

The Power of Your Story
Participant Manual
Version 3



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THE POWER OF YOUR STORY

Participant Manual

Version 3

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The Power of Your Story
Participant's Manual
Version 3

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FOREWORD

You're no doubt wondering why a man wrote a curriculum for post-abortive women. For me, it began years ago when a friend shared her story with me and asked me to write a book telling the true stories of women who had experienced abortion.

At the time, I had no context or involvement with abortion or with women who had experienced abortion. Through a unique relationship with a pregnancy resource center in Anchorage, Alaska, they put me in touch with 12 post-abortive women who were willing to bravely share their stories with me.

As they told their stories, I was humbled that they would take me into their confidence. Hearing and capturing their stories in print deeply moved and changed me. Previously, I had had no idea how devastating abortion could be in a woman's life.

Why would 12 women share their abortion stories, complete with all the pain, trauma, and chaos those abortions brought into their lives? Their overwhelming desire was to testify to the world how devastating abortion can be and to help other women begin to heal from their abortions. We agreed to tell those women's stories anonymously in the little book *13 Jars*.

Since writing *13 Jars*, I have heard the stories of many more post-abortive women and men.

Now, I find myself on the board of directors of Abortion Anonymous, Inc. (AbAnon), an organization whose mission is to help post-abortive women and men recover from the emotional pain brought on by abortion.

You might find me an unlikely candidate to write a curriculum such as this. I've been married to the same woman, Linda, for over 40 years. We have three children, lost a fourth through miscarriage, and have nine wonderful grandchildren. I am passionate about helping post-abortive women and men on their journey toward healing.

I could not have written this curriculum without the help of the women whose stories are recorded in this work. Also, Cindy Crawford, Cindi Heath, and Dianne Jongeward spent many hours poring over this curriculum to ensure its relevance and effectiveness for women like them who are post-abortive.

Because this curriculum is the joint work of these women and me, in many cases, I've chosen to identify with you using the plural personal pronoun "we." Please accept my attempt to draw myself into your experience in this way.

We invite you to fully enter this curriculum and the eight sessions you'll spend with other women like yourself. All sessions are gender-specific. I'm sure you'll meet some wonderful people and make some life-long friends in your AbAnon group.

Our hope and desire is that you will experience healing and a new-found hope through this curriculum!

— Rob Fischer, November 2014

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WELCOME

_____ and _____ will be your facilitators for the next eight weeks. You are very courageous for taking this step toward processing your abortion experience. We're glad you're here.

INTRODUCTIONS

- Name
- Where you are from
- What would you like to take away from your experience over the next eight weeks?

OVER THE NEXT EIGHT WEEKS, WE WILL TALK ABOUT

- Your abortion story
- How your abortion may have affected you
- Ways you may have coped with your abortion
- Your relationships
- Your child
- Common emotions surrounding abortion
- God & faith
- Healing & forgiveness

ESTABLISH GROUP NORMS

We like to establish group norms or ground rules by which we agree to conduct our meetings together. This way, we all have the same expectations and can get the most from this experience. Some group norms we see as essential are:

Keep confidences – What we say here stays here. We pledge to keep each person's confidences and ask the same of each group member. This should include participating in a private location where no one can be overheard.

Be present – Attend all the sessions (except in an emergency). Your presence here is not only important for you but the other participants as well. If you have to leave the group, please explain why so others are not burdened with the possibility of having been the reason.

Be ready – Keep up with the light reading or homework between sessions. The homework is meant to help you heal. Completing the light homework each week will help you find growth and healing.

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Be respectful – We agree to respect each other: our individual situations, our ethnicity, our faiths, the choices we’ve made, the things we may say, how we each process our abortion.

Function as a team – We agree to function as a team: no one dominates the conversation; we listen to each other; we’re here to assist, encourage and care for each other.

Be humble – We’re not here to judge or *fix* each other. Sometimes the way we suppress our own needs is by comparing ourselves to someone else or trying to fix them.

Believe and trust one another – All the stories printed in this curriculum are factual. We commit to being truthful with each other here as well.

No “sharing” hangovers – Promise not to regret what we’ve shared with each other.

Check-in – Allow each other to check in and ensure we’re okay through any pain the healing process may prompt.

Always try to end on a positive note.

What else would you like to set down as a group norm?

DISCLAIMER

We recognize that every person is different, and working through issues surrounding your abortion usually occurs over time. Our sincere hope is that you will achieve some measure of healing through this 8-week experience.

Our facilitators are not professional counselors or life coaches. But having personally experienced an abortion, we are passionate about providing a safe, supportive environment for others.

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Any profits from the sale of the Participant Manuals go to cover the cost of printing, shipping, and the support and expansion of AbAnon. AbAnon is a registered 501c3 not-for-profit organization and is financed primarily through the generous contributions of donors.

If you are actively harming yourself or having suicidal thoughts, please seek the help of a professional counselor immediately. We can discreetly help you locate a counselor if you like. This support group is not intended to replace professional counseling or therapy. You can find a comprehensive list of resources, including 24/7 hotlines, at srtservices.org/resources.

INTRODUCTION – THE POWER OF YOUR STORY

We are so glad you've chosen to join us for this eight-week session designed to help you process your abortion experience. Be assured that we will maintain confidentiality as you participate with this small group of women.

All our facilitators come with our own abortion stories and are in various stages of dealing with our experiences. We are all volunteers.

We recognize that although there are some basic issues that we all experience or need to face, each woman processes her abortion in a different way. Whatever it is that you are seeking, some sort of change is inevitable. Change can be difficult and scary but necessary if we want different outcomes than we're currently experiencing. Please avail yourself of every method and opportunity that we provide to help bring about your desired change.

AbAnon is not an overtly religious organization and does not represent a particular religion, denomination, or faith. Anyone, regardless of their faith or lack of faith, who has had an abortion experience is welcome to our gender-specific programs.

SESSION ONE

We freely acknowledge that part of our eight-week program involves discussion about God, faith, and forgiveness. Abortion impacts the whole person: physically, emotionally, mentally, relationally, and spiritually. Many people have found change and healing through faith, and AbAnon would be remiss in our responsibility if we failed to include God and faith in our curriculum. However, to make every participant feel welcome and comfortable, our meetings will not include prayer.

Some of what we'll be addressing will be difficult to discuss, but remember, we're all in this together. We are here to acknowledge and empathize with you as you process your experience. You are not alone!

HOW THE PARTICIPANT MANUAL WORKS

Each week or chapter has pre-work that you will complete prior to the next session. For instance, if you turn to Session Two on page 23 in the Participant Manual, you'll see that it begins with Cindy's Story, followed by some discussion questions and then a short reading on why it's so vital to share your story. At the end of each session, you will find a journal page. Feel free to use this space, journal electronically, or write your thoughts and emotions in a separate notebook.

Some of the chapters also contain projects. Please do this homework early in the week so that you're not scrambling at the last minute to finish. It may benefit you to break the preparation up over multiple days. Take your time and seek to gain all you can from this experience. The more you invest, the more you'll take away.

JOURNALING TOWARD HEALING

Many therapists encourage us to journal during our journey to healing. There are no real guidelines for journaling; no right or wrong

way to do it. A journal is a very personal record of what you're feeling and experiencing during the healing process. Record both the pain and the strides you're making toward healing. Your journal is for your eyes only, unless you choose to share it with someone.

From time to time, we encourage you to go back and read your journal and note the progress you've made toward healing.

POST ABORTION STRESS SYNDROME

Joan Appleton was the head nurse at Commonwealth Clinic, which performed abortions. Joan was a very active member in the National Organization for Women (NOW). As a firm believer in choice, she felt she had a wonderful opportunity to practice her political beliefs.¹

While working at the clinic, Joan realized, "I often saw women who were injured emotionally by abortion. However, my supervisor told me, 'If she's having a problem **after** her abortion, it's because she was having a problem **before** her abortion.'"²

But it kept bothering Joan. "Why was it such an emotional trauma for a woman and such a difficult decision, if it was a natural thing to do? If it was right, why was it so difficult? I had to ask myself that all the time. I counseled these women so well; they were so sure of their decisions. So why were they coming back now, months and years later, psychological wrecks?"³

Joan continued to explain that in the pro-choice movement and abortion industry, "We deny that there is anything like post-abortion

1 Clinic Quotes, "Former Clinic Worker Joan Appleton," September 11, 2012, <http://clinic-quotes.com/former-clinic-worker-joan-appleton/>.

2 Ibid.

3 <https://thelifeinstitute.net/learning-centre/abortion-facts/providers/former-abortionists/joan-appleton>

SESSION ONE

syndrome. Yet it is real, and they do come back. I couldn't deny their presence, their numbers were increasing, and I kept asking, why?"⁴

We refer to these very real psychological effects as Post Abortion Stress Syndrome (or PASS). Supporters of abortion often deny the existence of PASS. This brings additional pressure to bear on women who are feeling the negative effects of abortion but are told that their feelings are not real or meaningful.

However, Susanne Babbel, PhD, MFT, a psychologist specializing in trauma and depression had the following to say: "No matter your philosophical, religious, or political views on abortion, the fact of the matter is, the actual experience can affect women not only on a personal level but can potentially have psychological repercussions."⁵

Dr. Babbel went on to explain:

*Post Abortion Stress Syndrome (PASS) is the name that has been given to the psychological aftereffects of abortion, based on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is important to note that this is not a term that has been accepted by the American Psychiatric Association or the American Psychological Association. Nevertheless, any event that causes trauma can indeed result in PTSD, and abortion is no exception.*⁶

PASS

How common is Post Abortion Stress Syndrome and the trauma to women (and men) brought on by abortion?

4 See note 1.

5 Susanne Babbel, PhD, MFT, "Post Abortion Stress Syndrome (PASS) – Does it Exist?" Psychology Today, October 25, 2010, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/somatic-psychology/201010/post-abortion-stress-syndrome-pass-does-it-exist>.

6 Ibid.

Many experience feelings of loss and depression at some point after an abortion. Post Abortion Stress Syndrome (PASS) describes more severe and extensive trauma that may include the following:⁷

- ☐ Self-harm, strong suicidal thoughts, or suicide attempts
- ☐ Increase in dangerous and/or unhealthy activities (alcohol/drug abuse, anorexia/bulimia, compulsive over-eating, cutting, casual and indifferent sex, and other inappropriate risk-taking behaviors)
- ☐ Depression that is stronger than “just a little sadness or the blues”
- ☐ Inability to perform normal self-care activities
- ☐ Inability to function normally in a job or school
- ☐ Inability to take care of or relate to existing children or function normally in other relationships (i.e., with a spouse, partner, other family members or friends)
- ☐ A desire to immediately get pregnant and “replace” the baby that was aborted, even when all the circumstances that led to choosing abortion the first time are still in place.

In addition to the above, PASS sometimes does not appear until months or even many years after an abortion and may continue for months and even years. Other short- and long-term PASS symptoms may include the following:⁸

7 AfterAbortion.com, “What is PASS?” http://afterabortion.com/pass_details.html.

8 Ibid.

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- ☐ Uncontrollable emotions and/or dealing with emotional issues
- ☐ Anxiety and panic disorder
- ☐ Difficulty sleeping and sleeping problems
- ☐ Disturbing dreams and/or nightmares
- ☐ Problems with phobias or increase in severity of existing phobias
- ☐ Repeated unplanned pregnancies with additional abortions
- ☐ Repeated unplanned pregnancies carried to term
- ☐ “Atonement marriage,” where the woman marries the partner from the abortion, to help justify the abortion
- ☐ Distress seeing or socializing with other pregnant women, other people’s babies, and children
- ☐ Codependence or inability to make decisions easily
- ☐ Problems with severe and disproportionate anger
- ☐ Distress or other problems with a later pregnancy
- ☐ Added emotional issues and problems when dealing with future infertility or other physical complications resulting from the abortion
- ☐ An unhealthy obsession with excelling at work or school to justify the abortion
- ☐ Obsessive Pro-life or Pro-choice activism

PASS SELF-ASSESSMENT

In your homework for next week, you will be asked to come back to these two lists of PASS symptoms in order to assess your own situation with regard to Post Abortion Stress Syndrome. Reviewing this list carefully will help you write your own story.

FACILITATOR STORY

This curriculum is called “The Power of Your Story” because there is great healing in sharing our abortion stories in a supportive, non-judgmental environment. We want to model what we will be asking you to do. So today, one of your facilitators will be sharing her abortion story. Feel free to get a piece of paper to record your impressions. As you listen, keep two things in your mind:

1. How can I support and encourage her?
2. How does her story connect emotionally to mine?

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Some of you may be thinking, “I’ve been trying to put my abortion behind me. Why would I want to revisit that experience again? I just want to move on and forget about it.” Others may be processing an abortion in a different way that’s difficult to describe at this time. That’s okay.

In the following seven weeks of *The Power of Your Story*, we want to join you in processing your experience. We’ll provide you with tools and strategies for doing so. We want to help you find answers, support you, and offer you hope.

SESSION ONE

HOMEWORK FOR THE NEXT SESSION

Please read and complete the tasks for Session Two in the Participant Manual before our next session. You will find these on pages 23-38 in your manual. You may wish to turn there and go over these now. We'll meet here each week for seven more weeks at _____(time).

