Grief is the human response to personal loss, and a person who has had an abortion has suffered grievous personal loss. This grief can be an extraordinarily difficult sorrow to bear. When considering whether to abort a child or not, most people don’t foresee the remorse and depth of loss that may come if they choose to go through with an abortion. What once seemed like the only expedient solution to a crisis pregnancy later becomes a thorn in the hearts of these parents—a thorn that is not easily removed. In your grief, questions plague you. Will I ever be whole again? Will my pain ever lessen? Will my conscience ever stop tormenting me? If you have had an abortion, you understand the complexity of post-abortion grief. You want to know if real peace and healing are even possible for you.

Recently I was talking with a friend about an abortion she had over two decades ago. She commented:

I’ve never had the opportunity to see my abortion as a loss. It was just something that seemed necessary at the time. Even my counselor saw it as something that just needed to be done. Still today, every time the memories push into my thoughts and I start to feel sad, I simply try not to think about it.

My friend has never faced what happened. She has not allowed herself to grieve for the baby that died that day. She never experienced her abortion as the loss of her child. She and her counselor misunderstood the true nature and weight of this decision. As a result, she has been unable to deal with her guilt and sorrow.
Tragically, this distancing is all too common and the result is always the same. The grief goes underground. The person is left to bear the sorrow silently and alone. But people need to mourn the loss of a child and experience the sorrow. These are deeply human responses to abortion. Helpers often overlook this reality. And churches? They are more likely to address the moral aspects of abortion and ignore the personal aftereffects. As a result, churches are often not places of healing for those who suffer with post-abortion grief.

This should not be. God cares about the experience of those who are suffering—even if this suffering is a result of their own sin. In fact, God has a special heart for and hears the cries of distress from those whose lives are especially difficult—whether or not they contributed to the difficulty. When your grief is a direct result of your sin, God still cares for you. Because he cares, the body of Christ must grow in the ability to care well for those who have had an abortion. This article aims to minister to individuals¹ and couples who have been involved in an abortion, and also to equip helpers to minister well. We will uncover a redemptive way through this complex grief.²

We will look at five elements in the grief process.

- Remember: Make the memory available
- Face what you did and what others did
- Seek God’s mercy
- Share your grief and seek help from others
- Reconcile and make reparations

Finally, we’ll learn from John Newton, a man who knew both the great remorse over past sins and the great blessing of receiving God’s grace and forgiveness for them. We will see how he made this a foundation for compassionate and helpful ministry to others.

If you have personally experienced abortion, reading an article like this may be very hard. But I have prayed that God will give you courage to persevere. Reading this in one sitting may be too much. Consider breaking it into smaller pieces. Consider asking a trusted friend or your pastor to read and pray with you. As you do, I hope that you will come to believe that it is possible to experience forgive-

¹ In this article I will focus on the difficulties faced by a woman after an abortion. Certainly, a father may also experience grief, guilt, and distress—though perhaps less often and less intensely than the mother. But when a man’s conscience is alive to the immorality of abortion, he needs the same encounter with God’s mercy as she does. Also, there are situations where a father does not want his child aborted, but it is the mother’s “right to choose,” and she may act unilaterally. A father may then experience a helpless anger and bitterness toward his sexual partner. This article does not deal with every variation in human experience, so though I focus on women, the points I make can be adapted for men as well.

² I am using the term post-abortion grief to encompass the various and complex reactions after an abortion. These include grief, guilt, regret, fear, shame and despair.
ness, hope, and healing. Know that healing is most often a slow, difficult process. It will take time. Although there will be moments when he nudges you forward, God works over the course of weeks, months, and years.

I also realize that some of my readers may be hopeless that healing can ever come. Maybe you thought wholeness would eventually come—but it never did. Or maybe you thought it would come through bearing additional children—but it didn’t. Wholeness does come—but it comes through another Child. It comes through the Savior of the world, God’s only Son, Jesus. As you read this article, may you meet this Jesus whose heart is always to have mercy. May you come to understand that no sin is deeper than his redeeming love. The journey will not be easy, but he’ll take you somewhere good. You might even find a new joy in the forgiveness he offers. It is his pleasure to offer you the kingdom (Luke 12:32).

**Remember: Make the Memory Available**

When a person dies, we grieve. But when a child dies through abortion, we often do not grieve—at least not openly. Initially, there may be relief. But when relief morphs into sadness, we try hard to forget. But this is unnatural and does not work. Remembering and grieving is the way to begin to heal.

Consider how we normally grieve the death of someone close to us. We gather with friends and family. We do not try to forget the one who died. We actively remember the person. We do not privatize grief. We publicize it. And these are not just vacant rituals. Funerals and memorial services are actually crucial to the grief process. Think about what happens at them.

- We remember and mourn our loss. We say goodbye. Together we acknowledge that someone special is not coming back.
- Instead of distancing ourselves from the pain, we embrace it. A funeral is a place to express our deepest thoughts and feelings about the death of someone who is important to us. It’s a place to grieve death itself as Jesus does at Lazarus’s tomb.
- We affirm the value and worth of the person who has died. In doing this, it validates our suffering and legitimizes our loss.
- A memorial service acknowledges that through this death our identity has forever changed, and yet we are still valued and cared for by our friends and family. We are still accepted and loved.
- We grieve together. We hug, touch, and hold one another. It communicates that the bereaved are not alone in this suffering. Others also care for the loved one who has died.

---

3 For example, a wife who loses her husband is no longer a wife. She is a widow.
We offer public eulogies and poems, and even have special graveside “conversations” with our deceased loved ones. In these heartfelt expressions, we voice sorrow, gratitude, and things we may not have spoken overtly when the person was alive.

If you have an abortion, there is no funeral or memorial service. You are grieving a secret death.

These traditions start us on a pathway through grief and bring comfort amidst the loss. They start the process of relinquishing our loved ones into God’s hands.

But if you have an abortion, there is no funeral or memorial service. You are grieving a secret death, one that you participated in. Your grief is private. Your child is not honored. Your loss is not legitimized. You don’t receive affirmation that you are still valued and cared for. There’s no entrusting the Lord with your child and no means are offered to help you accept this painful loss. You suffer utterly alone. Since most people conceal their abortions, it seems as if the only remembrance of the child is through silent grief, and hidden guilt and shame.

You have good reasons to keep the memory of the abortion underground and hidden even from yourself. A friend of mine recently wrote to me:

It’s really hard to compare this sin with other sins. When you take the life of your very own dependent and helpless child, it feels very different. For someone who’s had an abortion, it feels like there’s no sin like it. I should know because I’ve committed them all.

