

God's Amazing Mercy

Healing After Abortion



Written by Janice Carleton

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“Who is there like You, the God who removes guilt and pardons sin; Who does not persist in anger forever, but delights rather in mercy, and will again have compassion on us, treading underfoot our guilt? You will cast into the depths of the sea all our sins.”
(Micah 7:18-19)

I've written this booklet in the hopes that God will use my story to help someone else – especially by contrasting my story with the story of another woman who made a different decision than I did. Hopefully, our stories will help others choose life and not be fooled by the lies of the pro-choice culture in which we live.

Just as I was starting my freshman year of college, I found out I was pregnant. I had dated one guy all through high school and right before I left for college, we got drunk and I slept with him (three years of firm resolve out the window in one night). He said he knew where we could go to “take care of the problem.” We were told it was just a blob of cells, that our problems would be over quickly, and that no one would ever know.

I was afraid to tell my parents. I was so ashamed, and I didn't want to disappoint them. I even talked with a counselor at the college I was attending, but she had no suggestions for me. Since I couldn't see any other options, I closed the door to my heart, and my soul, and to God. I didn't want to think about it, so I shut off my emotions and just went ahead with it. The procedure was a nightmare, but I will spare you the details. I started hemorrhaging later that night back at my dorm room and ended up in the emergency room.

The weekend after we aborted our baby I went home with a friend. Her mother was ranting and raving and threw a magazine down on the table for us to see. It was the picture of an aborted baby at 10 weeks. *It was like I was looking at my baby.* I almost got sick. This woman was a mother of 10 and the horror of abortion made her rightfully angry, but her cussing and screaming made me feel judged and condemned. I couldn't believe what I had done. I went straight to confession, but I didn't feel forgiven. I just couldn't believe that God could forgive such a horrible thing. I was convinced that He would never forgive me and that no one could love me if they knew what I had done.

On two occasions, I considered killing myself and got very close one day. I was driving down the freeway and thought if I crossed over into oncoming traffic it would be over in an instant. I just wanted the pain to go away. Fortunately for me, I didn't go through with it. But whenever I thought about what I had done, the guilt and sorrow would almost suffocate me. So much for "taking care of the problem." Abortion may get you out of a difficult situation, but it causes a lot of emotional suffering for you later on, let alone the suffering to your baby and the loss of that precious life. Some women die from the complications of abortion, and some can never again bear children.

Whenever the subject of abortion came up in conversation, I would spiral into a place of self-hate and fear of God's judgment. Finally after eight years of suffering, I went to a priest for the umpteenth time to confess my sin, and he was able to help me! He showed me this verse in the bible: "I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:34b) Father Tom said that God had forgiven me the first time I went to confession, but that *I hadn't forgiven myself.*

He was so right! I couldn't believe that my fear of what my parents would think robbed my baby of life! I still wonder sometimes what gift he or she would have given to our world. . . . There is a story told about Mother Teresa where someone asks her why God hasn't sent the cure for Aids. She is said to have replied: "God did send the cure, but the person was aborted." How many geniuses have been aborted? How many answers to prayer? How different would our world be today if all the babies who were aborted had been given the chance to live?

It's very difficult to forgive yourself for such a selfish sin, but after meeting with Father Tom that day, I finally saw that if God could forgive me, then I needed to forgive myself. I wrote a letter to my child asking for forgiveness and started to believe that God truly had forgiven me. I know now that Satan wants us to believe that God can't forgive us . . . but He can and He does . . . and He will! What amazing grace that can forgive such big mistakes. When we mess up, God doesn't condemn us, He loves us back to wholeness. He understands and helps us learn from our mistakes. Even though I felt that my life was over (or should be) it wasn't. God still had a good plan for my future. Not only did God forgive me, but he wiped the slate clean. God's mercy is amazing! He can and does forgive us for whatever we've done wrong when we are truly sorry and confess our sin. Healing takes time, but it is possible with God's unconditional love.

A Different Story

Let's now contrast my story with the story of a young woman I met on retreat last summer. Let's call her Mary. Mary had been an up-and-coming young businesswoman. She was very bright and had just landed the job of her dreams. She could write her own ticket and live the life she had always dreamed of. She and her boyfriend were

planning on marrying someday, but didn't see any reason to hurry into a life-long commitment.

Then she found out she was pregnant. She told her boyfriend and he told her to have an abortion if she wanted him to stick around. She too felt that was a reasonable solution because she wasn't ready to be a mom, especially with her career just taking off. She fully intended to go through with the abortion, but something told her that she should first call the Sisters of Life. She made that phone call and agreed to meet with one of the sisters before keeping the appointment.