The Power of Your Story

Journal Page

Journal page with horizontal dotted lines for writing.



FACILITATOR STORY

Today we will be talking about starting to write your story. To model what you will be working toward, one of your facilitators will be sharing her abortion story. As you listen, keep two things in your mind:

1. How can I support and encourage her?
2. How does her story connect emotionally to mine?

CINDY'S STORY

Please read the following true story and reflect on the questions that follow.

During my childhood, my parents were very unhappy and fought all the time. They both worked hard, but we had little money, and they had difficulty communicating with each other. After years of fighting, they eventually divorced.

When I was 11, my father moved away. My mom went back to work and struggled to raise and feed my older brother, sister, and me. As the youngest, I was a very fearful child, and I spent a lot of time alone, worrying.

Not long after the divorce, my mom met and married a man. He had money, which helped our financial situation, but he was not a good person. When my mom married, my brother moved out, which left my older sister and me at home.

My step-father began to come into our rooms at night. My sister was 16 at the time, and when he started to approach her sexually, she moved out. That left me, and for the next six years, my step-father sexually abused me.

My mom did not know what was happening. In fact, she seemed happy since she didn't have the financial stress anymore. I didn't tell anyone about what my step-father was doing to me. I was too ashamed, and I wanted to keep peace in my family.

The abuse continued. He began to stop on back roads when we were driving somewhere, or if my mom was gone, he would find me at home. He began giving me gifts in a feeble attempt to placate me and keep me quiet.

You might wonder why I didn't say anything, but I felt like I had no way out. Who could I tell? By then, he had moved us to a different city, away from family and friends and away from my brother and sister. He built a beautiful home for my mom and me. To the people around us, we looked like a model family.

In order to cope, I began finding ways to stay busy and away from home. I often only came home from school if I had a friend with me. This way, I

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didn't have to be alone with my step-father. My mom had gone back to school and got a job, so she was rarely home in the afternoons.

I felt trapped, insecure and lonely. I thought about telling my mom about my step-father but deemed it risky because it would ruin our "family" and our security. I thought about confiding in someone else but was afraid they wouldn't believe me, or worse, they wouldn't know what to do and leave me in my situation.

I desired acceptance and approval of others above all else, and because of my fragile self-esteem, it felt safer to pretend and remain in shame and secrecy. I held back in my relationships with girlfriends because I didn't want anyone to discover my secret. In my relationships with boys, I gave away too much because I wanted to be loved and secretly hoped that they might rescue me.

Since I was so needy and craved attention, I drove people away, and my relationships were short-lived, leaving me to feel weak and abandoned again and again. This confirmed my biggest fear that there was something wrong with me and I was not worthy of being loved.

The shame and insecurity increased. There seemed to be nowhere I could rest, nowhere I could be real and be loved unconditionally. I began to doubt that there was anyone that could truly love or accept me.

Time passed, and my mom and step-father began to fight, and our "fake" world began to crumble. After one awful night of fighting, my mom and I moved out, and they divorced a short time later. By now, I was 16.

Living alone with my mom again, I wanted to keep peace in our home at all costs. She was healing from a divorce, and I still felt somehow responsible for the abuse I had received from my step-father. I thought that by keeping my secret, we would recover and move on with our lives. But many things had happened related to the abuse that I couldn't talk to my mom about until the truth came out.

One afternoon, I finally told my mom about the years of abuse; she listened and believed me. By telling her, my healing began. Somehow, the fact that one other person knew the truth released me and set me free. I was no longer carrying the burden of my abuse and shame alone.

I realize now that my secret only had power over me as long as it was kept hidden. My mom made me talk to a lawyer that day and started court proceedings against my step-father. This was very difficult for me. It meant that secrets I had kept hidden for six years would be exposed—not only to my extended family but to strangers as well.

I found it embarrassing and humiliating to tell the jury the details of what my step-father had done to me. After the hearing, my step-father was sentenced to jail. It felt good that he was in jail, locked away and that I was now safe. Yet at the same time, I felt awful knowing that I was the one who put him there.

Looking back I know that standing up and telling the truth was the best thing I could do. This freed me from fear of him and living in shame. My secret lost its power when it was finally brought to light.

But the years after the hearing were difficult. I struggled to make new friends and start over. I was anxious to live a normal life but I didn't know what "normal" was. I had lived in dysfunction for so long, I didn't know what I was looking for.

During the years of my abuse, I had been invited to church with friends, but God felt distant to me. I still had so much shame and I was selective about with whom I'd share my story. I especially didn't want the truth of my past to come out in a church. It seemed like everyone at church had their lives together. They looked perfect from the outside and I was sure that nobody there had experienced what I had.

I also struggled with God. I wondered why He had abandoned me in my childhood. I wondered how a loving God could let this happen to me. I

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thought that maybe He was angry with me or didn't really care what had happened. I began to explore other religions and philosophies.

As I searched for answers, I sought security in relationships, education, and even food. I turned to anything that would distract and satisfy me, even if only temporarily. I continued to struggle with my deep desire to be accepted and loved.

While attending university, my roommate invited me to a Christian campus ministry meeting where I met healthy-minded people. These were real people who had come through challenges in their lives and seemed happy and "normal." I wanted what they had. It was there that I learned about the unconditional love of God and how His Son, Jesus took all my sin on himself and all I had to do was believe and trust him so that I could be pure before God.

I saw this as my chance for a new life, a fresh beginning. Looking back, I realize that God was gently bringing me back to relationship with Him through this whole experience. I was hopeful for the first time in my life. I could start over. The only problem was I wanted his forgiveness, but I still wanted to control my own life. I wavered and now realize that I hadn't healed enough to handle what was coming next.

While in college, I began to date a guy I thought I would marry. Our relationship became serious very quickly. He was a paramedic and police officer and a nice guy—marriage quality—so I moved in with him. He did not share my new faith and I gradually grew away from God again.

Before long, I became pregnant. I was so excited because I thought that I was ready to start a new life as a wife and mother. I fully expected my boyfriend to accept my pregnancy and to marry me.

Unfortunately, my boyfriend said he had no interest in becoming a father. We weren't married and he felt he had no obligation to stay with me. I had seen my mother struggle as a single mom. My dad had left me,

my step-father abused me, and now I was feeling abandoned by a man again. I turned to family and everyone recommended abortion as my best option. I felt powerless and completely alone. I knew it was wrong but felt I had no other choice.

My boyfriend drove me to the clinic and paid for the procedure. When I got to the clinic, the waiting room was very quiet and all the other women were crying softly. When it was my turn to go back for the procedure, I remember the nurse saying it would be over quickly. I remember the suctioning. I remember asking her if it was a boy or a girl. She said, "It's pretty early to tell, but it looks like a boy."

She took me back to the waiting area and I began vomiting and crying. A wave of shame came over me very similar to the shame I had felt for years during my sexual abuse. I cried and a new emptiness filled my soul. I had taken God's gift, a child, and destroyed it. I knew this was wrong and I thought, "Now there's no way God will ever forgive me!"

I remember crying for two days straight, not wanting to get out of bed. My relationship with my boyfriend ended and I was left to sort through my messed up life again. I now felt further from God than I had as a child. Hopelessness filled my heart.

Over the next years, God tenderly called me back to himself through other Christians who loved and accepted me. But I never felt comfortable telling them my secret. I kept my abortion from them.

Then, I attended a conference where Francine Rivers spoke. She is an author that I had admired. She shocked me when she shared her abortion story. And I thought, "If she can share her story in front of a room full of women, then I need to come clean with some close friends of mine."

So I attended a post-abortive recovery group. I began to share more freely. Soon I began volunteering to help other women who were post-abortive.

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As a child, I did not have a voice with my step-father who was abusing me. When I got pregnant, I felt that I had no voice with my boyfriend. I had felt censored; silenced by them. I had no other recourse, no power, no voice. Now, by sharing my story, God has redeemed my voice and taken away my awful guilt and shame.

— Cindy

DISCUSS CINDY'S STORY

1. In what ways could you identify with Cindy's story?
What were you feeling?
2. In what ways did Cindy's abortion affect her?
3. What are you taking away from Cindy's story to help
you move forward in healing from your abortion?

WHY IT'S SO VITAL TO SHARE YOUR STORY

*The real freedom we seek is often found in the vulnerability of the
secrets we least desire to talk about.*

— Lee Hudson⁹

When interviewed, many post-abortive women explained that sharing the personal story of their abortion was crucial to processing their abortion. An abortion often leaves a woman feeling “voiceless.” She may have been forced into the decision or felt coerced into it. But even if she made the decision to have an abortion willfully, she may have felt guilt and shame over it that left her *without a voice*.

There truly is power in sharing your story.

⁹ Lee Hudson, *Plains Thunder: the Invitation from Jesus to Real Worship* (Anchorage, AK: Saint Elias Music, LLC, 2011), p. 35.

HOW WE LOST OUR VOICE

Many women who have experienced an abortion express that they feel “voiceless.” To be voiceless is to be powerless and vulnerable.

There are at least three ways that your abortion experience may have left you without a voice. First, many women feel deeply ashamed of their abortion. Shame causes us to hide what we’ve done. We live in fear of being found out or exposed. This fear prevents us from speaking the truth about our past and may even prompt us to lie about it. In this way, we feel *gagged* in terms of talking about our abortion.

Second, many women feel that they were coerced into their abortion. They believe that given the same chance again, they would not have chosen this path. Often, women were pressured, or forced to get an abortion by: the father of the baby, his parents, her parents, a sibling, well-meaning friends, a doctor, or social worker. In this case, someone else spoke on behalf of the woman and made the decision for her.

Finally, the voice of our culture speaks out in favor of abortion so loudly and pervasively that it can overwhelm or drown out our voice. For instance, the voice of the media and many people assert:

- “Abortion is a good choice.”
- “You’re doing the right thing to abort.”
- “Abortion is perfectly safe.”
- “Abortion is no big deal.”
- “Abortion is a woman’s right.”
- “You have no other choice.”
- “If it’s legal, how can it be wrong?”
- “You’re just not ready for children.”

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- “It’s the socially responsible thing to do.”
- “You can always have children later.”

Because the voices who say those things are so loud and prevalent, we can be made to feel ashamed if we feel differently and we can be cowed into silence and stripped of our voice.

Please circle your response: To what extent do you feel you lost your voice in connection with your abortion experience?

Not at all	Perhaps a little	More than a little	To a great extent

HOW WE GAIN BACK OUR VOICE

To gain back our voice, we need to address each of the three ways above that may have left us voiceless.

First, there is a universal principle that helps us here: *Hiding our shame magnifies it and prolongs our agony. But when we reveal and renounce our shame, we find forgiveness and healing.* When we take the initiative to “come clean” and talk about what we did, we regain our voice.

It is said, “Confession is good for the soul.” This is so true. One of the key steps for gaining back our voice and beginning our healing process is to share our abortion story with each other. We are not suggesting that you tell your story to just anyone, for not everyone will receive it well.

Many women feel that they need healing following their abortion, and that feeling sometimes does not surface until many years after their abortion. Wherever you are in your journey, by sharing your story in a safe, caring environment, you will probably find release and a measure of healing.

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Often, *the process of remembering is the beginning of healing*. This is because you are forced to recognize exactly what you're dealing with. Denying or ignoring any pain you might be experiencing from your abortion will only prolong that pain.

Coming to the point in which a woman reveals the secret of her abortion frees her spirit. What has been hidden is now in the open. Now she can speak. Getting your story "out in the open" (in the context of your AbAnon group) takes away some of the power from the guilt and shame you may have been feeling.

Second, if you feel you were in some way pressured or coerced into getting an abortion, you must reject any victim mentality that remains. As long as we view ourselves as "victims" we remain powerless and voiceless. Victims remain victims. A victim cannot rise above her circumstances.

Third, recognize that although the voice of our culture and others may be loud, this does not make them right. What the media or others declare does not necessarily express what you believe or are experiencing. You know what you feel. No one can argue with your experience. Take your voice back. Read over the following list of declarations. Take a few moments and reword any of these statements based on how you feel about your abortion today.

"Abortion is a good choice."

"You're doing the right thing to abort."

"Abortion is perfectly safe."

“Abortion is no big deal.”

“Abortion is a woman’s right.”

“You have no other choice.”

“If it’s legal, how can it be wrong?”

“You’re just not ready for children.”

“It’s the socially responsible thing to do.”

“You can always have children later.”

By telling your story, you give validity to the fact that your abortion experience significantly impacted your life. This is very important when so many may be telling you to forget about it. Others might say, “It’s no big deal,” but if it has been troubling to you, then sharing your story will validate what you’ve been feeling.

SHARING YOUR STORY

There are several other reasons to share your abortion story—especially in the context of a safe, caring environment like we seek to provide in your AbAnon small group.

SESSION TWO

First, hearing other women's stories may encourage you because you're not alone. There are many other women who have experienced similar emotions. They understand what you're going through and can empathize with you. They've experienced things like confusion, inner turmoil, shame, guilt, grief, or pain.