Do you see what she’s describing? There’s a unique internal oppression that a woman experiences after destroying a life that was given by God. The oppression is external as well. Abortion is a vehemently politicized issue. On one side people say abortion is a woman’s right, necessary, and simply a medical procedure. They say that suffering after an abortion doesn’t exist or exists only for women who were emotionally disturbed before their abortion. Supposedly, if you are normal and well-adjusted, you shouldn’t experience any grief or guilt.

On the other side, people speak against taking the innocent life of a baby. But they so often forget that many of the people listening don’t need to be convinced that abortion is wrong. Those who have been through it know it is wrong. They

---

4 This reality should lead helpers to avoid superficial comforts and comments. The depth of this grief is great.
live in a place of perpetual grief and regret. Hearing Christians speak without compassion for them adds to their secret doubt and fear that they will only be condemned if they ever bring this out of hiding.

Polarized conversations leave people who have had an abortion in captivity, trapped by the tragedy of their choice and the subsequent grief. One side says you shouldn’t feel grief and the other says you should never have done it! In this environment, where can you go to talk about your experience and feelings? It often seems that the only option is to take the secret of the abortion to the grave. Pack it in a box marked, “Do Not Touch!” place it on a shelf in the closet, and close the door. Don’t bring it up in small group. Don’t share it with your pastor. Do what you can to not think about it.

But there is another way. It is to bring your grief out into the light—to make the memory available. Healing from an abortion hinges upon telling your story. Listen to Henri Nouwen speak about bringing these memories out of the closet:

> How are we healed of our wounding memories? We are healed first of all by letting them be available, by leading them out of the corner of forgetfulness and by remembering them as part of our life stories. What is forgotten is unavailable, and what is unavailable cannot be healed. Remembering is the beginning of freedom from the covert power of that which we have tried to forget.\(^5\)

Nouwen’s point is that there will be no freedom from these “wounding memories” if we do not draw these memories out of hiding. For healing to begin, these painful memories must be available. Hiding the memory of abortion is like constructing a wall around a leaking pipe. You may be able to ignore the leak for a time, but at some point you will have an even bigger problem on your hands. By keeping the memory of abortion walled off from everything else, you are separated from knowing the mercies of God in the very place you need his loving touch. And other problems may develop as well: addictions, depression, eating disorders, physical symptoms, or ruined relationships. Hiding the memory of abortion is never a good idea.

So the first step to healing is making these memories available.\(^6\) The next step is to take responsibility for what happened.

---


\(^6\) Pastors and counselors, please remember that ministry to a person who has experienced abortion may start before we even know what a person is dealing with. How we understand, converse, and preach about abortion may make all the difference in whether or not a person will bring this out of hiding and entrust this information to us. Timely and sensitive questions during a candid, confidential conversation can invite a person to remember and look at something that’s been hidden away and avoided.
Face What You Did and What Others Did

To heal, it is vital to face both what you did and the role that others played in your abortion. Coming to accurately understand both your responsibility and the responsibility of others is not easy, so I will help you carefully weigh both aspects. Then, I will speak to male readers who played a role in an abortion.

The sin of abortion needs to be stated. It needs to be named.

Face what you did. Facing what you did can be very hard. This may be the hardest step of the grief process. Perhaps you have been in denial as a way to distance yourself from the pain. But the sin of abortion needs to be stated. It needs to be named. Wholeness and healing comes as you acknowledge:

I killed a human being in my abortion.

This human being was my very own child.

My child was precious and created in the image of God.

This was not right.

I am so sorry.

I grieve.

Facing these truths will help you make sense of your emotional distress and begin the healing process. Admitting that you chose your child’s death is very hard. You need to say, “I did this. I made this decision.” Almost always there were others involved. But you must take responsibility for what you’ve done. Why do I say this? Is it so you will feel worse than you already do? No. I am not suggesting this in order to torture you with more regrets and guilt and shame. No. I urge you to face the weight of this wrong so that you turn to our Redeemer and find forgiveness and cleansing and mercy. Honesty is the door to mercy. There is no other way.

Having said this, you must not overlook the other pressures that influenced this decision either.

Acknowledge the pressures that influenced the decision. Understanding the context of the conception and your abortion is also crucial. The circumstances were likely complex and involved many relationships. Understanding the context will not absolve you of responsibility, but it does locate your responsibility more accurately.

---

I paraphrased these statements. They originally came from a post-abortive woman. See Holly Trimble’s *Healing Post-Abortion Trauma: Help for Women Hurt by Abortion* (Stafford: American Life League, 1989), 1.
More often than not many lying voices backed you into this corner. Few abortions are independent decisions. Your boyfriend, parents, friends, and maybe even your physician or therapist may have encouraged you or even pressured you to abort your baby.

There may have been other subtle—but powerful—voices that also spoke to you. Our culture lies to us repeatedly. It says we can have sex outside of marriage with no adverse effects. It says sex is natural and that following our desires is healthy. It tells us that it is okay to value our individual pursuit of happiness, higher education, and professional careers above raising a dependent baby. Even the legal system says there’s nothing wrong with abortion.

Seeing your decisions in light of the bigger picture takes the spotlight off of the act of abortion and helps you to see more clearly your part. Some people assume the entire burden of responsibility and live in self-recrimination and self-hatred. They get stuck in blaming themselves. They overlook other influences—those who were complicit in the conception and the abortion. This blurring and false assumption of responsibility impedes healing and prolongs grief. God sees what you did and what others did. Ask him to help you see your responsibility accurately. And do not take responsibility for how others sinned against you and betrayed you.\(^8\)

**Come to a balanced understanding of who is responsible for what.** In this process of discerning responsibility, you do have to be careful. You can fall off the horse on either side. You can ignore the reality of outside pressures and blame only yourself. Or you can get stuck in blaming others for your decision, which blinds you to your need for God’s mercy for the part you did play. Again, you must do both: acknowledge the impact of the influences of others and honestly face what you have done. Listen to a woman put this into words.

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

> I finally realized I needed to say to myself and others, “This is what happened,” and relate my story as accurately as possible as to what I was told, what I felt, and what happened. My responsibility before God was to acknowledge that what I had

---

8 I discuss how to approach others in the section “Reconcile and Make Reparations.”
done was wrong and ask for his forgiveness. While I stopped trying to assign degrees of blame, it was very helpful to look at my situation at the time of my abortion realistically. Healing was elusive until this woman acknowledged and faced all aspects of her decision. The pivot point is honestly coming to terms with the outside influences and your individual responsibility.