That meeting changed her life (and saved the life of her unborn baby). She put off having the abortion and began to look at what really mattered to her. Meeting with the Sisters helped her to set aside her own plans to consider the life of her baby. In time she knew deep down that she wanted to have this baby, wanted to meet him or her, and believed that God would lead her into His plan for her life. Her boyfriend moved on as he wasn't ready for a family.

With the Sisters' help, Mary started a new life for herself and her child. Eventually, she fell in love with another man, married and together they had another child. When I met her, they were having the new baby baptized and I got to meet their little girl who would have been aborted.

To see how God worked things out for her touched me deeply. It made me sad that I didn't know anyone to call who could have helped me choose life. And it made me ache for all the women today who don't know about the help that is available to them and who, like I did, feel that abortion is their only option. Hearing Mary's story makes me want to help others choose life.

You Can be Forgiven!

“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)

What I have come to understand is that Satan loves to keep us bound up in guilt and remind us often of our mistakes and failures. This is called condemnation, but with the Lord, we are no longer condemned: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1) We are forgiven and redeemed, and precious to God! There is mercy for us, no matter what we’ve done. Our mistakes can only continue to harm and torment us if we keep them in the dark. Confession lets the light of God’s healing love rescue us from the pit of darkness, despair, and unforgiveness. When we share our story with someone who understands, and confess our sin, we can experience God’s unconditional love. Rather than condemning us, God longs to show us that He loves us and forgives us, and will help us find healing.

Help for Those Suffering from Abortion

Many women never tell anyone that they have suffered an abortion because of the overwhelming guilt and shame that haunts them. Men too suffer from abortion and we sometimes forget that the father of the baby also needs healing. Men may have terrible guilt, especially if they pushed their partner to “take care of the problem.” They experience pain and grief too, and need forgiveness and compassion to come to peace with what they have done. You may also be carrying guilt and bad feelings if you took a friend or encouraged someone to have an abortion. Often grandparents and siblings need to grieve as well.

If you or someone you know has suffered from abortion, please don’t bear this sorrow alone. There are many organizations that can help including:

Lumina: <http://postabortionhelp.org/pah/>
Call 877-586-4621 or e-mail us at
lumina@postabortionhelp.org

Project Rachel: <http://hopeafterabortion.com/>
888-456-4673 during regular business hours ET

Rachel's Vineyard: <http://www.rachelsvineyard.org/>
“Do not continue to live in the shame, fear, or numbness.” Call 877-467-3463

Help is also available from the Sisters of Life who host retreats for men and women who have suffered from abortion. This quote is from their brochure: “Prayer and Healing Retreats – help for those suffering the effects of abortion. We offer a safe place, a way out of the pain, in a non-judgmental atmosphere. Call 866-575-0075 for more information.” They also have a webpage called “Hope and Healing after Abortion” at this link: <http://sistersoflife.org/hope-and-healing-after-abortion>.

Going on a retreat is a wonderful way to begin the healing process. Healing takes time, but eventually, you can live in freedom from the guilt and shame.

I hope you haven't suffered an abortion, but everyone struggles with something. “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) It's so important to know that God never stops loving us, even when we fall. Remember – there is *nothing* we can do that will stop God from loving us. He will forgive anything when we turn to Him in repentance. Don't let the past rob you of the joy and peace God wants for you. Confess your sin and let the Lord give you a clean heart and a brand new start. Knowing that God forgave me was an incredible experience! Once I received His forgiveness, I quit beating myself up. I was able to let go of the past and begin living the abundant life that Jesus died to give me. Thank you Lord, for saving me and setting me free. He wants to do the same thing for you!

Calling the Church to Compassion and Action

*“Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.”
(Luke 23:34)*

Most people would not call me a murderer to my face, but it has happened in a group when the topic of conversation is abortion. In a Bible Study one day the leader said, “I don’t understand how a woman could murder her own baby.” I couldn’t keep quiet any longer, so I told the whole group how it could happen, and how it does happen. I told them that whenever they talk about abortion, they need to choose their words carefully, because someone in the room has probably suffered an abortion. Abortion is evil, but the women who have them are not.

Many have been lied to, and believe they are making the best decision they can with the information they have been given. After class that day, two women called to thank me for speaking up for them. They too had had abortions, but had never been able to tell anyone.