Second, as you hear others' stories, you may realize things that you hadn't thought of before. Hearing their experiences may help you identify past (and perhaps present) behaviors that may be harmful.

Third, hearing other women's stories may awaken compassion in you and allow you to extend understanding toward them and receive it yourself. While being transparent and gracious with each other, we learn to be gracious in our other relationships as well.

Fourth, sharing your story with this small group of women will hopefully help you bond with them and deepen your relationship with them.

Finally, as you share your story and hear the other women in the group tell their stories, you will experience the power of standing together. We were never meant to try to struggle through life alone. We need each other. Take advantage of this tremendous support system being made available to you.

TAKE ACTION:

PASS Self-Assessment

Take a few moments and go over the two PASS lists in Session One on pages 18-19. Check any of those symptoms that you have experienced in the past or are experiencing now. This exercise is for your eyes only, so please be completely honest with yourself.

It's important for us to recognize that these lists represent *symptoms* of a root issue and not the issue itself.

Write Your Story

Below are some questions you may want to consider when writing your story.

1. How old were you when you had your abortion?
2. What factors led to your abortion?
3. Describe the relationship you were in that led to your pregnancy.
4. What were your goals and aspirations at the time you got pregnant?
5. Who influenced your decision to abort your child?

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6. What was happening when you went for the abortion?
7. What do you remember about the abortion procedure itself?
8. How did you feel immediately following the abortion? Where did you go? What did you do? Who were you with?
9. In what ways has your abortion affected your life since it occurred?
10. What else would be helpful for you to either get off your chest or share for someone else's benefit?

The Power of Your Story

Journal Page

Journal page with horizontal dotted lines for writing.



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SHARING YOUR STORY

We want to take time to allow each of you to share your abortion story in a safe, caring environment. Each week, a member of our group will share her story, and we encourage you to listen with empathy. First, consider how to support this woman, and second, think about how her story connects emotionally with yours.

MARIE'S STORY

Please read the following true story and reflect on the questions that follow.

At age 11, my parents divorced. They had fought a lot and my dad, a former Marine, was physically and verbally abusive toward my mom. He

also habitually touched me inappropriately. When we called him on it, his military, “stuff your feelings” attitude was forced upon us.

I grew up going to church with my mom. I read the Bible, tried to make good choices, and dreamed of one day getting married and having a family.

I didn’t date a lot. Perhaps my religious upbringing intimidated the boys. I remember finding out that an unwed older girl in church had gotten pregnant. I couldn’t believe how any Christian could do such a thing and I judged her harshly for it.

When I was 15, I met Glenn at a roller-skating rink. He too was being raised by a single mom. His mom drove a truck, so she was gone a lot. Glenn was always in trouble at school, but he was sweet, responsible and attentive to me. I was impressed with his knowledge and ability to talk. Glenn was not a Christian. He pursued me and we eventually started dating.

Glenn didn’t go to church on his own, but as we began seeing each other, he tagged along with me on Sundays. I had lots of boundaries imposed on me from my mom and church, but Glenn had very few.

We dated for two years and spent a lot of time together. My mom trusted me and his mom didn’t care. Because both our mothers worked, we spent way too much time alone and became sexually active. At first this was strictly taboo for me.

I cried after the first time we made love. I felt like I had just forfeited something precious I could never get back. Gone was the hope of a beautiful wedding in a white gown, followed by the enchantment of the honeymoon night discovering each other for the first time.

But after having sex once, I became addicted and we had sex all the time in the absence of our moms. Glenn and I went to different high schools and he would pick me up after school so we could be together. As far as birth control was concerned, we occasionally used a condom, but mostly

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just the “pull-out” method. We were very naïve and thought we would never get pregnant.

After about six or seven months of being sexually active I became pregnant. My period was late and I got scared. I tried not to have sex, but I couldn’t stop. I was in denial about being pregnant, but finally took a pregnancy test at home and tested positive. I hid it from my mom.

I told Glenn and he and I went to two or three clinics, not knowing what to do. At the first clinic, a woman gave me another pregnancy test to confirm my pregnancy. She asked me, “Would you like to see what your baby looks like at this stage of its development?” But I didn’t want to see. I was still in denial about the whole thing and tried to shove it down.

Then we went to Catholic Charities and they walked through all of our options with us, including adoption. But because of Glenn’s upbringing, he was against adoption and didn’t want to deal with what he perceived might happen with the child.

We didn’t like the various options presented to us by Catholic Charities because they all involved owning up to what we had done. We wanted to keep this quiet at all costs. I knew my mom would kill me if she found out and I couldn’t imagine the shame of being exposed at church. I was serving as the vice-president of our youth group.

Finally, we felt like we had no choice other than abortion. Glenn and I went to Planned Parenthood and met with a representative in an open cubicle. I had seen a girl from one of my classes at school in the waiting room and was concerned about the lack of privacy in this cubicle. Everyone could hear what was being said in the various cubicles and I didn’t want that girl to know why we were there.

The woman at Planned Parenthood asked me how far along I was and I told her 10 or 11 weeks. I had been in denial about my pregnancy; that’s

why I waited so long. She gave us the name and address of a doctor and told us how much it would cost.

We made an appointment with the doctor and went in for a consultation. He was very cold and all business. I remember there were no windows at this facility and there was no caring there. It didn't feel right.

A few days later, my mom—who was still unaware that I was pregnant—dropped me off at school. Glenn and I had arranged that he would swing by and pick me up right after she let me off. He and I drove to a fast-food restaurant and waited there until my appointment. I had forged a note to the school from my mom explaining my absence. This was April of our senior year.

There we were, two high school students by ourselves, making choices we should never have made. I had told Glenn that the only way I'd go through with the abortion was if he stayed by my side the whole time and he agreed to do so.

At the doctor's office, I paid for the abortion out of my own savings, hoping that my mom wouldn't find out. Glenn and I were led into a room where the procedure was to be performed. The doctor coldly told us what to expect. The room felt surgical and unfriendly. Both the doctor and nurse were void of caring. Nothing felt normal. I had to detach myself from it all. I had always dreamed of having children, and now this...

I remember the horror of hearing and feeling the vacuum and the scraping of instruments inside me. At one point the doctor broke an instrument in my womb. He became very angry and upset. I had blocked out this memory, but Glenn described it to me later.

After the abortion, we went down the hall to a back room and I was afraid I would pass out. I did get sick and threw up in the hallway. The nurse wasn't happy with me for doing that. She put me in a room and told me

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to get dressed, but I couldn't function. Glenn had to help me dress. Then the nurse talked to me about painkillers.

We stopped at a drugstore on the way home and filled a prescription for medication. The next day I had cramps and was sick, so I stayed home from school again—it was a Friday. All weekend was a blur. I felt empty and knew that what I had done was very wrong. I was overwhelmed with grief and shame.

On Sunday, Glenn told me he was going skiing with friends and I was angry at him for leaving me alone. I had no one else to be with. I went to church, but it was very hard being there.

For several days, Glenn and I didn't talk. I couldn't eat and my mom and one of my teachers became very concerned about me. I was moved that they cared for me.

A week or two later at school, I ran into the girl who had seen me at Planned Parenthood. She commented that she had overheard someone talking about getting an abortion. I snipped back at her, "I can't imagine anyone ever doing that!"

When I went in for the abortion, the doctor had asked about birth control and I told him we didn't need any. And a couple weeks after the abortion, Glenn and I began having sex again. We planned to get married right after graduation. Shortly before school ended I became pregnant again.

"How could this happen to me again!" I had a graduation and a wedding to plan. Glenn and I graduated and got married a week later. The week after our wedding, Glenn left for basic training in the military.

My mom still didn't know about my pregnancy and again I was in denial about it. But Mom noticed I wasn't having my period and asked me. I told her I was pregnant, but just wasn't ready yet to deal with a baby. To my utter shock she said, "There's a simple procedure to take care of that."

Perhaps in a subconscious effort to starve myself and the baby, I deprived myself of food and water during this time.

Now that Glenn was in the Air Force, I could go to the base for my medical needs. We made an appointment with a doctor on base and I went to see him. Reluctantly, I admitted to him that I had had an abortion in April and that I wasn't sure I wanted this baby either. I was scared.

This doctor was very kind. He noticed the cross on my necklace and asked me about its significance. I told him that it represented Christ's death on the cross for me and that I had received him as my Savior. Then the doctor gently told me that having an abortion would not be good for me.

He also warned me that unless I started eating and drinking water he would have to hospitalize me and that charges could be brought against me for neglecting my unborn child. I realize now that this was an empty threat, but it had the desired effect. I truly believe this doctor saved my life. I had been so depressed that I may very well have taken my life if things had not changed.

Up until now, my mom thought I had gotten pregnant on our wedding night, but when I told her my due date she came unglued. She was very upset and horrified about what people at church would think. Then my mom had a change of heart and decided to take me out for a steak to celebrate the coming of her grandchild.

Over the next months, my relationship with Glenn grew very tenuous. His mom pitted him against me and my mom did the same with me toward him. At one point, we both hired lawyers and were heading toward divorce. But I still loved Glenn and so I called him behind my mother's back. He and I agreed to meet and talk things out. We decided to stay together and work on our marriage, but the next several years were very rocky. We often sought counsel with various pastors to help us in our marriage.

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Glenn and I moved to Tacoma, WA, and there our son, Mark, was born. I felt like Mark had saved my life from the grief of my abortion. But it was wrong of me to place that burden on him.

By the time Mark was five, I wanted another baby—hoping for a girl, but Glenn couldn't see how we would manage. However, we agreed to "let things happen" and they did. I eventually got pregnant and we had little Robin.

Robin was extremely fussy and colicky from the start. Something was wrong, but I couldn't convince the doctors. She couldn't keep anything down. She was failing to thrive. I finally found a doctor who listened to me and we were able to get Robin on a new formula that her system could handle, and she began to sleep and play normally.

After 10 years we moved. Glenn was gone a lot. I had no family in this new town and year after year I seemed to grow more depressed. At times I contemplated suicide.

Meanwhile, Mark seemed to have a serious anger issue, so I went to see our pastor about Mark's anger, while burying my own. During that session, I confessed to my pastor that I had had an abortion. He referred me to a woman who could help me. We met and she shared with me about her abortion and how she had finally come to the place where she could forgive herself.

Forgiving myself for what I had done was inconceivable to me and I expressed that to her. In reply, she asked, "Are you more worthy than God?" Meaning, "God forgives you. Are you more holy than He is that you cannot forgive yourself?" She then encouraged me to attend a group going through a post-abortive recovery experience called PACE.

I attended and began my journey toward healing. I learned that God invites us to call him "Abba," which means "Daddy." He became the loving father to me that I never had. This occurred about 14 years after

my abortion. I also learned that healing from an abortion doesn't usually occur all at once. It is often a lengthy process that God leads us through over many years.

During PACE, they challenged us to ask God the gender of our aborted child and to name the child. Before this, I had never wanted to know its gender, but I prayed. Shortly thereafter I had a dream in which a little girl ran toward me with outstretched arms. She looked just like Mark, which puzzled me, and I knew this wasn't Robin. When I woke up, I realized that God had answered my prayer and revealed to me that my baby had been a girl.

Later, I told Mark about my abortion and then about this dream. With childlike wisdom he said, "What about naming her Grace?" And I knew that was her name! Through all this I experienced God's love for me and he began restoring my joy.

A few years later, with my husband's support I began volunteering at a pregnancy center, sharing my story and helping young pregnant girls and women who are post-abortive. God continues to heal me 30 years after my abortion.

— Marie

DISCUSS MARIE'S STORY

1. In what ways can you identify with Marie's story? What were you feeling?
2. What did Marie do to move forward in healing from her abortion?
3. What can you take away from her story that may help you heal?

FOR MANY, ABORTION IS AN ACT OF DESPAIR

For many women, abortion is an act of despair. A woman who discovers she's pregnant may feel trapped and that there's no way out. Added to this could be the all too frequent scenario that the father of the baby wants nothing to do with a child, and he may even reject her now because she's become a "problem." She's convinced that her life (as she knows it) will end if she has this baby. So, it's the desperate choice of *her* life or that of a nameless, genderless, faceless child within her.

Frederica Mathewes-Green of Feminists for Life of America describes the despair that many women feel when deciding to abort: "No woman wants an abortion as she wants an ice cream or a Porsche. She wants an abortion as an animal caught in a trap wants to gnaw off its own leg."¹⁰

10 Frederica Mathewes-Green, *Real Choices* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1994), p. 19.

In such a case, her decision is filled with despair. Her maternal instincts and hormones have already begun to influence her physically and emotionally. But she's torn because she sees this unexpected pregnancy as the end of all she's planned and hoped for. She desperately wants things back "the way they were."

She may *agonize* over the decision whether to have an abortion. The fact that her conscience is active and tormenting her over the decision may lead her to rationalize that the pain of the struggle itself makes it morally acceptable.

Many women who have abortions do so believing it is morally wrong. But at this point, in despair and hopelessness, many women capitulate—defying their conscience and values. In a state of shock, they numbly go through the motions of the abortion. Often, they are screaming inside, "What am I doing!"