Imagine how the climate in the church will change when men come out of hiding and take responsibility for their prominent role in abortion.

**Men: accept your part.** Men must come out of hiding, too. For every woman who goes to an abortion clinic, there’s usually at least one man who was involved in the decision. Imagine how the climate in the church will change when these men come out of hiding and take responsibility for their prominent role in abortion. Imagine the comfort when the men involved no longer allow women to stand alone bearing full responsibility for both the immorality of the sexual encounter and the abortion. It is an injustice for women to bear full responsibility. Jesus warned, “Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble…but woe to the person through whom they come!” (Matt 18:7). When a man participates in immorality, and then coerces a woman into having an abortion, God takes this very seriously.

As you start to see things clearly, you have all you need to approach God. Think of the parable of the lost son in Luke 15. Everything changed for the son when he came to his senses and sought his father’s mercy.

**Seek God’s Mercy**

As important as it is to remember and face the reality of an abortion, these things alone will not resolve all of the aspects of complex grief. Instead you have a Savior who meets you. You may believe that God has forgiven you, but feeling God’s forgiveness—feeling his mercy and acceptance—may lag behind. It is not God’s desire for guilt and shame to torment and paralyze you. Let these feelings drive you to Christ Jesus, and to search his heart.

How should you go about it? Here are four specific ways to turn to him in your grief.

---

1. Speak to him in prayer, seeking mercies from the God of mercies.
2. Ask him to help with lingering feelings of guilt.
3. Believe that God brings good out of evil.
4. Entrust your unborn child into God’s hands.

These are four ways that faith turns to God. By practicing these, your trust in him and his forgiveness will grow. God transforms our guilt and grief as we seek his mercy. Now let’s explore each one.

1. **Speak to him in prayer, seeking mercies from the God of mercies.** Experiencing God’s merciful love for you is not something you do just once. Cling to him, daily, over your whole lifetime. Experience Christ’s mercy as it accumulates over time. Remind yourself of how Jesus accepts the earnest repentance of sinners.

   In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9–14), the Pharisee self-confidently talks to the Lord. In his mind, he hasn’t committed the “big” sins. He sees himself on an elevated moral and spiritual plane. But next to him prays a sorrowful and contrite tax collector who candidly confesses his sins and seeks God’s mercy. He has no self-confidence in his own righteousness. He knows what he’s done. Knowing his own guilt before God, he stakes his life upon one thing—God’s mercy. His prayer is simple: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” Jesus shocks those who listen. He pronounces the tax collector, not the Pharisee, justified—forgiven and accepted as righteous. The Pharisee has an abundance of misplaced self-confidence, but the tax collector’s fragile faith is in God’s mercy, and he is commended for it.

   Let his prayer, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner” be your prayer as well. In faith, pray this simple request that rests on Christ and his infinite mercy. Then allow it to echo in the background of another prayer that has been spoken for centuries by countless faithful Christians:

   Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve; pour upon us the abundance of your mercy; forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior.\(^\text{11}\)

---

\(^{10}\) Tax collectors often took ample opportunities to exercise greed and unfairness afforded by the Roman government. Therefore, they were a despised and hated social class. They were seen on the same level as adulterers, murderers, extortioners, and harlots. They were the outcasts in Jewish society and seen as uninterested in spiritual matters. A tax collector cut himself off from decent society, was excommunicated from the synagogue, and his family members were equally tarnished.

This fifth century prayer asks God to give you what you cannot even imagine asking him for. And it asks for what you most need—his mercy and forgiveness. He actually desires and is able to give you freedom from the things that weigh down your conscience. The sin of abortion binds you. But Christ’s forgiveness releases you.

Using a tried and true prayer gives you a blueprint for intelligent and specific confession that directs your heart to receive and believe God’s promises—to make God’s mercy and forgiveness the final and everlasting word for you, not regret. David Powlison adapted two beloved prayers specifically to the sorrow of abortion— the General Confession and General Thanksgiving. Let these written petitions spring into designing your own personalized prayer. This may be very helpful in the process of healing, finding freedom, and living in confidence of God’s love.

2. Ask him to help with lingering feelings of guilt. For most people, the decision to abort was ultimately theirs. And this detail haunts like a ghost even after they have confessed it. You may feel like experiencing God’s compassion and consolation is for other Christians, those whose losses happened to them. Have you ever thought, “They may call on God, but I cannot. I chose to lose my child. This was my decision, and I knew better.”? You may even disqualify yourself from grieving your abortion. “I deserve to suffer for the rest of my life. It’s God’s punishment for what I’ve done.” Do you believe that you will keep paying and paying and paying? What is a biblical response to these ways of thinking?

Seek Christ’s forgiveness not self-forgiveness. Loss mixed with guilt is an exceptionally difficult grief to bear. To help, many well-meaning counselors point people to self-forgiveness as essential to the process of healing. It’s seen as the “key” that unlocks a person’s ability to heal. Intuitively, this seems to fit: You’re not in the same place you once were. With what you now know, you would not handle your

---

12 See A Personal Liturgy of Confession, by David Powlison, pages 45–52 in this issue.

13 Thomas Cranmer is the original author of the General Confession. Cranmer was the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1533-1555. Although a leader in the English Reformation, he knew firsthand what it was like to be coerced into making a decision he would deeply regret. During a three-year imprisonment, he signed his name to a document that was contrary to both his conscience and to Scripture in order to obtain his freedom. At the end of his life, Cranmer spoke about this tragic decision. Notice both his humble candor and the strength of hope in God’s mercy: “I come to the great thing which so much troubles my conscience, more than anything that ever I did or said in my whole life…which now here I renounce and refuse. To thee, therefore, O Lord, do I run; to thee do I humble myself. Thou didst not give thy son, O Heavenly Father, unto death for small sins only, but for all the greatest sins of the world, so that the sinner return to thee with his whole heart, as I do at the present. Wherefore, have mercy on me, O God, whose property is always to have mercy.” Cranmer was a man broken by a sinful decision, but who found mercy and forgiveness in Christ. Use his prayers, Powlison’s adapted prayers, and your own to seek and find the God who gives mercy. (John Foxe, Foxe’s Book of Martyrs Or A History of the Lives, Sufferings, and Triumphant Deaths of the Primitive Protestant Martyrs [Chicago: John C. Winston Co., n.d.], 5154, 5179.)
pregnancy in the same way. You did not fully understand the wrong that you were committing at the time or foresee the ensuing sorrow. Over the years, you may feel that you’ve become your own unmerciful servant (Matt 18:21–35), demanding payment for what the “old you” did even though the King has forgiven your debt. If only you could forgive yourself! It’s tempting to see yourself then as an entirely different person and to extend forgiveness to that person.