We definitely need to speak the truth of what abortion is, but we need to balance our comments with love and compassion. Saying “How could anyone murder their own baby?” is very different from, “It’s so sad that someone would feel that abortion is their only option. How could we help them choose life?” Your words can help someone find healing or they can judge and condemn them.

We can make a difference! We can offer women in difficult situations the hope they need to make the more difficult but better decision. We can walk with them, listen to them and save them from remorse, regret and shame. We can drive them to doctor’s appointments, pray for them and help them find jobs and places to live. What could be

better than saving a precious baby's life? Let's help them choose life!

As parents, we need to be sure that our kids know they can come to us with any problem! We can instill a confidence in them from the time they are little, that we will love them no matter what they do and that we want them to tell us if they get into any kind of trouble. We need to listen to them without judging them and tell them every day that we love them. They need to know that we are there for them even if their actions are wrong, and that we will help them find their way.

We can also pray for the people who work at abortion clinics. I used to be very judgmental of anyone who worked at one. When I lived in Chico, California, I prayed once a week at Planned Parenthood with a friend. We would take our walk around and around the clinic praying that the women going in would change their minds, or that the electricity would go off and they would have to close for the day. We prayed and prayed that the hearts of the doctors would be changed and that their eyes would be opened to the reality of what they were doing.

At this clinic there were "escorts" who sat at the door of the building. They would run over to a car when a client would arrive and rush them inside before a pro-life person could talk to them or hand them information about abortion. One day when we were walking, it was very cold. Since we were walking, we quickly warmed up and didn't need our gloves. As we came around to the front of the building, I sensed the Lord asking me to give my gloves to the escort sitting there who was obviously very cold. I stopped and asked him if he would like to wear my gloves while I finished my walk. He looked at me curiously and then said, "Yes, please, that would be nice."

I will never forget that experience. It was a great reminder to me that *we need to fight evil, but not judge others*. The Lord showed me that He loves that man just as much as He loves me! And that we are really very much alike . . . because we both feel called to do something for a cause we believe in. He believes in a woman's right to choose and I believe life begins at conception and needs to be protected. It's not my job to judge him – it's my job to be kind to him as I should be to all of God's children. Remember the song, the "Love Round"? "Love, love, love, love. Christians this is your call. Love your neighbor as yourself, for God loves us all." Lord, please help me to judge a little less, and love a lot more! And please, Lord, help more and more abortionists and clinic workers come to see the truth of what abortion is and become advocates for life!

This scripture came to mind that day: "I know your deeds; I know you are neither hot nor cold. How I wish you were one or the other – hot or cold! But because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spew you out of my mouth!" (Revelation 3:15-16)

If you aren't already involved in helping the pro-life effort, please pray about finding a way to get involved. If we all do our part, we can turn the tide of this culture of death. The least we can do is pray every day for life. This prayer is from the National Prayer for Life Campaign:

Eternal Father, Source of Life, open our hearts to see and desire the beauty of your plan for life and love. Fill us with your Holy Spirit so that our love will be generous and self-giving and we may be blessed with joy. Grant us great trust in your mercy. Forgive us for not receiving your gift of life and heal us from the effects of the culture of death. Instill in us and in all people a sense of the sacredness of

every human life. Inspire our efforts to protect and care for the most vulnerable, especially women who are pregnant and their unborn children, the sick and the elderly. Strengthen us in the hope that with you nothing is impossible. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who by his Cross makes all things new. Amen. Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of Life, pray for us.

You can pray this prayer online with the Sisters of Life at this link: <http://www.nationalprayerforlife.org/en/index.html>.

God Works All Things for Good

“We know that God makes all things work together for the good of those who have been called according to his decree.” (Romans 8:28)

So what good could possibly come out of my story? Besides experiencing God’s amazing mercy, I have been able to speak at conferences and am available to share with women facing an unwanted pregnancy. I also speak at high schools encouraging the students to choose life rather than abortion. I believe that because I speak from personal experience, my story touches the kids and definitely makes them think. Many reconsider their pro-choice stance, and many get help for a current pregnancy, or find the forgiveness that has eluded them.

An important word of caution: *before* you share your abortion story publicly, be sure that all of your family members are ready for you to do that. Don’t assume that they will want you to speak out, even though it can help others. We are all different, and some may need more time than others to process the reality of what you did. Let them help you decide when or if it’s time to go public. It’s important to prayerfully discern when and how to share

your story. Your spiritual director could help you with this process. Until then, you can actively pray for the pro-life movement and also find ways to share privately with women who need your help and experience.