But it's too late. The deed is now done. And the despair that drove them to abort isn't gone! Oh, she may feel relief at first; most women do. But months or years later, the despair, like an angry, ravenous beast, has now feasted on the abortion experience and rises to greater strength to consume her as well.

This beast of despair now snarls at the woman, "You are such a horrible person! Look what you've done, taking the life of your child! You are worthless, good for nothing and fit for no one!"

In her despair, she believes the accusations and slandering of this beast. She believes she is unworthy of love. She thinks, "I can never be forgiven." "I don't deserve anything good." And she begins living out this desperate life that she now envisions for herself.

She may try to medicate or subconsciously punish herself with drugs, alcohol, food, or unbridled sexual experiences. Or she may try to stuff her despair by burying herself in a career or some extreme

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hobby—anything to take her mind off the abortion and her heartache. Some women become self-destructive, contemplating suicide and even attempting it. Any of these responses will only intensify despair, increasing its downward spiral.

In fear and anguish, the woman reflects on those who coerced her, urged her, “supported” her, or merely failed to challenge her in her decision to abort, and perhaps she resents them. If a woman felt alone before the abortion, now she may feel totally isolated and alienated from others.

All of this may be very painful for some who are reading this. If *despair* led you to abort, then *despair* will prevent you from healing. The question is how do we replace despair with hope?

REPLACING DESPAIR WITH HOPE

If the above describes you, there are at least four things you can do to begin to destroy this beast of despair in your life.

First, recognize that the accusations of this beast are false. They are lies. Even though you may now believe your abortion was wrong, the abortion does not diminish your worth as a person, or as a woman. Your worth is not measured by what you’ve done or haven’t done, but by who you are. You are a beautiful daughter, a lovely creation.

Second, identify and reject self-destructive behaviors. You cannot “pay” for what you did or what you allowed to happen to your child. Your child would not want you hurt. Harming yourself in any way will only bring you and those you love more misery, hopelessness and pain. Instead, seek those habits, behaviors and thoughts that are wholesome, healthy and promote hope.

A great way to instill hope is to provide hope for others by serving them. Perhaps you could look for ways to help other post-abortive

women, volunteer at a charity, or help the homeless. Serving others may seem like the last thing you'd want to do right now. But experience shows that serving others is very therapeutic. Build your life around positive, healthy people and practices.

Third, strive to let go of anger and bitterness and seek to forgive others. When an animal is injured in the wild, it often crawls off to die alone. Because we feel wounded, we may be tempted to do the same. Being angry and bitter toward others fuels our imagination with negative thoughts about them and drives us into isolation and loneliness. We'll talk more about relationships and forgiveness in a later chapter.

Fourth, draw near to others who love you deeply—regardless of your abortion. Their love substantiates that you are lovable. You were created to love and to be loved. You are worthy and capable of wonderful things. Accept their love and let it fill you with hope for a brighter future.

TAKE ACTION

1. Look back over those four ways above of replacing despair with hope mentioned above. Which ones will you begin to put into practice this week? How will you do that?

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2. Go somewhere quiet and alone. Hold a mirror up to your face. Look beyond the reflection you see in the mirror and identify at least 10 positive attributes about yourself. List these positive attributes here and state them in this fashion: "I am _____."
- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.
- f.
- g.
- h.
- i.
- j.

The Power of Your Story

Journal Page

Journal page with horizontal dotted lines for writing.



SHARING YOUR STORY

We want to take time to allow each of you to share your abortion story in a safe, caring environment. Each week, a member of our group will share her story, and we encourage you to listen with empathy. First, consider how to support this woman, and second, think about how her story connects emotionally with yours.

MICAELA'S STORY

Please read the following true story and reflect on the questions that follow.

I did everything by the book growing up. I never drank, never smoked, and the purity ring on my finger was a commitment that I would wait until marriage to have sex. I, along with others, held myself to a very

high standard. If I ever fell from that height, I would be afraid of anyone knowing about my failure. This is key to my story.

At 19 I had my first real boyfriend. We had been best friends for seven years and I thought we knew everything we needed to know about each other. We grew up in church and were Christian youth leaders together. Our relationship seemed meant to be! Everyone looked up to us, but what nobody knew was that there was deep emotional and verbal abuse. I felt like I had to be strong, had to make it work, but he pushed me beyond my limits. One night, he tried to pressure me to be more physical with him and I had to pry him off me to be released from his hands. He was in a new relationship three weeks later and that wrecked me. Of course, I never told anyone what had happened because that would show I was “falling.” I didn’t want anyone to know about my struggles, but the pain was unbearable. As time went on, I realized that I had been sexually assaulted and I felt like I had lost control of my own body.

After the night I was assaulted, I really wondered about sex. If the person who was my best friend for seven years couldn’t love me and could just find someone new like I’m trash, why wait? I wanted to get back at him, and oddly enough, I did it through sex. I figured that if I chose to have sex, I wouldn’t be forced to do anything I didn’t want to do and could be in control. Once I lost my virginity, I didn’t think there was anything else worth saving, so I started having sex quite frequently.

After a while, I decided to see if I could find anyone worth settling down with. I came across a six-foot, muscular Christian on a dating app whose first message was, “Nice to know there’s another Christian on here!” WOW! He would pray at the beginning of our dates and I felt as if this was a man I could spend the rest of my life with! People would tell me, “You’re lucky to have this man. There are not many out there like him; don’t lose him!” Two weeks after we met he told me that I was the one for him.

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He claimed to be a virgin and was very disappointed that I wasn't. He would bring it up constantly and make me feel bad about it. I felt horrible for not waiting for him. He manipulatively convinced me that I was broken, so I felt like I had to make it up to him in any way I could. I didn't want to lose him--then one day I caught him cheating. At first he did everything to try and convince me not to leave, but abruptly decided to end our relationship. I was devastated! I didn't eat for a week. I even begged him to come back. From that point forward, our relationship became secretive, on and off. He would want me, then not. The constant back and forth shattered me, but toxicity can be addictive.

In the middle of all this drama, we finally made love. He is the only person I have ever given myself to that I loved. It truly was the experience I wish I had the first time around. Once we did it, we did it a lot more often. We talked about pregnancy consequences and agreed that an abortion would be necessary, obviously just creating an easy way out for a situation we both doubted would happen.

Dating under the radar was secretive, yet fun. Sometimes he was sweet, filling a room with candles. Then he would become distant and end our relationship again. There I was, every single time, sobbing until my face hurt; it was a brutal cycle. Eventually, I became extremely depressed and planned to take my life. I can't even explain the darkness that surrounded me. I convinced myself that this was the right move and my family and friends would be okay. I had been sexually assaulted; I had sex and was made to feel guilty about it by someone I loved, who then cheated on me! I felt used and unwanted. I had never felt so worthless in my life. My plan was to jump from the top of a parking garage, and when I was about to do it, he met me and convinced me not to go through with it. He said, "If you do this, people will blame me for your death." I didn't realize how selfish his statement was at the time, but at that moment, I just responded, "You're right and I love you too much to allow that." We continued our on and off relationship.

Two weeks later, I suspected I might be pregnant. Something just didn't feel right. I had always hated pickles, but suddenly craved them. I was very emotional and moody. There was a leftover pregnancy test in his glove compartment. As a joke I took it, but the joke was on me! The test was positive.

Many thoughts raced through my head. I was a Christian, pregnant and not married. I would lose my position as a youth leader which I loved doing. The due date would have been in September and no one would hire a first year teacher who needed to take maternity leave at the start of the year. I also would have had the embarrassment of being stuck with this man forever. All my friends and family despised him after he cheated on me and no one even knew I was still seeing him!

But if you want the honest truth, I believe people would have judged me if I had an abortion or if I had a baby outside of marriage. I really saw no way out. We agreed to go through with the abortion and he said he would be with me through it all. The appointment was scheduled for a Monday, and he came over that Friday and stayed the whole weekend. Not once did he try to change our decision; not once did it seem like he even cared about what was going to happen. It was clear that he wanted the abortion. I know that if he really wanted to save that baby, he would have done everything in his power to do so, and he didn't.

He drove me to the clinic and I was put in a room by myself when I took the first abortion pill. To be honest, at first I truly felt fine. It took me until night time to really feel something and before I knew it, I was sobbing. I felt uneasy, like there was an evil presence around me. If I wanted to kill myself a few weeks ago, I definitely wanted to die even more now. At this point, I thought I really didn't deserve to live. If I could take someone else's life, what gives me the right to live? I cried to the baby's father and he didn't say anything. Lying in bed with him, I asked him just that. "Why are you not saying anything?" His exact response was so shocking: "I've

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heard this before; what do you want me to say?" I had never been physically with someone and felt more alone in my entire life.

When I woke up the next day, I was filled with regret and I wanted to change everything from the day before. It's as if my decision just hit me like crashing into a wall. I told him there had to be something that we can do to save this baby. To my surprise, he got mad at me and told me that I had put him through enough emotional stress. He insisted that since the baby was in the process of being aborted, deformities and mental challenges would result if I didn't take the next set of pills. I just gave up at that point. I felt shut down and defeated. I didn't know what to do or who to call. I took the next set of pills and when I started bleeding, he was on the phone with another girl. He left shortly afterward, and I let him go. We stopped talking at that point, but I heard things.

He started lying to people, making it seem as though I hadn't given him a choice or hadn't even talked with him about the abortion decision. I was shown a screenshot of a text he sent to a mutual friend. The text said that I was a murderer and this person shouldn't be friends with someone who murdered his child. This is probably the deepest hurt I've ever felt in my life!

I wanted to take a rock and go to his house and destroy it. But something in me told me not to. It was as if God were saying, "Don't worry about this; I've got it." The little glimmer of hope that I wanted to believe--that there was still some good in this man--was shattered, but I had peace in my decision to not take action against him. What's important about this situation is what I DID do. I opened up to a few people about my abortion, and one of them referred me to a life coach. I also opened up to my family about it and their most important concern was that I was okay. I know some people aren't this lucky to have parents that support them, and as hard as it was to tell them, they still accept me for who I am and said that they don't see me any differently.

I also got in touch with a pregnancy resource center that did post-abortive recovery. I know that a lot of people wouldn't want to take this step and would want to hide from what just happened, but, personally, I did not want this hanging over me for the rest of my life. I seemed to experience mental breakdowns every other day, crying in the shower to hide my agony. I was afraid that this uncontrollable emotion would build up and cause me to lash out at people who didn't deserve it, most importantly, a future husband and children. I knew I needed healing immediately and if I didn't start to work on that, the rest of my adulthood would suffer tremendously.

So I joined a post-abortion class where we met for eight weeks to read and discuss some challenging information about my situation. At the end of the class there was a memorial service. I firmly believe that God gave me the name and gender of my daughter, Shiloh. I received a certificate of life for my child, wrote a letter to my baby and was able to invite my close friends to this service. This was a huge step in my process of healing. I was surrounded by people who love me; people that I know love my daughter, whether she's here physically or not. It helped me to know that I am forgiven and set free by God.

The certificate of life for my daughter only has my name on it, not the father's. After the memorial service, I was finally able to separate the painful emotions from my relationship with him from my emotions concerning my unborn child. It was as if he was no longer involved in my experience. Until then I didn't know there was a way to ever separate the two, but I could finally view all that happened as MY STORY. I eventually found forgiveness for the man who hurt me so deeply. I was able to move on from him, knowing that there was nothing positive that he could bring or be that I could hold on to. If God could forgive me for what I did, I had to be willing to forgive him. I felt new, I felt fresh, and I started on my journey to self-forgiveness.

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*The first year after my abortion was definitely the hardest. As Mother's Day arrived and I was able to travel and do things in the summer, I would feel guilty. I felt guilty for being able to enjoy my life because of the life I took away. Instead of missing someone because you're used to them being there, you miss someone because you wish they **were** there. You wish they could experience what you're experiencing, but you are the reason they cannot. There's not an important event or holiday that goes by that I don't think about where my life would be, what she would look like, or the joy she would bring to my family despite the circumstances. I'm able to control my emotions better, but missing Shiloh will always stick with me.*

I have peace knowing that when I die I will meet my baby. She will not hold the abortion against me but rather embrace me with arms that I've been needing to feel the entire time while here on Earth. As a mom, you always want to know that your baby is safe. That connection begins in the womb and it's something that a lot of people can't understand. The regret I have will never go away, but it does get easier. I don't like to say "move on;" rather, you learn to live with it. I had to learn to feel the feelings and emotions surrounding my abortion experience, to really process them and not push them away. What has stuck with me is something important my mom told me: "You can't keep being mad at yourself for a decision you made when you weren't in the right state of mind." The strength I didn't know I had, getting through the abortion itself, its aftermath, and past a dysfunctional relationship, is something I see and value in myself now.

—Micaela

DISCUSS MICAELA'S STORY

1. In what ways can you identify with Micaela's story?
What were you feeling?
2. What did Micaela do to move forward in healing from her abortion?
3. In what ways does reading Micaela's story give you hope and comfort?