Your ongoing sorrow does not mean that God despises you.

But this would-be insight leads you astray. Many people confuse self-forgiveness with receiving God’s forgiveness. Scripture never calls you to have enough faith to forgive yourself no matter how different or sorry you are now. Striving for self-forgiveness keeps you from resting fully in the sufficiency of Christ’s finished work on your behalf and asks you to try to exonerate yourself. It leads you to take your cues from your troubled conscience instead of from the Father of all mercies. It assumes that you have broken your own, rather than God’s, holy law and are capable of freeing yourself. But you cannot absolve yourself from wrongdoing. Your conscience will continue to assault and torment you. It is only God who offers mercy; your conscience and Satan only heap accusations. Will you listen to God? Here are words from a woman wrestling through this:

One day I made the choice to include my own name on the list of people I needed to forgive…Then, as the Holy Spirit gave me insight, I further understood that Jesus’ work of forgiveness was perfect, whole and complete, so that even questions of self-forgiveness began to fall away. Jesus forgave, and that was all that mattered.14

Instead of praying for the strength to forgive yourself, pray that God would help you in faith to receive, experience, and rest in his mercy, in Christ’s work, and in the grace and consolation of his Holy Spirit.

After you have received God’s mercies, you might not feel any different. That is because being forgiven and feeling forgiven are two different things. Your ongoing sorrow does not mean that God despises you. The Apostle John counsels us that “whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything” (1 John 3:20). He is greater and truer than your feelings. Instead of

14 Pamela Ramsey, Mercy Triumphs, Grace Abounds! (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2012), 52.
trying to forgive or heal yourself, turn in humble, dependent faith that accepts what you’ve done, and clings to Christ’s mercy.\textsuperscript{15} There is no transgression too great to be forgiven by Jesus. Where sin abounds, grace super-abounds (Rom 5:20). To echo Thomas Cranmer, the Son of God did not die “for small sins only, but for all the greatest sins of the world.” If he is willing to forgive us, who are we to reject his mercy?

\textit{Dwell on God’s grace, not self-recrimination.} But if God forgives us and there is no need to forgive ourselves, then how are we to make sense of the lingering, painful consequences following an abortion? It might seem that the grief and loss following an abortion serve as God’s punishment—a life sentence for your sin. Perhaps you feel destined to live the rest of your life under its curse. Maybe you fear that if you let go of your guilt and shame that you are dishonoring your child or severing the only connection you have with your baby. Maybe in your self-recrimination you are trying to let God know how sorry you are. How can you live with the physical, emotional, and relational consequences of abortion? Though you are forgiven, are you to live the rest of your life under the cloud of this sin? Is that what God wants? To answer these questions, let’s look at a story in Scripture where people sinned and, in a similar way, faced ongoing consequences.

Simeon and Levi were two of Jacob’s twelve sons.\textsuperscript{16} A prominent man in the city of Shechem raped their sister, Dinah (Gen 34). In an act of barbarous revenge, these two brothers massacre the entire male population in Shechem. They kill countless men who had nothing to do with Dinah’s humiliation. They return one man’s evil with genocide. When their father, Jacob, confronts them, they show no signs of remorse and justify their actions as something that had to be done. As a result, Jacob curses them. Their descendants will be divided and scattered throughout the other ten tribes of Israel (Gen 49:7) and will be the only two tribes in Israel without an inheritance in the land. Their sin will be remembered because the consequences will be experienced both by themselves and their families for all time.

Certainly, we see this played out in Scripture. At the beginning of the book of Numbers, the tribe of Simeon starts out as the third largest of the twelve. But by Numbers 26, they have dwindled down to the smallest tribe in all the land. In Moses’s farewell message (Deut 33), the Simeonites are so peripheral that Moses does


\textsuperscript{16} I’m indebted to Steve Estes for this pastoral application. For a more in depth exposition of this story listen to \textit{When My Loss Is My Own Fault} at http://www.ccef.org/when-my-loss-my-own-fault.
not even mention them in his blessing. Essentially, they play no significant role in Israel. It seems as if they have languished under the consequences of Simeon’s sin.

But what about Levi? He took part in the massacre of Shechem and he is under the same curse. Just like Simeon, Levi would never have a land of his own. His descendants would also be scattered in Israel. But even though they share the same consequence, the outcome could not be more different. The Levites, though cursed by Jacob, are the most privileged tribe in the land. In 1 Chronicles, the Levites are placed at the spiritual center of faithful Israel. They have a central role in the nation’s spiritual life and wellbeing. They are leaders in the ministry of worship and the ones to make atonement for all of Israel.

God creates new and fresh opportunities for us to trust and obey him.

How is this possible?! Why does Simeon wither while Levi flourishes at Israel’s spiritual epicenter? It is because God’s grace is not nullified by our sinful decisions. He creates new and fresh opportunities for us to trust and obey him. This is what he did for the Levites at Mount Sinai. In a moment of national crisis—the idolatry of the golden calf—Moses asks, “Who is on the Lord’s side? Come to me” (Ex 32:26). The only tribe to respond is the tribe of Levi. The Levites fight for the Lord and defend his honor. They do the very opposite of what they did in Shechem. At Sinai, the Levites turn to the Lord and sacrificially follow him. When no one else is willing to take a stand, they trust God, stand with him, and obey him.

Because of the Levites’ faithfulness at Mount Sinai, God blesses them (Ex 32:29). He sets them apart to fill the privileged position of serving him as priests in the central sanctuary (Deut 18:5). Though they are not given a land as their inheritance, the Lord himself will be their portion and inheritance (Num 18:20). Do you see what has happened here? The Levites have a pathway out of despair. They live out a redeemed story. They experience a very different outcome because the Lord showed them mercy. He gave them an opportunity to come back into relationship and they embraced it. Loss, in God’s hands, becomes gain. Curse becomes blessing.

In the same way, abortion has painful consequences. But God desires you to turn toward him in faithful obedience—to lean not on your own understanding, but to follow Christ. So gather around him and be on his side at each day’s fresh opportunity to trust and obey him.

The painful consequence of an abortion is always loss. But in and through this
loss, God’s desire is for you to gain someone who cannot be lost—Christ himself. May your pathway from abortion be a blessing like the path of the Levites.

