



After the
abortion ...

... there
is hope
in His
healing

by Linda D. Bartlett,
Rev. Edward Fehskens,
and “Karen W.”

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For those who have had an abortion (or participated in an abortion decision), there are promises of hope from God.

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” (Psalm 147:3)

“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.” (Isaiah 43:25)

As we come to Jesus we are in truth no longer separated from our God. We are completely forgiven as if we never sinned. We have the privilege of experiencing how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ (Ephesians 3:18).

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” (Philippians 3:20-21)

There is no more reason for despair ... for there is hope in His healing!

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After the Abortion
(a personal journey)

After the Abortion (a personal journey)

A personal testimony from Karen W.

I should have given birth to a daughter, but I committed the sin of abortion and took her life. I had just turned 17 years old. I was alone in my decision to have the abortion. I couldn't face what I had already done, and I wouldn't tell anyone what I was about to do. Let me give you a little history. I was raised in what many call a dysfunctional family. My parents had a very bad marriage, and they offered very little security to us kids. As things got worse at home, I became more and more starved for love and affection. When I was 15 years old, my parents separated for the last time. My father left us without an explanation, and my mother sank into a deep depression. Shortly after my dad left, my older sister left for college. The only security I understood at that time was completely gone. I collapsed emotionally and spiritually.

My world had crumbled and I with it. I began to live a double life. At school I continued to be the expected honor student, but socially I was living a secret hell. After resisting for years, I started experimenting with drugs and alcohol, and it didn't take long to learn that flirting would get me some attention. I desperately wanted attention. Then I made a life-changing mistake when I was 16. I flirted with my best friend's 25-year-old brother-in-law. He took it more seriously than I intended. I was excited by the attention he paid me so I kept on flirting. Eventually, I was convinced he loved me, so I rewarded him with my virginity—and conceived a child one July night. I was devastated when the father asked me if it was his. On October 4 of that year, I killed my daughter by abortion.

I had no idea what lay in store for me as a result of my sin. I spent the next 17 years in a downward spiral of self-destruction. I graduated from high school and went off to college—right on schedule. Six weeks later, at the first

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anniversary of the abortion, I had a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized. I was so heavily medicated that my memory is sketchy. My family learned all my secrets while I was in the hospital. Please bear in mind I was attending church through most of this. I gained 90 pounds in the 10 months following my release from the hospital. I was supposed to put my life back together, but I couldn't face the pain. In the fall I returned to college, but my suicidal depression put me back into a locked psychiatric unit during the first week of October—the second anniversary (of the abortion). I spent months in therapy, and I cannot recall ever discussing the abortion or the guilt that was killing me. But I did learn to function enough to get a job and move into my first apartment. On very shaky 20-year-old legs, I set out to make my life work. It didn't work.

For the next four years I continued in my self-destructive pattern. I was the classic case of “looking for love in all the wrong places.” I was willing to give myself away for a moment's worth of affection. I confused sex with love. I hated the things I was doing, but I continued to do them. I hated myself. I suffered intense periods of depression every October (especially around the anniversary), but I didn't see the connection.

I moved out of state to begin a new life. It was at that time that I truly began to surrender my life to God. I got it together enough to fall in love with a wonderful man I've been married to for 11 years. I wish I could tell you that we rode off into the sunset on a white stallion. The truth is that my depressive cycle challenged us for many years. I had confessed my sins of abortion and promiscuity. I had been assured of forgiveness. I was highly functional on the outside, but I was dying on the inside. There was a healing that needed to take place in me that I had not allowed.

My loving heavenly Father led me to a place where I

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couldn't run from the pain any longer. He moved our family "smack dab" in the middle of my old "stomping grounds." My psyche went berserk, and within 12 weeks I was suicidal. In desperation I went to my pastor and began counseling. It had been 16 years since the abortion, and I was *just beginning* the very necessary healing process. For the first time I looked at the fact that there had been a human life. I had hated that baby because she reminded me of my sin. I never accepted her as my child—she was a mistake to be erased. God led me to some books that helped me to accept the baby as mine, and I finally began to grieve. I cried a lot for a long time.