THE BURDEN OF REGRET

Regret is another emotion that many women manifest to express the pain of their abortion. We all have past regrets. Regret is sorrow over things we've done that we wish we hadn't, and things we didn't do, but wish we had.

Women commonly express a number of regrets around their abortion. Look at the list below and check all the boxes that apply to you.

I regret that...

- ☐ I was even dating that person.
- ☐ I had sex at the time.
- ☐ I got pregnant in the first place.

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- ☐ I listened to those who urged me to get the abortion.
- ☐ I didn't listen to those who tried to dissuade me from having an abortion.
- ☐ My boyfriend, husband, father, mother, sibling or someone else close didn't keep me from aborting my child.
- ☐ I had the abortion.
- ☐ I didn't let my baby live.
- ☐ I don't know my baby, its gender, or anything else about him/her.
- ☐ Other: _____

Much like the other emotions many women feel as a result of their abortion, regret prevents us from moving past our grief. One reason that regret is so debilitating is that it is based on something that happened in the *past*. The problem is we cannot change the past. So, to continually live in regret over our past abortion is futile—and cannot help us get beyond it.

We carry regret around like too much baggage. This baggage encumbers us and weighs us down. No matter where we go, we find ourselves dragging this heavy load with us. Sometimes the emotional strain we feel under this burden is unbearable. We wish we could discard this great burden, but we just do not know how.

So it is with the regrets around our abortion. We may feel terrible about our abortion and know that we cannot deny the gravity of what we've done. But we wish we could somehow shed some of its weight. In some measure, there will always be feelings of regret. But

too much regret can weigh us down, crushing us under its weight and making life a constant struggle.

We may experience waves of remorse, sorrow, and grief over what we've done *and* what was done to us. We may desire to somehow miraculously undo what was done—but *we can't*. At times we may get caught in the whirlpool of "What ifs" around our whole abortion experience. But going there only stirs up *more* regret.

REGRET AND YOUR BABY

The regret we feel is often tied directly to our baby. Before our abortion, our culture and others around us may have led us to think about our baby in the following terms:

- Dehumanized ("It's just tissue")
- Removed or distant

But at some time after our abortion, we may experience:

- Reality setting in about our baby—a human being, a person
- A desire to know about our baby—gender, hair and eye color
- Imagining what our baby would have been like

Regret, sorrow, and grief are all forms of emotional pain. As with physical discomfort, pain plays an important role in letting us know something is wrong. There are only two primary responses to pain: we can either suppress it or take steps to cope with it.

While suppressing the pain may be a coping mechanism, it's not a good one, because it doesn't solve anything. Suppressing or ignoring

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regret and sorrow, though common, is a response that could result in behaviors leading to more regret.

Instead, we must take steps toward coping effectively with our regret. We offer three steps here, but you may discover other steps as well.

1. **Lay down the baggage of “what ifs” and second guessing.** You cannot change the past no matter how hard you wish you could. Settle that in your mind and unload that burden from your shoulders.

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. — Reinhold Niebuhr

2. **Discard the baggage of things you could not control.** Very likely there were circumstances around your abortion over which you had no control. If so, you are carrying someone else’s baggage. Release it and be free from it.
3. **Set down that huge box full of old recordings that you carry around with you and keep replaying.** You know the recordings that we’re referring to: they are reruns of your whole abortion experience. These may include conversations, people you’d rather forget, the cold clinic, the noises, and smells. Shut them all tight in that box and push it off the end of a dock into the depths of the ocean. Be done with it.

You can learn to travel light when it comes to regret.

TAKE ACTION

Please take time to get alone and walk through those three steps for coping with regret. Visualize yourself laying down the weighty burden of each one. Take your time. Make sure you really do put it down and walk away from it. Record here for future reference what you did with each of these burdens.

1. Lay down the baggage of “what ifs” and second-guessing.
2. Discard the baggage of things you could not control. Rid yourself of the burden of someone else’s baggage.
3. Set down that box full of old recordings that you carry around with you and keep replaying. Then push that box off the end of a dock into the deep ocean.
4. Finally, is there another heavy piece of baggage that we did not identify that you can also lay down? If so, write that down here and take steps to abandon it like the others.

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Journal Page

Journal page with horizontal dotted lines for writing.



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SHARING YOUR STORY

We want to take time to allow each of you to share your abortion story in a safe, caring environment. Each week, a member of our group will share her story, and we encourage you to listen with empathy. First, consider how to support this woman, and second, think about how her story connects emotionally with yours.

DIANNE'S STORY

Please read the following true story and reflect on the questions that follow.

My boyfriend, Dave, and I had been dating for a year-and-a-half when I got pregnant. When I told him the news, he panicked. Without asking, he made an appointment at an abortion clinic and called to let me know.

My world was crushed! The man who I thought loved me was unwilling to do the right thing. We had talked about marriage, and I had been anticipating a proposal in the near future.

As Dave drove me to the clinic, I was consumed with fear and felt pressured to follow through with the abortion. I wanted to talk to my best friend to get her advice, but I was too ashamed and afraid. I felt I couldn't talk to anyone.

As a Christian, I was already carrying the shame of being pregnant and not married. While I bought into the then- popular claim that my baby was just tissue, deep down I questioned whether that was really true.

I was very afraid. Everyone that day was telling me that everything would be fine.

Lying on the table with the doctor's wife holding my hand, I was dying inside. I felt overwhelmed with guilt, and then ... it was too late! I was devastated and filled with regret.

Still lying on the table, I began sobbing and begging God to forgive me. The nurse tried to console me saying, "Everything's all right." And I remember telling her, "No! Everything is not all right!" I had been deceived. I had been lied to. I felt like I had been thrown to the wolves. I was just a dollar sign to them. I left that place empty: a broken woman.

I was in shock and in mourning. But I plastered on a fake smile and pretended to my family and friends that all was good.

Dave and I stayed together as a couple, even though our relationship was now anything but healthy. I still loved him, but I hated what he had done to me. He made me feel worthless by pressuring me into an abortion, instead of taking on the responsibility like a decent, honorable man should. Now, I had such low self-esteem, I felt unworthy of anyone who would treat me any better.

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Ultimately, Dave proposed and we got married. We began our marriage with baggage that would take years to sort through. There were constant reminders at every turn: TV commercials, a baby footprint pin on the lapel of a pro-lifer, seeing a newborn baby—the reminders were all around. Eventually, when we had a child, I remember holding my baby boy in my arms, knowing what I had done to my first baby and feeling like I didn't deserve such a beautiful gift.

For six years from the day we left that awful facility, we never talked about the abortion. I suffered in silence, but inside I screamed heartache, anger, regret and sadness, almost each and every day. After we were blessed with a second baby boy, I had difficulties with my third pregnancy and I miscarried. I was heartbroken and wondered if my abortion had caused me to miscarry. I pictured this baby meeting his or her sibling in Heaven and it gave me comfort.

My mom was a regional director of a national women's organization and she had asked if I was interested in attending a conference in Washington, D.C. with her. I was consumed with trying to protect my secret. I feared that my mom's friends would not accept me and even judge me if they knew my secret. But because of my passion to protect the unborn, I decided to go, even though I knew I would be uncomfortable.

When we arrived, we joined with other women making signs, which we would hold while marching on the Capitol steps the next day. I felt like a hypocrite. But I also felt like I was doing a good thing.

On the third day of the convention, a woman spoke at the breakfast meeting. She had adopted a baby that was close to being aborted. She told the story of her adopted baby girl almost being a victim of abortion. Then, she began singing a song she had written about her daughter called, "I Almost Didn't Know You." I started feeling sick to my stomach. I worked hard holding back the tears, but I knew I couldn't, so I excused

myself, telling Mom I wasn't feeling well. When I reached the hallway, the tears began to flow. In my room I couldn't stop sobbing.

The story and the song this woman had shared reminded me that I DIDN'T get to know my baby. Was it a baby girl? Would she have had blue eyes? Blonde hair? Would she have loved to dance, or sing, or both? Was it a baby boy? Would he have loved science or sports, race cars or history? I would never know.

On the flight home, my mom began recounting the conference. She still didn't know I had aborted her grandchild. She didn't know the pain I was carrying. I struggled to carry on a normal conversation, like everything was fine, but I was overwhelmed with sadness and shame.

On my first day back home, after my husband left for work, I was thinking about my experience at the convention. I was glad I had gone. I remember being alone in the living room. I closed the curtains. I cried out to God for forgiveness. Tears began flowing. How could I continue with this internal pain? I felt so alone and so sad.

But God spoke to me that morning. In that moment of my agony I heard Him tell me that He was going to use me for His glory. It's not like I heard Him audibly, but He spoke to my mind, my heart, and my soul. I didn't really know what it meant, but I believed that somehow and someday God would use me, even if it was only to help just one person. I felt God tell me that it was time to take a baby step toward healing.

The next day I said to my husband, "We have to talk about the abortion. It happened. We've swept it under the rug all these years and we're not going to make it in our marriage unless we talk about what we did." This was the first time in over six years that I had even spoken the word, "abortion." The pretending needed to end. All those years, I would sit in church and look around, thinking that I was the only woman in church who had had an abortion. I felt so bad about myself all the time. It was way past time to seek help. Dave agreed to try to get help. We went to our first

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counseling session. It was the first step toward seeking healing and Dave and I were actually talking about the abortion.

I became pregnant again, not too long after my miscarriage. I started experiencing problems and learned that one of my baby's kidneys was not functioning properly. After countless trips to see my doctor, 24 ultrasounds later, and residing near the hospital for the final four weeks of my pregnancy, I gave birth to our third baby boy. Again, I wondered if any of the complications were the result of the abortion.

Over the next few years, Dave focused on work and supporting our family and I focused on doing what moms do. We found a church home where we attended a few more counseling sessions. These loving, caring, godly men tried to help us, but they weren't trained to work with post-abortive women and men.

At that time, no one knew about my abortion except for the counselors we had gone to. One Sunday an ad in the bulletin about a "post-abortive support group" caught my attention. It was to be held at the local Crisis Pregnancy Center (CPC). My dilemma was that I knew the Director of CPC very well and she did not know that I had had an abortion. Also, my mom's best friend served on the CPC Board and she didn't know about my abortion either. Finally, with God's leading, I decided to tell them about my abortion. The time came and I was so fearful, but God gave me courage. I started crying as I shared my story. I was afraid they would reject and judge me. Instead, they cried with me. They prayed over me, and I left feeling loved and encouraged. I attended that first class, taking another step toward healing.

Shortly after that, I attended a new Bible study that was offered at CPC for post-abortive women. I learned more deeply about God's grace and His love for me on a fresh and new level. While I was indeed accountable for what I had done, God wanted me to accept the gifts He was offering me: grace, forgiveness and His unconditional love. God's Word came alive to

me, and I finally received healing and made peace with God regarding my abortion.

God eventually placed on my heart the desire to go through leadership training to help other women find healing through His Word. I thought back to the time in my living room with my curtains drawn, when I cried out to God, and He spoke to me about using me to help others heal. But before going into leadership I would need to share my abortion story with those closest to us.

Dave and I called a family meeting with our boys. At the time, our three sons were 18, 14 and 12. We were both fearful and didn't know how they would react. I didn't know if they would think less of me. As their mom, I didn't want to let them down. It broke my heart looking at them and knowing it could have been one of them that had been aborted. God gave me peace to finally share our story with our precious boys.

Dave talked about his part in the abortion. We wanted them to know that we had messed up...that we were imperfect, but that we had a perfect God who can make all things new. Because of being miles apart, I wrote my parents a letter to share my story. They were loving, forgiving, and supportive. The next time they came to visit they brought me a bouquet of beautiful roses, sending a message of their unconditional love and forgiveness.

It is a miracle that Dave and I have now been married for over 32 years. Part of my healing process was focused on forgiveness. We are all called to forgive others for wronging us. God showed me grace and I needed to show grace to my husband. This didn't come naturally! I had some deep-seated anger to deal with. But God gave me the ability to love Dave unconditionally just as He loves me unconditionally.

If I hadn't had Christ in my life to carry me through my darkest days, I most likely would have turned to alcohol, drugs or something worse to

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mask the pain. I am also thankful to those who prayed for us through those dark times. Prayer works.

Abortion did not end in the clinic—that's where the suffering began. If you have your own abortion story, I encourage you to replace fear with courage and take the first step toward healing. It begins with truth – for the truth shall set you free!

— Dianne

DISCUSS DIANNE'S STORY

As you read Dianne's story in this chapter:

1. In what ways did you identify with her story? What were you feeling?
2. What did Dianne do to promote her post-abortive healing process?
3. In what ways does reading Dianne's story give you hope and comfort?

ANGER

Anger is a very personal emotional response that expresses frustration and agitation over a situation that we can no longer change. Anger usually focuses on what is past—on something that already happened. Anger displays antagonism toward others over hurt or frustration that we are feeling, whether those individuals have anything to do with our hurt and frustration or not.

Many women respond to their abortion with anger. In many cases, we may not even know why we're angry. Perhaps we've never even associated our anger with our abortion.

As post-abortive women, we often feel angry at ourselves, at those who coerced us into an abortion, at those who participated in any way, and at those who failed to intervene and provide a way out. We

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may also be angry at the circumstances leading up to and resulting from our abortion. Sometimes we may be angry with God for allowing this to happen, even though we admit our part in it.