3. **Believe that God brings good out of evil.** Remorse over an abortion does not yield quickly. There is so often a fruitless remembering of “what ifs” and “if onlys.” “What if just one person had given me another option?” “If only someone intervened and helped me put together a plan for me to have this baby.” These fruitless thoughts are poisonous. They leave you in faithless regret. But knowing and trusting great truths about God will become the ballast that keeps your soul upright amidst the continual breakers that threaten to batter and depress you.

One of the most famous and precious of God’s promises is Romans 8:28, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” Could this promise actually apply to something as devastating as abortion? Absolutely. It has to.

If you belong to Jesus, he not only promises forgiveness but also to redeem your life. He is a redeemer who personally steps into the dark and broken places and reclaims them. Through your repentance and obedience, he restores his blessing to you. He uses even the failures and the sins in your life to serve greater purposes.

The story of Joseph and his brothers reminds us of this. His brothers throw him into a pit and later sell him into slavery. But this is not where their story ends. Twenty years later, Joseph consoles his brothers by showing them how God has been remarkably merciful to them. God has used their heinous sin to preserve life and to rescue their entire family from famine and certain extinction. Joseph says, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Gen 50:20). Joseph comforts his brothers by reassuring them of God’s gracious providence over their sin, and this truth is crucial for your comfort as well. Your spiritual and psychological survival depends upon knowing that God is a great redeemer—and even redeems the most tragic sins. He is sovereign over your most woeful decisions.

Make no mistake, abortion is not good, and God is not the author of evil. But God will use this tragedy to conform you into Christ’s image, to shape a heart of compassionate love for others within you, to deepen humility, and to grow a grateful dependence upon Jesus. And this is just the start. When you see him face to face, you will have an understanding and clarity that is not possible this side of glory. Will you, in the wake of your most heartbreaking sin, surrender to his will? The very sins that may have forever changed the course of your and your family’s life, in his hands, will fulfill his gracious purposes.

Pondering and resting in God’s sovereignty over our sin is a source of enormous comfort and sweet helpfulness. Consider how salvation has come to us. It comes through the worst sin ever committed—the murder of the Son of God.
Not only was Christ unjustly murdered, but he also was rejected and betrayed by the ones who should have defended, protected, and cared for him. Yet the awful, shameful sins committed against Jesus led him to the cross where he obtained our salvation. Here is the clearest place we see God overcoming evil by making sin serve his purposes. He reverses evil and turns it back on itself. Listen to a testimony of a woman who is learning to rest in this hope. She says:

> When I was so ill with depression and guilt after my abortion I had a difficult time believing that Romans 8:28 could apply to something as destructive and devastating as my abortion…. God patiently began to show me how this Scripture could be fulfilled in my life. First, I began to recognize that the pain I was experiencing had given me insights on suffering, sin, and forgiveness. It also gave me a great desire to live in obedience to God; in fact, my depression was the catalyst for both myself and my husband to come to know the Lord…. I am not thankful I had an abortion. But I am extremely grateful that God has used such a tragedy to bring me to Him and to teach me.¹⁷

Undoubtedly, the faith and clarity that this woman displays was not given all at once. It has grown over years and will continue to develop over her lifetime.

In faith, your grief too can transform into humble trust. It’s a grief that lives honestly in the face of your failures. It’s a grief that learns to see your failures in light of God’s bigger mercies and greater promises. It’s a grief that turns away from living in fruitless regret and trusts that God will redeem even this. Surely, you won’t ever forget your child or “get over” an abortion.¹⁸ Yet it may be that this is the very place where God meets you and continues to draw you to himself. It’s a place where joy in God’s purposeful, merciful sovereignty can transform your despair. Listen carefully to Old Testament scholar Iain Duguid. Let each word sink in:

> Yet even [your] sin could do nothing other than accomplish God’s purposes. …[You] were responsible for [your] own failure before the Lord, but even [your] sin would become the means that God used to further his own gracious purposes. This is good news…God never wastes the suffering of his children.¹⁹

¹⁷ Trimble, Healing Post-Abortion Trauma, 37, 40.

¹⁸ For further reading on this, see David Powlison’s article “I’ll Never Get Over It”—Help for the Aggrieved,” Journal of Biblical Counseling 28:1 (2014): 8-27.

If this is true, you will continue to grieve, but you will “not grieve as others do who have no hope” (1 Thess 4:13). Your grief will be comforted by the hope that even in this, God is accomplishing his gracious purposes for you and your family. You may have thought that you were sidelined from God’s plan. But this difficult experience is one means by which God is doing his work in and through you.

4. **Entrust your unborn child into God’s hands.** Have you ever wondered, “Where is my baby now?” “Will I see my child in heaven some day?” “How can I be sure?” These are painful questions to wrestle with. A person who experiences a miscarriage or stillbirth asks them too. Yet Scripture says very little about the salvation of unborn children. And when Scripture is scant, it’s hard to be definitive. Rather, God calls you to faith—to trust him, because he is good.

To find rest for your soul on this question, you must entrust your child into his hands. Be assured that Scripture is not silent in describing the Father’s special heart for the weak and defenseless. The goodness and mercifulness of God is your anchor here. His goodness is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. In other words, his heart of compassion for children is certainly not limited by abortion, does not end with a child’s death, and will never change.

1. Throughout Scripture we see God values unborn children. There are many examples.
2. In describing pregnant women, the Bible says that they are “with child.”
3. Of all the ways that the Son of God could enter this world, he chose to come as a helpless, dependent baby.
4. With both Jesus and John the Baptist we hear, “You shall call his name…” at conception or even generations before they are born.
5. While in his mother’s womb, John the Baptist leaps for joy when Elizabeth meets Mary. This is more than an interesting detail in the story of Jesus’ birth. God even uses unborn children to celebrate his Son’s arrival! Let this comfort your heart.

And there’s even more we can point to. During Jesus’ ministry, people would bring their babies to him for his blessing. When the leaders criticized them, Jesus said, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:16). Jesus delights in children. He loves them and is concerned for their welfare. Of the eight resurrection accounts in the Bible, five involve children. He is merciful and good and his ministry is replete with examples of mercy and care for them.

My former pastor loved children too. He never told me this exactly, but I knew it to be true. Once in the middle of a worship service, a toddler had escaped unnoticed from the nursery and was wandering fearfully and tentatively down
the center aisle looking for his parents. Before anyone caught on, my pastor left the pulpit, strode swiftly down the aisle, and scooped up this child in his arms. Tenderly he comforted the boy with gentle, kind words, spotted his parents, and delivered him to them. He returned to the pulpit and began preaching again as if nothing had happened. But I was transfixed by what I had witnessed. This frightened child, although he was in the wrong place at the wrong time, was the most important person in the entire sanctuary to my pastor. I had witnessed spontaneous compassion and mercy. I had caught a glimpse of the kingdom of God and of God’s tender heart toward children. In the same way, when you open Scripture, be transfixed by a God who repeatedly tells you and shows you that he is good, merciful, and kind—especially to the weak and defenseless. In faith, grow to trust this Father with your child.

