

FACILITATOR'S COMPANION TO

Transforming Your Story

A Path to Healing after Abortion

WENDY
GIANCOLA

*I will return her wings
to her and
transform the Valley of Trouble into
a pathway of hope.*



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CHPC
Washington, DC

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*The disciples came up and asked, “Why do you tell stories?”
He replied, “You’ve been given insight into God’s kingdom. You
know how it works. Not everybody has this gift, this insight; it hasn’t
been given to them. Whenever someone has a ready heart for this, the
insights and understandings flow freely. But if there is no readiness, any
trace of receptivity soon disappears. That’s why I tell stories: to create
readiness, to nudge the people toward receptive insight. In their present
state they can stare till doomsday and not see it, listen till they’re
blue in the face and not get it.”*

— EUGENE PETERSON’S TRANSLATION OF MATTHEW 13:10–13



WALKING THE PATH TOGETHER

Companion Overview

This facilitator's companion to *Transforming Your Story: A Path to Healing after Abortion* is designed to offer suggestions and ideas for group facilitators. The main guidebook for group participants incorporates biblical stories and present-day personal stories to help women recover from the pain of an abortion and lead them toward healing. Abortion recovery is a personal journey, and every story is unique, influenced by different people, circumstances, and decisions. This facilitator's companion is designed to offer suggestions and ideas for abortion recovery group facilitators.

For women going through this process, a group setting—a safe community—is ideal, offering powerful support and growth while easing fear and isolation. A group facilitator's role is to guide and support the group members through the stories and Scriptures and to nudge them toward helpful personal insights, with the goal of applying the material to their own lives. Then they can find hope for transformation in God.

Members are invited to ponder the stories and experiences of the Bible, seeing themselves as characters in each story. As they do, they can progress from knowing *about* God to knowing Him personally.

QUALITIES OF LEADERS

Group facilitation requires time, passion, and commitment. It is best for groups to be guided by two facilitators who will share the practical, emotional, and spiritual responsibilities and who will pray for and with each other—and the group members—regularly (Mark 6:7, Luke 10:1). Ideally, facilitators will have support and accountability from

a leadership body, such as a church, a pregnancy center, or another ministry.

The most effective dynamic is to enlist at least one facilitator who has experienced emotional and spiritual healing following an abortion. This sense of shared experience creates greater identification between the leader and the group and engenders greater comfort for group members. Those who have not experienced an abortion are also candidates to facilitate. It is helpful for these individuals to have received healing from another grief or trauma, have a solid knowledge of post-abortion stress, and have a heart and passion for helping others. All facilitators need to be nonjudgmental and willing to share their own experience, strength, and hope with the group honestly and authentically.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR GROUP

Facilitators are encouraged to speak with or meet with each interested participant in advance of the first group session. Doing this has two benefits: It allows potential participants to become familiar and comfortable with the facilitator, and it allows the facilitator to learn about each woman's specific needs and concerns. The initial contact is a time to establish her safety and confidentiality. Below are suggestions for this initial meeting.

- Acknowledge the woman's courage in seeking help and ease into a discussion of what brought her to see you. Encourage her to share her current thoughts, emotions, and reactions to the extent she is comfortable and listen for signs of post-abortion stress as she tells her story.
- Reassure her that others respond in similar ways.
- Ask about her current and past relationships with God and significant others, including the father of the baby.
- Find out if she has sought other help previously (counseling, medication), and ask who currently offers her emotional support.

- Sometimes one-on-one mentoring is a better option for healing than participating in a group. Ask about circumstances that suggest that the woman may not be ready to join a group, such as addictions, current physical or emotional abuse, mental health problems (e.g., severe depression), suicidal thoughts or attempts, and other signs of current crisis. If indicated, refer her to a doctor, psychologist, counselor, or social worker. When other situations are too numerous or overwhelming, she may be unable to work through her abortion pain.