Of all the emotions we feel, anger is one of the most volatile and dangerous. A desperate attempt to regain control over a situation in which we feel we've lost control, we may lash out at ourselves or others. Anger provokes irrational and unhealthy thoughts, words, and behavior.

Alternatively, we may internalize our anger, where it can simmer and grow silently. Very often, women are taught that we must not express anger, so for some of us our first challenge is admitting that we are even experiencing what to us may be an ugly emotion that we would prefer to deny.

Anger is also very contagious and destroys relationships. For example, in our anger over our abortion, we may lash out at a loved one who just happens to be nearby. Perhaps we don't feel *worthy* of love, so why should this person love us? In our anger, we push them away, rejecting their love and denying them ours.

Anger often causes us to do things contrary to our conscience and moral standards. It can lead to self-destructive behaviors like drinking, drugs, sexual recklessness, binge eating, unrestrained gambling, and all sorts of other behaviors that only worsen our situation. Internalized, it can implode and lead to self-abuse. We are subconsciously directing our anger toward ourselves as punishment for what we've done or failed to do.

Anger is an emotion that we *yield* to. We may feel justified, giving this emotion free reign and letting it dictate our responses to life. When anger is in control, we cannot heal and we injure others, because it is like acid that eats away at the person holding it. The awful things we think and say about ourselves become self-fulfilling prophecies.

If unrestrained, it consumes our life, weaving strong patterns that are difficult to break. If we're angry over our abortion we look for things around us to justify and feed our anger. For this reason, we may need to recognize that whatever we're angry about in the moment may not be the source or root of our anger—our abortion.

Over time, various responses to our abortion may include: *hiding, denying, blaming, and rationalizing or justifying*. Anger may be a common emotion in any or all of these responses.

HOW DO WE GET RID OF ANGER?

In order to break the patterns of anger in our lives, we must identify its root cause. Anger is a very *relational* response. What that means is that even if we are upset over a situation or an event, we invariably direct our anger toward *people*. This may be ourselves, God, anyone else who was involved in our abortion, or we may take it out on those around us who have nothing to do with our abortion. Anger expresses itself toward people.

Because of this relational aspect, the only way to truly rid ourselves of anger is to forgive those who have offended us—including ourselves. When we're angry at someone, we put the responsibility on them to change, not realizing that *we* need to change. *We* must take the initiative. *Forgiveness is vital, because it removes the excuse for our anger*. For many of us, forgiving others and especially ourselves may be extremely difficult.

First, we may think that if we forgive someone for their role in our pregnancy or abortion that we are somehow condoning their actions. This is not true. In reality, the act of forgiveness *validates* that there is a real offense which warrants forgiving.

Second, we mistakenly think that by withholding forgiveness from someone, we exercise control over them. We may think that by not

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forgiving them, we continue to hold something over them. This is a form of revenge. The irony is that withholding forgiveness from others harms *us* more than it harms them. Someone has wisely said, “Refusal to forgive someone is like drinking poison and hoping the other person suffers.”

Finally, forgiveness is often difficult for us because we have held onto anger for so long it has become a part of us. Because it has woven its patterns into our life, we may even feel that parting with our anger will strip us of something important to us. This thinking is part of the folly of anger, allowing it to control us. It’s like keeping a rabid dog in the basement that we continue to feed, even though we’re afraid of it. But we will only find relief when we remove the basis for our anger.

Forgiveness is **NOT**:

- making allowances
- forgetting
- an open door for more wrongdoing
- reconciliation

Forgiveness **IS**:

- a choice
- a process
- dismissing the debt
- feeling the hurt and then releasing the hurt

We cannot go back and erase our abortion, but we can forgive others and ourselves for our role in it. Doing so will help us end the awful rule of anger in our lives.

TAKE ACTION: STEPS TO FORGIVING OTHERS

1. **Identify those with whom you are angry.** Write down here everyone who was involved in your abortion. Include anyone and everyone that even remotely had a role before and after, including yourself. Even if you don't FEEL anger toward someone involved, it is best to include the name and really think about it. Feel free to include people with whom you are currently angry, even if they are unconnected to your abortion.

2. **Forgive each of these individuals.** We are not suggesting that you actually go to each of these individuals or even call or write to them. (In some cases, you may choose to do so, but be careful about opening unnecessary wounds.) There are two parts to this step:
 - a. **Prepare a short statement that you will actually speak aloud.** This statement may say something like: " _____
(person's name), I forgive you for your role in my abortion and I release my grudge against you."

 - b. **Speak these words of forgiveness for each person on your list.** Go somewhere private to do this. Work through your list and speak your statement of forgiveness aloud in your own

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hearing. Saying it aloud is important because it helps validate the act and demands that you speak it in a way that you mean it.

3. **Next, understand that anger is a two-way street.** People have offended us and therefore we are angry. Remember, as long as we hold onto anger it controls and poisons us. Forgiving others is the key to freedom from anger.

But *we* may have offended others as well (through aborting our child, or by the way we've treated them post-abortion). So too, if we have offended others, we can find refreshment and freedom by going to them and asking their forgiveness. By taking initiative to ask their forgiveness, we also offer them freedom from their anger.

You must approach this step using some common sense:

- a. **Make this a short list.** Who are the people that really matter in your life? Have you offended them? If so, go to them and ask them to forgive you. Be very careful, however, to avoid opening yourself to relationships that have been abusive or otherwise toxic.
- b. **Choose your words wisely.** Words like, "Sorry if I offended you," can sound insincere and hypocritical. Say something like, "I'm sorry I offended you. Would you please forgive me?" If you feel you need to provide the person with the context for your apology, then do so.

4. **Consider asking God to forgive you.** As you read this, you will know whether this step is right for you now. If you would like to ask God's forgiveness for your abortion and other actions that have followed as a result, simply talk to Him and tell Him you're sorry and ask Him to forgive you. God loves it when we come to Him like this. He will not turn you away or deny you forgiveness.
5. **Be prepared for reappearances of anger.** Because anger may have been your companion for many years, it will try to come back and take hold of you again. That's why it's important to record above what you have done: whom you've forgiven and what you said. Then, when anger does raise its ugly head again, come back to what you did in this exercise. You may need to do this from time to time.

Some people experience an immediate and complete sense of release and freedom in forgiveness. With others it occurs over time. If you're one of those who continues to struggle with anger and forgiveness, don't be discouraged or frustrated, but keep at it. Come back to the actions you initiated in this exercise. Keep rehearsing the truth of what you know.

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Journal Page

Journal page with horizontal dotted lines for writing.



SESSION SIX

SHARING YOUR STORY

We want to take time to allow each of you to share your abortion story in a safe, caring environment. Each week, a member of our group will share her story, and we encourage you to listen with empathy. First, consider how to support this woman, and second, think about how her story connects emotionally with yours.

PAULA'S STORY

Please read the following true story and reflect on the questions that follow.

Many years ago, I was serving in the US Marine Corps. One day I accepted a ride home from one of the soldiers that I worked with. As a result of allowing myself to get into this situation, he violently raped me. When I

got back to the barracks I was in a state of shock. Because of his threats I was afraid to tell anyone, but felt tremendous guilt and shame.

Three months went by and I still hadn't told anybody, but I could no longer ignore the fact that I was pregnant. On our base there was a club for enlisted personnel that was run by a couple. They took many of us under their wing, kind of like surrogate parents. I told this woman I was pregnant and she went with me to the doctor to confirm my pregnancy.

At this point, I called my parents and my mom flew down and went to the doctor with me for a checkup. I knew at the time that I didn't want an abortion. I felt that abortion was wrong. Many believe that abortion is justifiable in the case of rape, but to me abortion was not justifiable. My mom was very supportive and put no pressure on me either way.

When we got back to the barracks my dad called me. I loved my dad. He was my idol. I adored and worshiped him. But over the phone he broke down and began crying. He said he didn't know how the family could deal with this. Well, that destroyed me and I decided then and there to abort the baby.

I went to the Navy hospital for the procedure. They led me into a room that wasn't even an operating room, but more like a large office. Because a Navy hospital is also a training facility, the doctor conducting the abortion had 8 or 9 other doctors in training in the room with me. He proceeded to explain to them about the procedure and what he was going to do to me.

Being treated like this was terribly humiliating, shameful and embarrassing. They gave absolutely no thought to what I might be feeling or going through under the circumstances. They were so callous and cold. I had no friends or family there to stay with me.

The doctor told me in a cold, clinical fashion what to expect and the nurse was even colder. He said that because I was so far along, they

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couldn't perform a simple D&C, but would have to inject a saline solution into my uterus to end the life of the fetus. After doing so, they sent me to a hospital room and told me to get up on my own to go to the bathroom if I had the urge.

I was so young, naïve and ignorant at the time. After a while I got up to go to the bathroom and gave birth to the fetus in the toilet. I experienced utter horror and didn't know what to do. I felt like I was in a nightmare in another world. My heart was broken. A piece of me died that day.

Just then the nurse came in, took a look and said, "I'll take care of that." She sent me back to my bed and retrieved the fetus. She didn't tell me what gender it was. She didn't tell me anything.

At the time, I had a hard time calling it a baby, because that made it too real.

After this ordeal, the Marine Corps gave the option to either remain active duty or to leave and go back home. I chose to go home. At home we never spoke about the abortion. I knew my mom felt guilty about it. I felt like I was in a fog.

My self-esteem plummeted to zero. I carried horrible guilt and anger. I was angry at God for allowing this all to happen. I was so desperate for someone to love me and make me feel worthy. I just felt so unworthy of love or anything good.

Around this time, I met my first husband. I saw him as my savior—someone to love me. In my mind he loved me. But we really struggled in our marriage and I never told him about the rape or abortion. After two years we decided to have a child in spite of our marriage difficulties. I was scared to death that I'd never be able to have children again as judgment for killing my baby.

But I did get pregnant. However, I began having complications early in my pregnancy with bleeding. And I thought, "God is punishing me." At seven months, my husband and I were still having problems and he left

me. He had done many things that made me feel so unworthy of love or anything good.

I went in at seven months for another appointment and asked the doctor if my baby was going to be all right. He said, "I'm concerned about both of you." Both the baby and I were in a bad way physically. I cried out to God, "Just let my baby live and I'll do anything."

Little Travis was born two months premature. He was very tiny, but he survived. During this time I was very down. Carrying the weight of the rape, the abortion and now my divorce, I was at the lowest point I had been. Several times I contemplated suicide. Had it not been for little Travis, I might have gone through with it.

Over the next three years, my parents helped me get into a house and I got a job. At this point, my emotions swung the opposite direction and I decided I didn't need anyone. "I can do this myself," I thought.

But after some time, I met my current husband and we married after three months. He loved me unconditionally even though I felt so unworthy of his love. Because of me I don't know how we made it through our first year of marriage, but my husband just kept loving me in spite of what I said or did. His unconditional love served as the initial catalyst for my post-abortion healing.

My husband had been in the military, was out when we married, but decided to reenlist. We were soon transferred to Hawaii. One day in Hawaii, I was sitting in an enlisted club with two other women. The three of us were talking and, on a whim, decided to start reading the Bible together. We didn't really know what we were doing, but through it began drawing near to God. I was still carrying around a lot of guilt and shame at the time.

About four years into our marriage, my mom sent me a recording from a speaker named Rachel Johnson. She did a lot of counseling of post-abortive women. On this tape, she encouraged me to imagine the following

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scene: I saw myself standing in a beautiful field full of wild flowers with a gentle breeze blowing and the sun shining.

Then I visualized a figure coming toward me from far across the field. As this figure drew closer, I could tell that it was an adult with a child. As they continued walking toward me, I recognized that it was Jesus. He walked up to me and placed the child's hand in my hand. Then he said, "I have your child. I'm holding her for you until you come."

I never knew what the gender of my aborted baby had been, but from that moment forward I knew it was a girl. This experience totally broke me and set me free from my guilt and shame. I felt completely safe and accepted by Jesus.

Rachel also encouraged me to look at myself as I would look at another young woman who might be in my situation. I knew I would accept her and extend grace, mercy and forgiveness to that young woman, so I should do the same toward myself.

Some years later, I was meeting with 12 other women and someone shared a personal experience that prompted me to tell the story of my rape and abortion. This was the first time I had shared my story. I was amazed that day at two things. I was amazed that my story encouraged the other women so much. But I was also amazed to learn that at least three quarters of those women had experienced rape, sexual abuse or abortion.

Mine was no isolated case. There are thousands of women who have had similar experiences. Since that time, I have given my time and energy to helping other women heal from the wounds of their abortions. I am amazed that God has entrusted me with this task. He truly does love and accept me just like I am with all the junk from my past.

— Paula

DISCUSS PAULA'S STORY

1. In what ways can you identify with Paula's story? What were you feeling?
2. What did Paula do to move forward in healing from her abortion?
3. In what ways does reading Paula's story give you hope and comfort?