Finally, Scripture and the vast majority of church history weigh heavily toward anticipating a future personal reunion with our unborn children in heaven. When David and Bathsheba’s baby dies (2 Sam 12:15–23), David seems to indicate a clear hope of meeting him again someday. He says, “I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.” You too may anticipate a future reunion with your child.

We have talked extensively about how to draw closer to God and to see your abortion through his love and mercy for you. You might think that is all that is needed. But it is not. God also calls you to break out of the cocoon of secrecy and shame and share your burdens with others. His ministry to you continues as you obey this call.

Share Your Grief and Seek Help from Others

At this point you may be saying: “I am no longer trying to forget my abortion and I have tried to face the reality of what I have done. I am even starting to believe that God’s mercies are for me. But some days I still feel miserable and confused. Is this what God has for me?”

The answer to that is “No.” But you have further to go. The next step is to share your grief and seek help from other believers. Doing so will continue the process of dismantling the isolation, despair, and shame. It certainly did for one woman who came to see me one frigid January day. She slowly described having an abortion twenty-five years prior. She mentioned that for weeks she’d been driving to my office and parking outside, but she could not bring herself to come in. Finally, she took the plunge. After we talked, I returned to my office to see something I’d never seen before: the entire chair she had been sitting in was drenched in sweat. It is hard to acknowledge abortion publically—to confess it out loud and

20 In this section I use “confess” in both a specific sense—i.e., admitting a wrong, and in a general sense—i.e., acknowledging something hidden and difficult to share with others.
face it with another person. This woman showed incredible courage.

**Tell others about your abortion.** Grief that is shared lessens the weight of sorrow as it allows others to bear it with you. In Solomon’s words, “Two are better than one...for if one falls, the other will lift him up.” But how hard it is for the one who is *alone when he falls* and has not another to lift him up (Eccl 4:9–10). Hidden grief withdraws you from your community. The more isolated you are, the more destructive it is. I know it might feel as though you have no right to ask for help. But you must share this burden. Tell a wise and caring person about your abortion—your pastor, an elder, or a godly friend or family member. When another person reassures you of God’s forgiveness and love, possibly for the first time, you may start to experience a comforting confidence of God’s mercy to you. If you do not disclose your abortion, you may live in doubt of God’s forgiveness and love, never breaking with the past or knowing the comfort of true friendship with others. Listen to Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

> Those who, despite all their seeking and trying, cannot find the great joy of fellowship, the cross, the new life, and certainty [of forgiveness] should be shown the blessing that God offers us in mutual confession. Who can refuse, without suffering loss, a help that God has deemed it necessary to offer?...Where there is deep anxiety and trouble over one’s own sins, where the certainty of forgiveness is sought [but not found], there comes the invitation in the name of Jesus to come to brotherly confession.  

Bonhoeffer asserts that you suffer an even greater loss when you refuse a remedy that God himself gives. A crucial part of God’s remedy is sharing your abortion with other believers who can and will reassure you of God’s forgiveness and love. Until you share this burden you may not be able move beyond the fruitless remembering, self-recrimination, and isolation. It’s easy to get stuck there and to stall in despair.

Let’s look at an example where Jesus heals a woman physically and emotionally (Luke 8:40–56). She had a discharge of blood for twelve years and her condition led to isolation and deep shame. She sought healing from many doctors but did not find it. Now, she is destitute. When she touches the fringe of Jesus’ garment, she seeks a private healing just between her and Jesus. We can't blame her for wanting that. But Jesus desires something more for her.

She is physically healed as soon as she touches him in faith. But if he lets her go without giving her the chance to put her sorrow and her faith into words,
then her soul won’t be healed and she won’t be restored to her community. So he calls her to acknowledge, in front of others, why she touched him. At this point, you might want to cry out, “Jesus, why don’t you just let her go? Hasn’t she suffered enough already?” But he asks and she answers. And then, out in the open, Jesus declares, “Daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace.” It’s only then, after bravely speaking out loud in the presence of others that Jesus calls her his precious daughter. He is saying to her before the watching crowd, “You belong to me. I am not ashamed to call you my own.” After revealing her shame and sorrow, she experiences real peace and deep healing for her shame. She now belongs to and is publically affirmed by Jesus, and is no longer an outcast in her community.22

_Tell others as an expression of faith._ For the person who still hides the sorrow of abortion, peace and true rest will be out of reach until the secret is revealed. There are few private healings. When sin is the cause of your suffering, confession to others in your community is often necessary for healing. James encourages, “confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (5:16). The Lord will use other believers to help bring about your freedom and forgiveness through confession. Listen to Kim Ketola as she describes what transpired after she confessed her abortion to two Christian women who had firsthand experience with abortion:

We each began to weep. And then something beautiful happened. These women held me. They didn’t turn from me. And I was able to hold them. Where we each had feared hatred and rejection from others, we found only love, acceptance, and care…

As we held one another and wept, I felt the love of Jesus Christ enter into the deepest recesses of my heart, the place I had kept closed just for the baby and me…

It was over. The anguish, the shame, the mourning, all the dark secrets had finally come to an end. I knew I was forgiven. I am forgiven. I no longer needed to hide from God or anyone else in this life.23

The tide turned for Kim when she confessed her secret and wept with other women. Although she had previously tried to deal with the guilt of her abortion, shame

---


was lurking in the shadows of her heart. Up until this moment, she had experienced very little healing. With abortion, a person expects rejection. But breakthrough is possible when you share your grief with others and experience their acceptance and love. Deal with your guilt and your shame. Shame is healed both in relationship with God and in relationship with others.

In counseling, I’ve found that when a person is ready to share this sorrow with another person, the Lord does amazing things. Maybe for the first time, the grief and significance of this loss becomes legitimate for you. You’re able to mourn together with your loved ones. And you’re no longer alone in hidden torment. Finally you start to experience forgiveness personally. The baby is finally honored and given value and worth. Listen to a dear friend of mine describe how she now honors her aborted daughter along with her entire family. Two years ago she took a very difficult step—she shared her story of abortion with her adolescent children. Together they named the child Rebecca Grace. She writes:

> My family and I will celebrate Rebecca Grace on Valentine’s Day. If I had allowed the pregnancy to continue, and if she had been born on time, she would have come into the world on that day. In the past, I have left little gifts on the kids’ and my husband’s pillow. I wanted them to know how much I valued them. Each Valentine’s Day I have marked the knowledge of this secret baby by honoring my living children. Not so anymore. For the last two years, all the kids and my husband have celebrated Rebecca right alongside me.