After awhile I asked my pastor if he would lead a memorial service for my baby. He graciously agreed. Planning the service made me realize I must name my daughter. Then I faced another problem because she didn't have a last name. I asked my husband if he would consider adopting this lost child. After prayer and soul searching, he lovingly accepted Kari Ann as his own. There were four people at the memorial service—my pastor, my mother, my husband, and me. My sister sent three flowers for the altar—one for Kari Ann, one for my husband, and one for me. My pastor used several Bible passages, but the one that stuck with me was the story from John 11 of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. After He'd raised him, Jesus said, "*Take off the grave clothes and let him go.*" The point was made. God wanted *me* to take off *my* grave clothes. He wanted me to walk in the freedom that Jesus bought for me on the cross. God cleansed my heart that night and **I AM FREE!** I still grieve for a lost child, but the guilt is gone. The day after the service, we left my old "stomping grounds" and moved back home. The work was done.

I'm here today because I want to help you understand people who have experienced abortion. Recently I saw a billboard that read, "Abortion = One Dead, One Wounded."

After the abortion (a personal journey)

For many years our society has peddled the lie that abortion is okay. Many, many people have been “conned.” There are millions who need to know the forgiveness that is theirs in Jesus Christ. There are millions who have not been able to forgive themselves. You may know someone who needs to hear that Gospel message. Can you share it with them?

Perhaps you are wounded. You need to know that Jesus paid for *every* sin—that includes abortion. He is willing to forgive. He is willing to cleanse. He is willing to heal anyone who comes to Him. Lay your burden at the foot of the cross and allow God to work a newness in your life. God’s grace is overwhelming. Thank you for listening.

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” (Isaiah. 61:1-3a)

“Jesus said to them, ‘Take off the grave clothes and let him go.’” (John 11:44b)

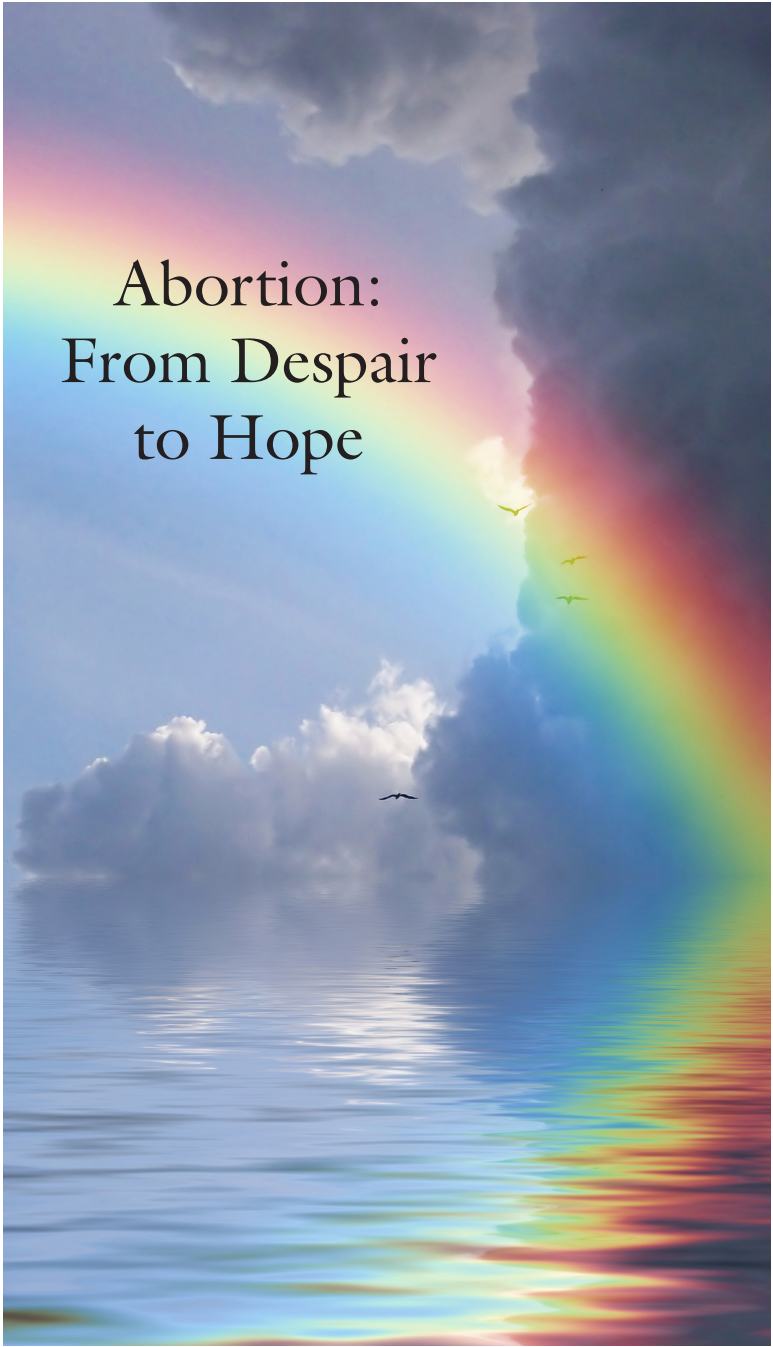
Karen W. shared this personal testimony with the youth attending a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Mid-South District Youth Gathering in Memphis, Tennessee.