FEAR

While anger focuses on what is past, fear is anxiety about what *could* happen in the future. Like anger, fear is an emotion to which we relinquish power. When we yield to this emotion, we grant it permission to rule over us and control us. Fear may have caused us to hide, deny, or blame someone else for our abortion.

Fear can be crippling and paralyzing, preventing us from making good decisions or making any decisions at all. If fear played a role in our abortion, it drove us to do something that we may now regret. Additionally, the abortion itself may have given us even more things to fear.

Please check any of the things below that have brought forth fear in your life. As post-abortive women, we may have harbored fears about:

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- ☐ Being found out
- ☐ The long-term consequences resulting from our abortion
- ☐ Whether people will reject us
- ☐ Being somehow punished for what we did
- ☐ Whether we would ever be able to have children
- ☐ Whether our children will repeat the same mistakes we've made
- ☐ Other: _____

In order to avoid any confusion, keep in mind that there are different kinds of *fear*. For instance, we can have a healthy fear of dark alleys at night that prompts us to take proper precautions. We also may cultivate a healthy fear of failure that motivates us to show up at work on time and perform our jobs well. A soldier experiences a healthy fear when going into battle and overcomes that fear with courage and training.

But the kind of fear we're talking about here is neither healthy nor overcome with safeguards. The fear we're talking about haunts and cripples us. It is unhealthy, destructive and prevents our healing. The antidote for this kind of fear is...*love and acceptance*.

Imagine that you're a little girl and you wake from a terrifying nightmare in the middle of the night. You cry out and your mom or dad hears you, comes in and sits down on your bed and holds you, comforting you and rocking you in their strong arms. Held in their embrace, all your fears melt away. *Love dispels fear*.

While little girls have little fears, grown women can have big fears. Stealing our joy and paralyzing us, fear keeps us from taking risks and entering new relationships. Left unchecked, it begins to influence our every decision. Fear can run and ruin our life.

HOW DO WE STOP BEING FEARFUL?

Our fear of being rejected by others is fueled by our refusal to allow others to love us. Ironically, our fear often causes us to push them away. We may reject their love because we feel so unworthy. Or perhaps we've been burned so many times we are afraid of being hurt again, so we withhold our love from others.

It is true, every time we love someone and allow them to love us, we run the risk of being disappointed, abandoned, or hurt. Still, we desperately need the love of others in our lives. *To love and be loved is a basic human need.* When we allow fear to keep us from love, we give it permission to deny us a basic human need. As long as we're fearful, we cannot heal.

When we allow fear to prevent us from trusting others, we'll never experience their love—the very thing that will dispel our fear. This is one reason we discussed forgiveness last week. By forgiving others and asking their forgiveness, we have opened the door for the possibility of reconciliation, trust and real love.

We must face our fears with courage. Decide to take a risk, allowing others to love us and daring to love them. Weigh this decision carefully and wisely, however, because we don't want to abandon ourselves to someone who does not truly love us. A word of caution: people can pretend to love you because they want something from you. What people want from you could include money, sex, attention, domestic services, admiration or approval. Before exposing yourself to another person, take time to consider this question:

Would this person truly love me as I really am if I did not have _____ to offer them?

Choose wisely. There are those who do love you dearly. Abandon yourself to their love first. Let them love and comfort you and return their love freely.

TAKE ACTION: THREE STEPS FOR BECOMING FREE FROM FEAR:

1. **Make a list of people who truly love you just as you are.** These people love you unconditionally with no strings attached.
2. **From that list of people who love you, identify the person with whom you could most likely be a confidant.** This is someone you can trust, who loves you and you love them. Don't gravitate toward romantic love in this context. This person *could* be your spouse, but most of us also need another woman in our lives in whom we can confide.

Be picky about who you choose for a confidant. Look for someone you admire. Choose a woman who may not necessarily have it all together, but is also not on the brink of disaster.

Simply ask this person if she would start meeting with you regularly (we recommend monthly). Share the characteristics of a confidant with them, so you're both on the same page. Commit to confidentiality and transparency. Then establish when and where you'll meet.

Confidants:

- a. **Spend time together.** Whether in person or online, let your confidant into the whole of your life. You have to be able to let your hair down with this person and be yourself without condemnation.
 - b. **Love and care for each other.** Look for ways to serve each other that will clearly demonstrate the genuineness of your love and care for each other.
 - c. **Challenge each other boldly.** We are often timid about pointing out negative behavior in another person. But if given permission to do this from the beginning of the relationship, you will experience a much richer, more meaningful relationship that helps both of you grow as individuals.
 - d. **Encourage each other in your spiritual journey.** Wherever you are in your journey regarding faith in God, you want someone who will help you move forward.
 - e. **Celebrate one another's joys and victories.** Avoid spending your time complaining, criticizing others, or gossiping.
3. **Seek out a healthy group of like-minded people.** We need a small group of individuals with whom we can be ourselves and not be guarded all the time. We need people with whom we can have fun, love and be loved.

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Warning! You probably won't find this group of people in a bar! Also, stay clear of groups who find pleasure in gossiping, back-biting, or living shallow lives. You might find a healthy group of people to spend time with in:

- a. A recovery group like this
- b. In a common-interest club or association
- c. A group of peers from work
- d. A church

For some, the painful reality may be that you couldn't think of any names to write down in Step 1. Or perhaps you wrote down a few names, but there is no one on the list with whom you could be a confidant. If this is the case for you, it might intensify your pain and increase your fear. This is no way to live your life, so we will speak about this in more detail next week. There are always other options. There's always hope.

The Power of Your Story

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SESSION SEVEN

SHARING YOUR STORY

We want to take time to allow each of you to share your abortion story in a safe, caring environment. Each week, a member of our group will share her story, and we encourage you to listen with empathy. First, consider how to support this woman, and second, think about how her story connects emotionally with yours.

CELESTE'S STORY

Please read the following true story and reflect on the questions that follow.

I was attending college and had been dating a guy for three years. At the beginning of summer break, I found out I was pregnant. I confided in my older sister who immediately insisted that I get an abortion.

She also told my dad. My dad had been a military chaplain and was now a university professor and I had always valued his opinion. He also advised me, "You are young and not married. Your whole life is before you. Finish college, get married and have your babies later." So, I just accepted what he said.

Abortion had extreme limitations in my state, and my doctor began probing me with questions like: "How do you feel about getting an abortion?" "What emotional strain might it put on you?" "What if your mom found out about the abortion?" "If your mom found out and was very upset with you, are you prone to thoughts of suicide?"

Later, I realized that he was trying to build a case for a medically necessitated abortion. He really wanted to perform this abortion and was willing to stretch the limits of the law to justify it "for my health."

I had the abortion and felt no immediate emotional regrets. Yet, I must have felt something, because I wanted to quietly say, "Good bye, and I'm sorry," to my baby. So I asked the doctor, "May I see my baby?" But he firmly said, "No, of course not."

My dad died about six months after my abortion.

Ten years passed and I was now dating a different guy. My period was late and I was sure I was pregnant again. This time I knew I couldn't bring myself to have an abortion. I decided that if I was indeed pregnant, in spite of how it might change the plans I had for my life, I would keep this child. That would be a better option than to live with myself for having killed another child. So I planned to keep my baby. But as it turned out, I wasn't pregnant after all.

Moving on from that relationship, I eventually met and married my husband, Tony. Three years later, both of us stepped into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Jesus changed our lives profoundly! I can't imagine how life would be today without Him in our lives.

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Several years later, I found out that my dad had been a dedicated communist. Pieces of the puzzle began to fall into place and I realized that he had deceived our family in order to take us down a completely different philosophical and spiritual road. That road of socialistic “choices” and actions had led to negative consequences and brought me a lot of sad times and bad memories.

My dad had guided me into the killing of my child, but I also had a choice in the matter. From the time I found out why he had led me astray in so many areas of my life, I couldn’t mourn for him anymore. He had failed as a dad to teach me right from wrong. So many years had been wasted following his advice.

Tony and I had been trying to get pregnant but couldn’t. I was 35 by now and getting concerned. At 37, we heard about a “drug baby,” so we adopted this little boy, but still tried to get pregnant. One day when our adopted boy was two years old, a married friend of mine told me she had gotten pregnant and was going to abort her child. I begged her not to, telling her she would deeply regret it later. We even offered to adopt her baby, but she refused our offer and aborted her child.

About that time, I was starting to hear about the pain and torture that happens to a child during an abortion. Those facts and my friend’s abortion drove home to me for the first time the horrors of what I had done to my child. I crumpled onto the kitchen floor and wept my eyes out over my aborted baby.

My little boy walked over to me, took my face in his little hands and urged, “Don’t cry, Mommy! Don’t cry, Mommy!” His tender pleadings only magnified the pain of what I had done. Here was our little boy who’d been given to us, and he had almost been aborted by the insistence of his birth mother’s family and friends. Here was my baby, ALIVE, because of another desperate woman’s difficult choice! My son, Tony and I can never thank her enough for giving him life!

As I continued to read my Bible and got to know the character and love of Jesus, I knew that Christ's sacrifice for me was more than sufficient to cover my sin and that He had forgiven me, but I was still deeply saddened over what I had done.

Five years later I finally got pregnant and we eventually had two more children—a boy and a girl. I was 42 and 44 years old giving birth to them. I didn't have an amniocentesis. I knew that even if there was something wrong with them, they would be a blessing and God would help me through anything.

As they grew into their teen years, I was so ashamed of my past that I told them I had kept myself pure until marriage. I so desperately wanted to be a good role model for them, so they wouldn't follow the way I had gone, which would lead to unnecessary pain.

I desperately wanted to volunteer at a local pregnancy center, where I hoped I could counsel young girls who had gotten pregnant not to abort their babies. But I was fearful that some of those girls might know my sons and daughter and that word would get back to my children that I too had had an abortion. So my fear and shame kept me from pursuing this work.

Finally, when my daughter was 19, I confessed to her my former lifestyle and abortion. She accepted me and appreciated that I had shared with her. I have also told both my boys.

I think of my aborted baby in March, the month he would have been born. I can't tell you how I know, but I see him as a boy. I often wonder what life would've been like with him; what he'd be like as an adult. What I did to him and not being able to know him still makes me very sad. Our culture has duped us and I made a terrible mistake which I'll never forget! But I know that my boy has forgiven me and that God loves me and has forgiven me too.

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My favorite passage from the Bible is Psalm 139:13-14, "For you created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." I think of my unborn child when I read those verses. God is still in the process of healing me and I truly hope that my story will help heal other women as well.

— Celeste

DISCUSS CELESTE'S STORY

As you read Celeste's story in this chapter:

1. In what ways can you identify with Celeste's story?
2. What triggered Celeste's regret over her abortion?
3. How did Celeste move forward in healing from her abortion?
4. What can you take away from her story that may help you heal?

SHAME

Shame is a painful emotion caused by a sense of guilt. Guilt is not supposed to torment us, but to cause us to change. Guilt says, "I DID something bad", but shame says, "I AM something bad." People have a variety of responses to shame. Some may try to stuff or cover it, while others beat themselves up because they feel they deserve it.

Shame is a very common emotion felt by post-abortive women. Shame, like some of the other emotions we've covered, causes us to hide, deny, blame others, or rationalize our decision to abort our child. Like those other emotions, it can be debilitating and can prevent us from healing.

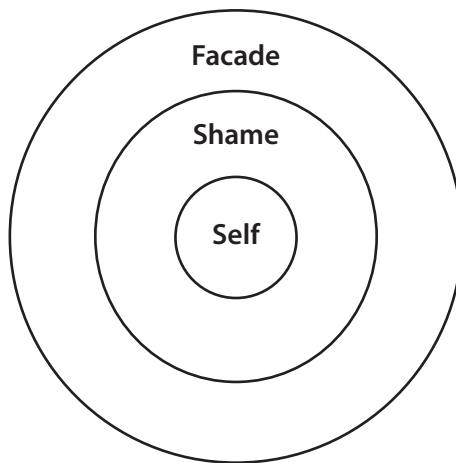
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Above all, shame breeds a sense of unworthiness. Many post-abortive women express that after their abortion they feel unworthy of the things listed below. Please check all that apply or have applied to you. Many post-abortive women feel unworthy of:

- ☐ Having children
- ☐ Being loved by a good man
- ☐ Experiencing love and acceptance from others
- ☐ Receiving or experiencing anything good in life
- ☐ Other: _____

HOW SHAME AFFECTS US

One way to look at shame and recognize what it does to us is by the following diagram.



At the center of these concentric circles is our “self” – who we really are. But our shame causes us to hide. By hiding our true self, we cannot be known by others. But in order to establish and maintain relationships,

others need to get to know us.¹¹ So we put up a facade—a false self—to present to others in hopes of being loved and accepted.

The problem is that we often know when someone is putting up a false front; we sense that what they're showing us is not genuine. Others see this in us too, and the result is shallow relationships built on pretense. Our shame literally prevents us from loving others fully or being loved by them.

The key is to deal with our shame, so we can drop the facade and let others in. In this way, we can begin to love again and be loved. So how do we deal with our shame?