> What was lost has been found, and I cannot express my thankfulness to Jesus for what he has done. The very thing I thought I would take to the grave is the thing most precious to me on this earth. I aborted my own baby daughter, but by God’s grace, she is alive in our family.

For nearly three decades, this woman silently grieved and secretly honored her “lost” daughter. But not anymore. Now she and her family grieve and cherish her together.

Abortion grief is oppressive when it’s hidden—tormenting you with doubt and driving you into isolation from your community. Freedom comes when you are able to share your sorrow with other believers who know their own need for Christ’s mercy and who will pray for your healing. And yet, there may be some unfinished business that has yet to be addressed in your life. In your abortion, others likely sinned against you and you sinned against others. So far as it depends on you, let’s consider how you can help these relationships heal.
Reconcile and Make Reparations
As I said earlier, it is likely you did not make this decision on your own. People closest to you—those you trusted—may have lied, misinformed, and pressured you. Instead of helping you to find a way to carry your child, they convinced you that abortion was your only choice. They wronged you. Perhaps you are angry, bitter, and dealing with betrayal. Facing and dealing with this anger and resentment is now of foremost importance. You will never be entirely free until you forgive those who played a part in your abortion. Holding resentment toward others not only poisons you, but more importantly separates you from God (Mark 11:25).

**Forgive others who were involved.** Forgiving these people may seem impossible. But, remember, forgiveness does not excuse the wrong done against you. It recognizes the gravity and odiousness of sin. True forgiveness sees sin as justly deserving God’s wrath. It doesn’t dismiss or trivialize the wrong—just the opposite. It sees sin for what it is, yet responds with mercy.

How is mercy possible? Experiencing God’s mercy to forgive you is what compels you to forgive others. Knowing his abundant mercy personally is the only thing powerful enough to give you the ability and desire to forgive others from your heart.²⁴

Jesus instructs us that when someone has sinned against us, we are to go and be reconciled (Matt 18:15). Listen to a woman who approached the ones who were involved in her decision to abort her child:

> I was able to express my anguish to those who encouraged me to have an abortion, and this made it easier to release the feelings of bitterness I had toward them. I also wrote a letter to the doctor who performed my abortion, describing the ramifications of it in my life.²⁵

Not only does this woman deal constructively with her anger and resentment, she also deals constructively with those who were complicit in her sin. She seeks both to reconcile and to minister to others. By approaching these individuals, she deals with her own resentment and bitterness, while also helping others to see their responsibility. But there’s more. Reconciliation is a two-way street.

**Seek forgiveness from others.** Chances are you sinned against others as well. You will need to seek their forgiveness. Does this surprise you? Although abortion is often done in private, it is not a private sin. It hurts and impacts the people closest to you. As a general principle, I recommend that you confess your

---

²⁴ If you find yourself struggling to forgive those involved in your abortion, please see my article for more help—“From Your Heart...Forgive,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 26:3 (2013): 26-61.

sin to the people who have been wronged and affected by your abortion. This may be a difficult step for you, but it is right, honorable, and can bring freedom and reconciliation.

Just like your approach to others who have sinned against you, each situation is different. Each requires much wisdom. Who should you seek forgiveness from? Seek wise counsel, oversight, and assistance from a pastor or an elder about whether confession is right given your unique situation and unique relationships. In some instances, it may be unnecessary, disorienting, or even dangerous to confess to certain people. Here are some situations to think through.

- If you are or were a dependent living under your parents’ roof and authority at the time of your abortion, consider seeking their forgiveness.
- If you are married and have never told your husband, he should probably know. The abortion itself may not be a sin against him, but the immorality of the sexual encounter is.
- If you never disclosed your pregnancy to the baby’s father and are capable of contacting him, consider doing so. If you are married, be sure your spouse agrees with the plan.
- If you are preparing for marriage, disclosing your abortion can be an important step, just as it is important to disclose sexual histories with one another. Go thoughtfully and prayerfully into these conversations.

If you do confess to others, understand that your abortion may be distressing and difficult to discuss for some people. How you tell others matters. An honest, clear, and humble confession is important. Encourage questions and ongoing, constructive discussion as needed. Genuinely seek to understand how your abortion has affected them and express sorrow over the ways that they have been impacted. Specifically ask them to forgive you and know that they may need time to pray about and work through their feelings. Listen to a woman share her story of approaching her parents:

My parents were completely quiet as I told them about those days long ago when I faced a very difficult decision and chose to have an abortion. I told them how ashamed I was of what I had done and that my fear of how they would react had tormented me for many years. I asked for their forgiveness. Without missing a heartbeat, they drew me into their arms and forgave me…My joy and the forgiveness I experienced were indescribable. My secret was gone and I was free.27

26 This interaction needs to be thought through very carefully. Seeing this man may stir up affections between the two of you or may erupt in a conflict. If you decide to go forward, I suggest you take a friend with you for accountability and support.

27 Ramsey, Mercy Triumphs, 68
Do you see the release and freedom this woman experiences as she seeks to reconcile with her parents? After years of being alienated by these covert sins, she finally heals and restores her relationship with her parents.

Finally, some women feel it is important to seek forgiveness from their living children. Most likely, they were not born at the time of the abortion and yet they have a sibling they will not meet in this life. If you decide to do this, carefully consider the timing. Bear in mind the ages of the children, their spiritual maturity, and ability to comprehend what you are telling them. Seek the Lord’s wisdom for sharing in a way that is constructive and for their good.

Once you bring your abortion out of hiding, it frees you to come out of hiding, too.

Confessing this sin to your children is a testimony of God’s grace in your life and an opportunity to form your children’s consciences and lives. Help them reach a moral clarity as they see the nature of abortion. Show them God’s mercy to you that they might know that through Christ there is forgiveness. Don’t hide the ensuing suffering from your abortion so that they might grow in compassion for others who experience post-abortion grief firsthand. May these conversations engender wisdom in your children.28 Be honest and trustworthy—a parent to whom they can come if they ever face an unplanned pregnancy. Lastly, if you share your abortion publicly, make sure your children hear the story first—from you directly.