If you desire more information or need to talk to someone regarding an abortion, please contact Word of Hope, a ministry of Lutherans For Life, at 888.217.8679.

For those who have had an abortion (or participated in an abortion decision), there are promises of hope from God.

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Abortion:
From Despair
to Hope

Abortion: From Despair to Hope

Many millions of women who have had at least one abortion share these experiences:

NIGHTMARES

"I thought I must be crazy because I couldn't shake the nightmares and deep pain I felt about the loss of my child."

SEXUAL PROBLEMS

"I had an abortion. I wish I could say the sadness is getting less, but instead it seems to be worse. I just want my two girls to watch TV all the time. I couldn't care less if my husband ever touched me again (to me sex means having babies), and now I'm afraid the Lord does not love me anymore. We couldn't afford another child, but the only thing I feel is hate toward myself for being talked into this and that I killed my child. Please help me!"

GUILT AND GRIEF

"I have had two abortions. I felt a lot of remorse and guilt, especially after the birth of my daughter. I find myself grieving for the loss, and the guilt is sometimes unbearable. Sadly enough, this guilt keeps me from the one place I need the most—the church."

DENIAL

"I am almost 18. I am a cheerleader, vice president of the student council at my school, vice president of my youth group, and I hope to become a parochial school teacher. I also had an abortion. I wanted to have the baby that was created out of love. I wanted to give the baby the opportunity to live and place the baby with adoptive parents. But the shame was too great. I could not handle a nine-month reminder of my sin. I couldn't tell my parents—I'm supposed to be the good one! I

Abortion: From Despair to Hope

would have to quit cheerleading, resign as class leader, lose all the respect I had gained.”

ISOLATION

“I never told my pastor. I’m not sure my minister would be understanding. I’ve told only one person at church. This is a guilt I carry alone. But I’m not the only one.”

SUICIDAL URGES

“I still am struggling. In the last few weeks I’ve had a really strong desire to end my life. The guilt feelings have become so great, plus, I have always had low self-esteem. I didn’t hate my babies. I will live with what I have done my whole life, and I know that there may often be times of great sadness. I just hope and pray the Lord will begin to work through me when I am ready to persuade other women not to make the same decision I did.”