OVERCOMING SHAME

At AbAnon, we have found that many women deal with their shame and find healing from their abortions through a relationship with God. For this reason, even though we do not identify ourselves as a religious organization, we would be falling short if we did not share with you this important remedy for finding freedom from guilt and shame. In the spirit of this, please consider the following true story from the Bible about a woman who dealt with shame.

John, one of Jesus' disciples and an eyewitness to these events, tells about a woman that Jesus met one day. Jesus and His disciples were on foot about half-way into a 75-mile journey from one part of Israel to another. At noon, they stopped at a well in a region called Samaria. Samaria was populated by people with mixed blood of Jews and non-Jews. Their religious beliefs represented a blend of Judaism and paganism. As a result, most Jews looked down on Samaritans and would have nothing to do with them. But Jesus was different.

11 Donald Miller, *Scary Close—Dropping the Act and Finding True Intimacy* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2014), pp. 20ff.

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Jesus sat by this well in Samaria while His disciples went off to buy food. While they were gone, a Samaritan woman came to draw water from the well. The customs of the day give us insight into this situation. Normally, the women in a village would come to the well in the cool of the morning. They would also use that time to socialize with each other and catch up on the village news.

This woman, however, came to the well at noon. As far as we know, no one else but Jesus was there. We soon become aware of why she chose to come to the well at an hour when she would not have to interact with the other village women.

Jesus initiated the conversation by asking this woman for a drink—which shocked her—because most Jews would never stoop to request anything of a Samaritan. When she expressed her surprise over His request, Jesus said, “If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water.” (John 4:10 NLT)¹²

The woman was confused at Jesus’ response at first and thought He was talking about water from the well. But Jesus explained, “Anyone who drinks this water [from the well] will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.” (John 4:13-14 NLT)

This offer intrigued the woman and she asked Jesus to give her this ever-thirst-quenching water. Appropriate for the culture of the day, Jesus asked her to go get her husband and come back and Jesus would fill her request. At this point the woman’s shame subtly came to light, for she replied, “I have no husband.”

12 *Holy Bible: New Living Translation*. 2013. Carol Stream, IL: Tynedale House Publishers.

Jesus, knowing this, responded to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.” (John 4:17-18 NIV)¹³

If it weren’t for the rest of the story, we might assume that Jesus was being cruel in revealing this woman’s shameful secret. Now we understand that the shame of her lifestyle prevented her from coming to the well to draw water in the morning with the other village women. Her shame caused her to come alone in the heat of the day and to bear her burden in solitude.

In the discussion that followed, Jesus revealed to her that He is the long-awaited Savior and that He was offering her forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The woman was so excited about this that she left her water jar at the well and ran back into the village. She went to everyone she could find and said, “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did!” (John 4:29 NLT)

At first, it seems like her excitement was about Jesus’ ability to supernaturally see into her past, but that’s not what thrilled her. What she eagerly told the others about was that Jesus knew everything there was to know about her past—*and yet He still loved her and offered her the living water of forgiveness and eternal life*. Her unspoken testimony was, “Come see a man who knows every sin I’ve ever committed, and yet He still loves and accepts me!”

That was not some psychic trick that Jesus pulled when He told this woman about her whole life. He knew her just as thoroughly as He knows you and me. He knows everything you and I have ever done. He knows about our abortions. And He makes that same offer of forgiveness to you and me today. He knows our shame and offers to remove it from us.

13 Holy Bible: New International Version. 2011. Biblica, Inc.

TAKE ACTION

Shame can cause us to hide, deny, blame others or justify our abortion. We show others a facade because we are ashamed to reveal our true self. Unless dealt with, shame may prevent us from healing or experiencing meaningful relationships. Ironically, shame prevents us from exposing our abortion, but it's only by exposing our abortion that we gain freedom from shame.

Hiding our shame magnifies it and prolongs our agony. When we reveal and reject our shame, we find forgiveness and healing.

Like that Samaritan woman long ago, many post-abortive women have found freedom from guilt and shame by trusting Jesus Christ and receiving His forgiveness. If you would like to trust Jesus Christ and receive His forgiveness, simply pray to Him. Confess your sins to Him and ask Him to forgive you. He doesn't turn anyone away. He loves you and offers you healing.

We are here to love you and walk with you through your healing process. If as a result of reading this you have put your trust in Christ, please consider telling your facilitator that you have made this decision.

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KELLY'S STORY

Please read the following true story and reflect on the questions that follow.

My husband and I had been married for only a few months. We had met in college and lived together for five years before we married. We lived a very unhealthy lifestyle—partying all the time and living from paycheck to paycheck.

When we found out that I was pregnant, both of us had the same reaction. We immediately thought, “We can’t afford a baby! This doesn’t fit our lifestyle.” At the time we didn’t think we ever wanted kids, but at any rate we didn’t feel ready now.

So we decided we had to “take care of this problem.” We never discussed other options. We were too entrenched in our life of partying and having fun.

I looked for a clinic and just chose the first one and made an appointment. I met with a woman there who showed me pictures of the development of a fetus. She was calm, soothing and not at all judgmental or mean. But I realized she was trying to talk me out of my abortion, so I wanted to get out of there.

At the time I was young (27) and felt insecure and lacking the confidence to ask questions or counter her arguments. Finally, I stood up and blurted out, “I’m not ready to talk about this anymore,” and left.

I went back to find a different clinic and found a doctor nearby who performed abortions in his practice. I made an appointment for three or four days later. My husband went with me and the staff was surprised to learn that we were married and seeking an abortion.

At the time, I remember feeling distaste for what I was doing. I knew it was wrong, but our independence and finances trumped the baby. My strong feminism also played a role in my decision.

In the doctor’s office, the nurse led me back to a room and had me lie down on a table. She began to prepare me verbally, telling me what to expect: what I would hear, feel and see.

I cried through the whole process. The nurse asked me, “Are you crying from pain or emotion?” I was not in physical pain but felt an overwhelming emotional tugging. Meanwhile, my husband held my hand. He was very somber through the whole procedure. The doctor and nurse remained “clinical.”

My husband took me home and I began cramping severely. I was nauseated and felt terrible. I slept for a day-and-a-half. A girlfriend of mine

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came over and tried to cheer me up. She totally dismissed the abortion and tried to make me laugh it off, which only made me feel worse.

I didn't want to be one of those people who thought abortion was no big deal. I knew it was wrong and it felt very improper to simply dismiss it.

A few days later we were supposed to drive up to San Francisco with another couple for an all-day food and wine-tasting event. When we left that morning, I remember feeling very sad. My friend asked me, "Why are you so down?" I said, "Well, you know what happened on Friday!" And she responded, "Get over it! We're going to the city. We're going to have fun!"

And I remember looking at her and telling her, "I think God is going to punish me for what I've done, and I'm scared about what that's going to look like." She just gave me a blank stare as if to say, "I have no idea what you're talking about." And she just dismissed it.

So I decided, "I'm going to buck up and be cheerful, put this out of my mind, and at least pretend that I'm having a good time." I was more concerned with ruining their fun and keeping them from having a good time than I was about my own feelings.

About 13 years later, I found myself sitting in a church and listening to a message about Jesus Christ dying for my sins and that he offers forgiveness to all who come to him. During the message the pastor distributed little black pieces of paper and a pencil. He asked us to write down any sin that we thought God couldn't possibly forgive us for. The pencil on black paper made the writing nearly invisible.

Without hesitation I wrote down, "My abortion" on my piece of paper. Then the pastor told us to get up, take our pieces of paper to a large wooden cross and nail them to the cross. This was to signify that Jesus died for that sin, nailing it to the cross and bearing the guilt and shame

on my behalf. In that moment I declared that I wanted to follow Jesus. I felt so grateful, so relieved to be forgiven for my abortion!

A couple years later and 15 years after my abortion, a friend of mine invited me to a pregnancy resource center fundraising event. After the event, on the way home, I shared my story with my girlfriend. She hadn't known about my abortion. She then asked me if I would consider attending a post-abortive support group. I thought, "Why would I want to do that? I'm forgiven, it's all good." But at her prompting, I decided to go.

I wasn't fully on board with being in the group until I got there. Hearing the other women's stories made me realize that I had not fully dealt with my abortion. I began to see that there's value—healing—in sharing my story with others and hearing their stories. It was significant for me to see how God was going to redeem or bring something good from my abortion.

While in that support group, I experienced healing from the secret and the shame. Incredibly, I saw that God could even use my abortion for his glory. He is in the life-changing business—he creates beauty from ashes. I was set free. God not only forgave me, but he began to use my story to encourage and heal other women.

— Kelly

DISCUSS KELLY'S STORY

1. In what ways can you identify with Kelly's story? What were you feeling?
2. What did Kelly do to move forward in healing from her abortion?
3. What can you take away from her story that may help you heal?

BRINGING CLOSURE TO YOUR GRIEF

Although you may not have thought about your abortion this way in the past, you have lost a child. Women who miscarry also experience grief over the loss of their child. You have just as much right as any person with a pregnancy loss to mourn that loss.

Grief is a natural and healthy response to great loss. Expressed in sadness, a sense of deep bereavement, and mourning, grief may numb us or overwhelm us. We may feel "lost" or experience a profound sense of emptiness. An awkward, inconvenient, and sometimes embarrassing emotion, grief is a place we'd often rather just avoid.

Normally, when a loved one passes away, we find consolation and closure through a formal memorial service or funeral. Even though it can be difficult to attend such an event, the experience helps us come to grips with reality and initiates healing for our grief that otherwise might not occur.

One thing that makes a miscarried baby or an abortion so difficult to heal from is that we are usually not given the opportunity to formally grieve or provide some kind of memorial for that little one. There has been no closure. We may grieve internally, but we have no healthy release for our grief.

As we've already noted, our culture tends to suppress the humanity and personhood of an aborted child. Also, for many of us abortion was a deliberate choice. For these reasons, we may feel we have no right to grieve freely. Others might challenge our desire to create a memorial for our child. It could take courage and support to pursue closure for our pregnancy loss.

When we speak of "closure" for our grief, this does not mean that we will never grieve again over our lost child. But it does mean that we've initiated a clear course of action to ascribe dignity and worth to our child, giving expression to our grief.

Many post-abortive women have found great release from their grief and sorrow by making a conscious effort to remember their child in a dignified manner—in a way worthy of a human being. There is no standard method for doing this, but it should be something that you feel will be meaningful to you and honoring to your baby.

For example, many women have found closure in their grief by naming their child. Naming a baby attaches personhood to him or her. Naming your baby allows him or her to be part of your family. There are many additional possibilities: plant a tree as a remembrance, give a memorial gift to a charity, buy a solitary rose and dry or press it to preserve it, or purchase a special necklace or ring to wear in remembrance of your child. The important thing is to find something that holds meaning for you.

THE ETERNAL NATURE OF HUMANITY

God reveals in the Bible that death is not final for a human being. We believe that we will see our aborted babies again. And because of Christ's forgiveness, that reunion with our child will be sweet and joyful, not bitter or sorrowful.

In view of this, one other action that has proven very therapeutic and cathartic for post-abortive women is to write a short note or letter to their baby. In it they may express their love and sorrow; ask forgiveness; talk about meeting them one day; and anything else they find meaningful to write.

Of course, this note or letter won't go anywhere, but it would be one more way of honoring your child and ascribing to him or her humanity and worth.

TAKE ACTION

We ask that you complete three specific tasks this week. Because of the nature of two of these tasks, you won't want to leave them for the last moment before Session Eight.

1. Please write a short note or letter to your aborted child or children. This letter or note is for your eyes only, unless you choose to share it with others.
2. In addition to the note or letter, think of some meaningful way to establish a memorial for your child. This is a very personal exercise. It does not matter what someone else does; choose something that is most meaningful to you, remembering your child and bringing closure to his or her death. Some

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women may wish to carry out this exercise with their confidant or another trusted individual.

3. Please fill out your Celebrations below. We will give you an opportunity to share what you wrote in our final meeting.
 - a. Before joining my AbAnon group, I was...
 - b. After joining AbAnon, I feel...
 - c. This group has helped me...

ADDITIONAL STEPS FOR HEALING

Our hope is that this curriculum has helped contribute to your healing process. Healing from an abortion is no small matter and often requires more than one experience like this. Please let us know how we can serve you to help further your healing process. Following are some suggested next steps:

1. Continue to meet with your **confidant**.
2. If the other women in your AbAnon group are willing, maintain contact for a period of time. You

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can function as mentors for each other. It could be encouraging to compare next steps and support each other as you pursue a memorial of some kind.

3. Join another post-abortion **small group** session like this one.
 - a. You are encouraged to go through this experience again with another group. Go to **www.srtservices.org** to enroll in an upcoming group. An intake coordinator will contact you.
 - b. Or, we can assist you to find another post-abortion group with a different curriculum to further promote your healing. Please refer to the Continued Healing Flyer.
4. Join a different type of healing group.
 - a. Enroll in an upcoming sexual abuse/assault healing group, SAVAnon, at **www.srtservices.org**.
 - b. Enroll in an upcoming miscarriage/stillbirth healing group, MiSAnon, **www.srtservices.org**.
5. If you would like to hear more about God and Jesus Christ, please let us know and we can provide additional resources and opportunities for you.

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