Another factor to consider in group participation is whether a woman's abortion occurred within the past nine months. Physiologically, she may not be ready to engage in a group healing process, owing to hormones and body chemistry. Vicki Thorn, a certified bereavement facilitator and executive director of the National Office of Post-Abortion Reconciliation and Healing, suggests this may be linked to something currently being researched called microchimerism, a biological process in which cells from the fetus are passed to the mother within four weeks of conception and may remain for decades, whether the child is birthed or aborted.¹ According to Thorn, this cellular connection with the baby may be part of the reason why hormonal responses remain with post-abortive women until after they reach the baby's anticipated due date. In addition, Thorn believes women may be unable to grieve their abortive loss fully until after the due date, when the body physiologically senses completion of the pregnancy.

Thus, it may be wise to give a newly post-abortive woman time to settle physically, emotionally, and mentally rather than placing her immediately into a group. Instead, consider meeting with her one on one. Use the time to offer her the support of a listening ear, and provide her with resources to help her with other complicating factors in her life where possible. Be patient with her, as she may simply need to talk and may repeat herself at times while being unable to move forward yet. It is also helpful to suggest she practice self-care such as eating well (a balanced diet, with protein and vegetables), sleeping

enough (including twenty-minute naps if needed), and engaging in aerobic exercise (such as a twenty-minute walk three to five times per week). At some point after her due date and several meetings with you, she may be better equipped to process her complicated grief.

Facilitators are to maintain confidentiality *except* when a woman declares any intent or plan to harm herself or others. In such situations, the facilitator should seek professional help for the person immediately.

SETTING THE TONE

It is vital to ease the group's concerns from the very beginning. Facilitators set the tone for a group by being reliable, humble, and calm. Compassion and empathy—not sympathy—are key qualities, as are good communication skills. Each woman will be dealing with a range of feelings and issues, so facilitators must demonstrate sensitivity and patience (be prepared to deal with strong emotions, language, or both!).

- Be sure to set and maintain healthy boundaries with group members, and practice good self-care by rejuvenating your own spirit through prayer, journaling, and rest.
- Maintain a network of supporters to pray for and with you before you begin an abortion recovery group as well as throughout its duration and after its completion.
- Limit your group to no more than five women. This size enhances group experiences, yet allows enough discussion time for all to contribute.
- Contact members once each week (between sessions) to encourage, answer questions, or pray.

HOW TO USE THIS COMPANION

This companion provides discussion questions for each chapter and ideas for adapting the activities found in the book to a group setting.

Each healing group consists of unique individuals with unique stories, so each group may require a different approach from the next. Some groups may benefit from questions that tap into the truth, while

others may need action to pull out stubborn Enemy lies, while still others may need prayer regarding forgiveness. Some groups may be more talkative; others may prefer more exercises and lengthy prayer times. Be flexible as a facilitator and actively listen to the group members to understand how to best meet their needs. There is no particular formula to follow; the tips and tools contained here are just options for your consideration.

It is beneficial for facilitators to complete each chapter alongside the group in order to gain fresh insights from the Holy Spirit for each topic and each group. Resist the temptation to work too far ahead of the group.

With each group, encourage participation, but do not force it. Encourage women to place themselves in the stories to foster relational awareness and experience of Jesus. The discussion questions here are open-ended, to allow for contemplation and sharing.

The supplemental materials in *Transforming Your Story* include a sample group commitment form, which contains guidelines regarding confidentiality, participation, and respect for everyone. As a facilitator, you will guide the group session by practicing good communication skills. This includes being aware of your own posture and facial expressions to ensure you are generating a sense of interest and concern. In addition, actively listen for both the verbal and nonverbal cues of the participants. Ask open-ended “what,” “how,” “when,” and “where” questions to dig deeper into the details of group members’ stories. Summarize or rephrase what a participant has said to ensure understanding and foster engagement, but don’t be concerned about periods of silence. Silence allows members to think about their own experiences and process the questions being put to them. Remember, each participant is ultimately responsible for her own healing journey.

Encourage the review and use of the practical toolkits offered throughout the guidebook. These will be highlighted in the appropriate chapters in this facilitator’s companion. Do not skip the activities that include movement. Memories are kept not only in the mind but also in the body, so movement helps people to process the emotions connected to their memories. Embodied movement also assists with

integrating the concepts being learned. Incorporate video and music as appropriate, to engage the group, and be sensitive to the learning styles of your group members. Some ideas are listed in certain chapter reviews, but there are more options available—experiment!