SELF-JUSTIFICATION

Dr. Vincent Rue, a pioneer in the study and treatment of post-abortion syndrome, says abortion must be understood as a major death experience. An abortive woman’s words bear this out:

“When I had my (two) abortions, I told myself that what was inside me was just a piece of tissue, a product of conception, fetal parts, a cell. I had a lot of intellectual justification for what I had done.”

But later, in therapy, the truth came out.

“It hit me like a ton of bricks. I had two babies, and I killed them.”

Abortion: From Despair to Hope

For many the reality of abortion is too painful to acknowledge—leading a woman to deny and repress the facts of her experience. Rationalization, self-justification, and a delayed reaction to an abortion, varying from a few weeks to many years, are common. The following symptoms may appear in time:

Physical

- sexual problems
- eating disorders
- sleeping disorders

Emotional

- grief
- anger
- mood swings
- apathy
- sadness
- numbness
- anxiety

Mental

- nightmares
- flashbacks
- denial
- rationalization
- self-justification
- low self-esteem
- preoccupation with death/abortion date or due date

Social

- isolation
- withdrawal from relationships
- avoidance

Behavioral

- child abuse
- substance abuse
- frequent crying
- avoidance
- promiscuity

Spiritual

- guilt
- depression/despair
- suicidal thoughts
- anger
- refusal to forgive

BREAKING DENIAL

Denial becomes increasingly difficult to maintain, especially when a woman gets pregnant a second or third time. She sees the ultrasound of the moving baby, then gives birth to a child whose fingers and toes she can count. The

Abortion: From Despair to Hope

memory of her first child, her aborted child, is still there, and suddenly her emotions overwhelm her. But the path to healing begins when denial is broken. With God's gentle grace, repentance can replace rationalization, and lips can utter confession instead of excuses:

"Months later ... a nameless anxiety would come over me. I didn't know what it was. I couldn't understand what was making me feel so sad, so empty, so guilty. Then I gave birth to a beautiful daughter. And when I became a Christian, I recognized my sin for what it was. I had taken the life of my first child and I was wrong. I praise God for the way He has worked in my life to show me He has forgiven me and still loves me as His child."

CAN GOD EVER FORGIVE ME?

One woman wrote, "I'm 95. And I have lived with my abortion experience for 55 years. I am afraid that this sin is just too great. Can God ever forgive me?"

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

God hates the shedding of innocent blood, but abortion is not an unforgivable sin. The Good News of the Gospel is that God has already forgiven us in Jesus Christ: **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"** (1 John 1:9). God forgives the sin of abortion. He will also help us to forgive ourselves and others as His peace fills our heart: **"If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts"** (1 John 3:20a).

There are caring people who understand, care, and want to help. Many of them have experienced the truths contained in this booklet—journeying from despair to healing in God's forgiveness.

Dear Lord Jesus, Your mercies are new every morning. Great is Your faithfulness. Amen.

There is no more reason for despair ... for there is hope in His healing!

As we come to Jesus we are in truth no longer separated from our God. We are completely forgiven as if we never sinned. We have the privilege of experiencing how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ (Ephesians 3:18).

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”
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Hope in His Healing –
After the Abortion

Hope in His Healing - After the Abortion

Abortion ends a tiny baby's life. That young one will never share his or her special message with the world. But what about the mothers of these little ones?

Perhaps you are such a woman. In defense, you may have buried your guilt deep inside because, after all, abortion is legal and supported as a woman's right. "Have the abortion," you were told, "and then get on with your life." Why, then, does it hurt so much? If it's so "right," why doesn't the pain go away? Perhaps it's true, as someone once said, parents are parents forever, even of a dead child.

Every experience with abortion is different, yet the consequences remain the same. There is guilt, anger, despair, and heartache. These feelings are not abnormal. Post-abortion syndrome occurs when the bereavement process remains unresolved due to the spiritual condition that arises after killing a baby. Most people do not have the core belief that they are a killer, but abortion kills a baby. This fact is inconsistent with the self-view, and both cannot be true for a person that had an abortion. Therefore, many will resort to cognitive dissonance and denial of the truth that inhibits the healing process.