God continues to use my experience for good through my son Jerry and his wife Heather. They feel called to support homes for unwed mothers and they speak up for life whenever they have the chance. I will let him tell you in his own words:

I cannot adequately capture the graces and blessings that God has been able to bring about through the tragedy that was my mom's abortion, but I will try. The first manifestations of God using this for good came before I even knew of her abortion. I've had a strong calling since childhood to help with pro-life causes. When mom told us about her abortion, it clicked for me that this calling was very intimate for me – I had a sibling in heaven, and a mother who was still healing from what had happened. I needed to do whatever I could to help others not experience the same type of tragedy. Knowing of my mom's abortion not only strengthened my resolve to help, but it gave me a certain credibility on why I wanted to help. I am an affluent white male, and in some circles as I try to help, I'm told that I don't have any standing to participate in the dialogue. I am not a woman (and because of that, I can't get pregnant), and I haven't experienced poverty or racism or some other outside force that many use as a justification for why access to abortion should be protected. However, now that I can explain the family experience that I come from, and how I've seen firsthand how damaging abortion can be to a

loved one and how long the healing process can take, I'm allowed to have an opinion.

Beyond that, and more importantly, my mom's experience has taught me that abortion isn't just about the baby's life that is lost. Abortion also means significant pain for the woman who found herself in the crisis pregnancy situation, and how important it is that we not only try to help avoid those type tragedies, but that it's important to reach out in love to assist all women who have been through the tragedy with the healing process. My calling grew into a more holistic mission. Don't just raise the prolife banner, but do something to help the women and the babies in all phases of this issue. Some examples of the actions God has called my wife and I to because of that include involvement with a maternity home ministry called Saint Child (whose focus is on the child in the womb, as well as the child with the womb), and then creating the Hope Squared Foundation (a foundation to raise funds for maternity homes like Saint Child focused on the same mission). Hundreds of lives have been impacted through this work to date, and God willing, hundreds more will be impacted as we continue.

Hitting even closer to home though, my wife and I have adopted two little girls. Part of our holistic approach in helping is to ensure viable options for women facing crisis pregnancy, so being involved with maternity homes was a start, but joining the lives of Kenlyn and Kyra (our birthmoms), bringing our two little miracles home (Ellie and Emma), and restructuring our family accordingly has changed all of our lives, eternally,

and for the better. And it all started with my mom's abortion. Her pain started our call to action, and we're so very blessed to be called. We often hear that God can use anything for good for those that trust Him, but in this situation, we are blessed to actually live out that truth.

It's also amazing to me, and oh so wonderful, that God has called our daughter to join the Sisters of Life, whose main charism is to enhance and protect the sacredness of human life from conception until natural death. These Sisters give their lives to help women choose life; to help women (and men) heal after suffering from an abortion; and to help change our world's culture of death into a culture of life, one person at a time.

If you are pregnant and need help, or if you know someone who is, I invite you to visit the Sisters of Life website at <http://sistersoflife.org>. Please don't hesitate to let them help you. They will be happy to listen and assist you in finding the help you need.

Thank you for reading this booklet. Please share it with others who may benefit from my story. For additional copies email: janice@janicecarleton.com.



This booklet is an excerpt from Janice's book; *God Speaks to Ordinary People Like You and Me*. Her books and music are available at: www.janicecarleton.com

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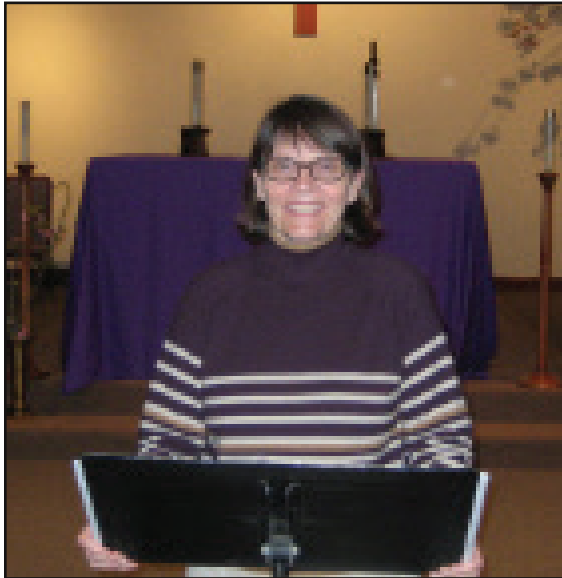
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Janice is available to speak at pro-life rallies, youth groups, and schools.

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