Our sins afflict and separate us from one another, and our healing—both personally and relationally—is incomplete until we reconcile with those we’ve wronged. These hidden sins not only separate you from others but hinder your ability to worship the Lord as well (Matt 5:23–24). God promises that he will heal and flourish us once we bring our sins out of hiding (Ps 32:1–5) and seek forgiveness. As you humbly and courageously confess your wrongs, he grants mercy (Prov 28:13).

Once you bring your abortion out of hiding, it frees you to come out of hiding, too. When you no longer live in shame and fear of others finding out your secret, it opens the door to ministry. It enables you to serve in God’s kingdom in the ways he has gifted you. Perhaps this means you will be used in the lives of others who have experienced abortion. Perhaps you will have a heart for teen girls and serve them, though the abortion part of your story might never

28 For guidance on how to talk to your kids about sex in general, see Julie Lowe and Lauren Whitman’s article “Teach Your Kids about Sex,” Journal of Biblical Counseling 27:2 (2013): 6-17.
come up. But know this: God’s goodness and mercy do not end with your comfort. God purposes to use you, as he does all of his children, as the place where love, compassion, and courage take shape. In other words, God has plans for you. This is always how he works. The mercy we receive is the mercy we then have to give away (2 Cor 1:4).

Let’s now look at one example of how God used a person’s sinful history to edify the church.

**John Newton: How God Can Use a Person’s Story**

John Newton is considered by many to be the greatest pastor of the 18th century. We know him because of his famous hymn *Amazing Grace*. When he wrote, “Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come,” he wasn’t speaking hypothetically. Newton knew from experience that God steps into the brokenness and darkness of our lives. His life and ministry testify to how receiving God’s grace can be a foundation for compassionate and helpful ministry to others.

**Newton’s story.** On the mantel above his desk, Newton inscribed Deuteronomy 15:15. “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord your God redeemed you.” These words were literally true for Newton. When he was eleven years old, he sailed from England to, in his own words, be “free to sin to my heart’s content.”29 And he did. During these years, he fell lower and lower. At one point, after being imprisoned by the Royal Navy, Newton was transferred to a slave ship. He did not get along with the crew, so the captain left him with a slave dealer in West Africa who then gave Newton to his African mistress to be her slave for a time.

The turning point in his life came later aboard a ship that was caught in a violent storm. None of the sailors thought they’d survive. As Newton hurried to his post, he muttered that he hoped God would have mercy upon them. Just speaking the word mercy arrested him. “‘Mercy!’ he said to himself, in astonishment, ‘mercy! mercy! What mercy can there be for me?’”30 Slowly his heart began to long for God’s mercy. Then he began to seek God’s mercy. Then God’s mercy found him—and he staked everything in his life on it.

And yet…he continued to sin. Even after his conversion, he actively participated in the cruel and abusive practices of the African slave industry, including rape and murder. But gradually, over the course of a couple of years, he came to see the slave trade for what it was—evil. Thirty years later, his conviction had grown to the point of working tirelessly to abolish slavery by giving personal testimony of the horrors of the slave industry.

---


30 Ibid., 229.
Throughout his life, Newton kept alive what he had done and what he had experienced. Instead of denying or avoiding his shameful memories, he remembered them as a way to magnify God’s great mercies to him. He held the “ebenezers”\(^\text{31}\) of God’s amazing kindness and mercy alongside the monuments of his own failures. How could he counsel and restore others in their trouble unless he first remembered his shame and God’s graces to him?

At the very end of his life, a friend met him on the street, and Newton complained that his mind was failing him. “‘My memory’ he said, ‘is nearly gone; but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior’”\(^!\)

Just before he died, he wrote an epitaph for his tombstone and asked that no words be added to or taken away from what he wrote:

\begin{quote}
John Newton,
Clerk,

Once an Infidel and Libertine,
A Servant of Slaves in Africa,

was

by the Mercy of our Lord and Saviour
Jesus Christ,

Preserved, Restored, Pardoned,
And Appointed to Preach the Faith he
had so long labored to destroy.\(^\text{32}\)
\end{quote}

Newton’s inscription calls to mind both the sins of his youth as well as God’s great compassion on him. Newton’s example reveals a way to be honest about sin while magnifying God’s mercy.

\textit{God can use your story, too.} Let’s leave Newton for just a moment and connect this to healing from abortion. Listen to a present day John Newton—a woman named Nancy. She writes:

\begin{quote}
In trying to deal with the abortion, I had to face what I had done and beg forgiveness from my God. …It is a daily struggle to accept the forgiveness I know the Lord has given me. And I will never forget my abortion. I know if it helps others, I can talk about it. …I also think I am a softer, more caring person than I might have been. …It always makes me cry, but if it saves just one mom and baby the pain, it’s worth it.\(^\text{33}\)
\end{quote}

\(^{31}\) Ebenezer means “stone of help” (1 Samuel 7:12).

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 233.

Nancy’s abortion has become the very place where God meets her and where compassion for others and clarity about the truth of abortion takes shape. Do you sense a faith that not only experiences mercy but springs into ministry to others as well? Nancy’s “I don’t want to forget it” is Newton’s “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord your God redeemed you.” This is not a verse of condemnation but of honesty, gratitude, and purpose.

**God empowered Newton to minister to others.** Newton is known as one of the most influential and loving pastors of all time. He had been touched with a sense of undeserved mercy and he lived in “habitual tenderness” toward others.

His house became a refuge for the afflicted and the emotionally distressed. He was neither overly impressed with people’s talents nor offended by their flaws. He saw past these and was generous in his judgments. He was known as a man who was tenderly persistent in dealing with difficult and troubled people. Where did he get this tenderness, patience, and love for people? He never got over the sins of his youth, he never got over God’s kindness, and he never got over the reality that God could use him to minister to others.

**A Grief Healed**

My prayer is that this article has encouraged you to live honestly and faithfully with the reality of abortion in your own life. God is a forgiving and restoring Father, and in his sovereign hands he works all things together for good. The very person who wrote these words from Romans 8:28 should know—after all, Paul was the “chief of sinners.” Late in his life he was able to say, “Here is a trustworthy saying, Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.” The Apostle Paul, like John Newton, had a remarkable confidence in God’s pardoning love for him. He knew he was a terrible sinner and yet was not haunted by it. If these men remembered their dark pasts without being tormented by them, then you can too.

Always keep in mind how the Lord works. First and foremost, he forgives. Let Christ’s forgiving love for you become all the more glorious. And, second, because God loves you so personally and tenderly, he shows you how you can personally and tenderly care for others.

---