Support groups across the country are ministering to women because post-abortion syndrome (PAS) is a reality. The symptoms of PAS include nightmares and flashback episodes. Distress or anxiety may occur upon hearing certain sounds (like a vacuum cleaner) or during sexual intercourse, medical exams, or later childbirth. An emotional numbing or inability to have loving feelings toward children, friends, husband, or parents may inhibit healthy relationships. Depression and frequent crying are typical. In many cases, there may be a tendency toward self-destructive behavior, including drug, sex, or alcohol abuse. "The pain of killing my child creeps up on me," mourned one mother. "It haunts my dreams, slowly, and never leaves me."

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In a moment of fear or weakness, you may have chosen to do what seemed convenient and even acceptable at the time. Mixed with guilt are feelings of anger directed toward a counselor, doctor, parent, boyfriend, or husband who didn't support you at a vulnerable time and who offered no alternatives. "Why didn't anyone tell me it would hurt so much?" you ask.

Your anger may even turn inward. "Why wasn't I strong enough to protect my child?" Many women who suffer the aftermath of abortion lose confidence in themselves. Instead of feeling strong and courageous, they feel weak and cowardly.

In His goodness and mercy, God can remove the anger, anxiety, and pain. God is patient. He doesn't want you to live in brokenness. And yet, hurting people often need to experience brokenness before they will look up in anguish to our Savior. As sinful people, we must experience the sorrow of sin before we can realize the joy of forgiveness. If we have no sorrow for our sin, how can we know the need for repentance?

If you are burdened by guilt after an abortion, God wants you to hand over your burden of guilt and sorrow to Jesus. Perhaps you are feeling that what you have done is a sin too big to be forgiven. This is not true. **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"** (1 John 1:9).

Even though he knew better, King David sinned a grievous sin against God. He admitted, **"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer"** (Psalm 32:3-4).

Hope in His Healing - After the Abortion

But what happened when David laid this great sin before God? He continues, **“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin”** (v. 5).

God didn’t just talk about His love for you—He proved it by sending His only Son, Jesus Christ, to be your personal Savior. Jesus paid the price for all sins of every kind, which includes abortion.

Today can be a new beginning for you. God doesn’t want you to carry around the baggage of your sins. He doesn’t desire that you be anxious or angry. He wants to release you from your shame and guilt.

He wants to restore you to Himself. That’s why He invites you to confess your sin, turn away from it, and, through the gentle urging of His Holy Spirit, accept His love and forgiveness. Accepting the gift of His forgiveness also requires you to forgive yourself!

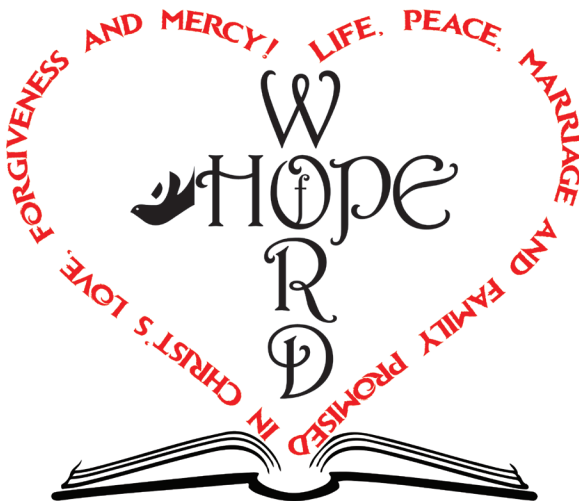
Through the power of Christ’s death and resurrection, you are set free to rejoice in the newness of life! Through His peace that passes all understanding, you are free to be a living example of God’s grace and mercy.

Will you accept God’s grace and mercy with this prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, I am truly sorry for what I have done. Take my pain and dry my tears. Grant me hope in the healing love of my Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

For assistance, information, or someone to talk to or pray with you, please contact Word of Hope, a ministry of Lutherans For Life, at 888.217.8679.

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