreats with their partner.

**Abortion Recovery International**

National toll-free hotline at 1-866-4-MY-RECOVERY (1-866-469-7326)  
[www.abortionrecovery.org](http://www.abortionrecovery.org)

Lists groups that provide healing services for men, as well as for other family members such as grandparents or siblings who have been affected by abortion.

**Ramah International**

Phone (941) 473-2188.  
[www.ramahinternational.org](http://www.ramahinternational.org)

Ramah International has a men's page with links to resources on their web site at [www.ramahinternational.org/for-post-abortive-men.html](http://www.ramahinternational.org/for-post-abortive-men.html). There is also a short page for men whose partners have experienced abortion at [www.ramahinternational.org/post-abortive-spouse.html](http://www.ramahinternational.org/post-abortive-spouse.html).

**SaveOne**

501-681-8979  
[www.saveone.org](http://www.saveone.org)

Seeks to provide hope for women and men suffering after abortion. through group study, one-on-one help, and giving encouragement through self-study. The Men's Study is a bible-study based workbook/guide to help men heal after abortion.

## **HELP FOR OTHERS HURT BY ABORTION**

The following are links to organizations that provide support to others hurt by abortion, including grandparents who lost grandchildren to abortion, those who have lost siblings to abortion and those who survived an abortion attempt.

**Abortion Recovery International**

National toll-free hotline at 1-866-4-MY-RECOVERY (1-866-469-7326)  
[www.abortionrecovery.org](http://www.abortionrecovery.org)

Lists groups that provide healing services for grandparents or siblings who have been affected by abortion.

**Rachel's Vineyard**

National toll-free hotline at 1-877-HOPE-4-ME (1-877-467-3463)  
[www.rachelsvineyard.org/men/index.htm](http://www.rachelsvineyard.org/men/index.htm).

Grandparents and others who have been impacted by abortion are invited to attend weekend retreats and receive email support. Women or men whose partners have experienced abortion are also invited to attend the retreats with their partner.

**Hope Alive**

(479) 855-0072 or (250) 642-1848 (Canada)  
[www.HopeAliveUSA.org](http://www.HopeAliveUSA.org)

Provides support for those affected by abortion, child abuse or neglect, pregnancy loss, and those who survived an abortion attempt or whose siblings were aborted.

**SILENT NO MORE AWARENESS CAMPAIGN**

The Silent No More Awareness Campaign provides opportunities for men and women who have been involved in a past abortion to speak out about their experiences and advocate for an end to abortion and the damage it causes. Their focus is on education and raising awareness. For more information, visit [www.silentnomoreawareness.org](http://www.silentnomoreawareness.org).

**The seats in our churches are filled with women, men and families who have been involved in abortions. Often, they are alone.**

Millions of people in our churches have been involved in a past abortion. For most, the abortion was unwanted or even coerced. Many still struggle with deep spiritual and emotional wounds as a result of exploitation, abuse and the trauma of the abortion itself. Yet many do not hear these issues discussed in church. Fear of being divisive or causing additional pain has left many church leaders silent on these issues.

Prepared with the help of experienced post-abortion counselors and clergy, this book can help our churches break through these difficult issues. It can help transform our churches into places where those at risk of abortion and those who are hurting because of a past abortion can find healing, help and support. Our churches can become places where the legitimate rights of both women and their unborn children are defended, and where women and men who are struggling will find others willing to walk the road with them.

If you are a clergy member or church leader, this book can help you learn to speak about abortion in a truthful, compassionate and unifying way. If you or someone you love has been involved in an abortion, it can help understand how abortion may have affected your life and point the way to finding support and healing.

**David C. Reardon, Ph.D.**, is a biomedical ethicist and director of the Elliot Institute. He has been actively involved in research, education and outreach on abortion issues for more than 20 years. His other works include *Making Abortion Rare: A Healing Strategy for A Divided Nation*; *Aborted Women, Silent No More*; and *Victims and Victors: Speaking Out About Their Pregnancies, Abortions and Children Resulting From Sexual Assault*.



**Acorn Books**  
Springfield, Illinois

*Cover painting: "Her Choice," original oil on linen, 16 " x 20"*  
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