Your most important responsibility, though, is to seek the Holy Spirit and ask for His guidance for every session each week. He may give you other ideas for discussion questions, activities, music, and videos. Be flexible and open to changes He may reveal. Remember that you are not responsible for the participants' ultimate healing. You may desire to see them healed, but be cautious that it not become your goal for the group. Healing is God's responsibility! Focus on caring for the participants and allow the Healer to do His work!

JOURNEY FURTHER

More in-depth information about abortion and recovery can be found in books such as *Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion* by Theresa Burke and David C. Reardon and *A Solitary Sorrow: Finding Healing and Wholeness after Abortion* by Teri Reisser and Paul Reisser.



A TROUBLED STORY

Session 1: Guidebook Introduction

This session is an introduction to Post-abortion Syndrome (PAS), providing attendees with an opportunity to connect their present difficulties with a past abortion. They will learn that healing is possible, and they can sample both the book and the discussion format to determine whether they desire to continue in the group. (You may choose to provide everyone a preview copy of *Transforming Your Story* in advance of the session, or you may wish to provide the material at the beginning of this first meeting.)

Please remember to introduce yourself and help group members understand your heart for post-abortion healing. This is not the time to share your full story (that is done later), but to share enough to put everyone at ease. This should be done by both co-facilitators.

The women may be tense and unsure at this first meeting, so one way to calm nerves is to offer a deep breathing exercise. Suggest that they focus on their breathing and inhale while counting to five and exhale while counting to five. Try this exercise several times. Once calmed, encourage everyone to introduce themselves and answer an easy, nonthreatening, open-ended question to get acquainted with one another on a surface level. One example is sharing a favorite something: a hobby, a subject in school, a movie, a book, or something similar. You can ask why it is a favorite, or you may choose to allow the women to relate to each other briefly if they find a common interest. A group is less threatening when there is common ground. Remind everyone of confidentiality, and bring them back to the shared focus of the group: a desire for recovery from an abortion.

WHERE TO BEGIN

Review the introduction to the *Transforming Your Story* guidebook briefly, and give group members time to go through the “Where Are You?” checklist found on pages 8–9. Consider highlighting a few of the items that once applied to you and ask if anyone wishes to comment on the list (were any items surprising, concerning, confusing, etc.) Some group members may not yet be comfortable enough to share, so do not push.

If possible, show a video of Jesus’ exchange with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:4–19). (One good option for this is the scene from the movie *The Gospel of John*.) Alternatively, read the story aloud. The questions for this story can then be discussed as the women picture the encounter and ponder its implications.

You may wish to choose a few of the easier—that is, less personal—questions from the book to ask first (e.g., the one about why the woman waited to go to the well). Encourage group members to answer aloud if they are comfortable speaking up, but be sensitive to the fact that some may be uneasy at first discussing such topics in front of a group. Remember, you don’t have to force answers, but don’t move ahead too quickly, either. Highlight any insights you may have regarding the passage and the discussion questions.

Ask some of the more personal questions as well (e.g., “What type of thirst do you want satisfied or healed?”). These may be more difficult to answer. Sometimes it is enough to ask the question and leave group members to ponder it for themselves. Once again, if there is silence after a question, don’t be afraid to let it linger. A personal comment from you relating the question to your own life story may give them courage to respond.

Last, highlight the final point in the questions: that Jesus wishes to offer them living water! Give a brief overview of the journey ahead, including the commitment involved and the ultimate goal (healing).

MAKE IT PERSONAL ACTIVITY, GUIDEBOOK PAGE 14

Have a pitcher of water and some cups available in the session. Note that group members can choose whether or not to drink the “living

water” that is being offered. You may wish to play music and encourage them to ponder this offer as you gather your cups and water. (One suggestion for music is Brenton Brown’s song “All Who Are Thirsty,” performed by Kutless or Jeremy Riddle.) As the group listens to the music, approach each woman and ask if she wishes to receive a cup of water, and if she chooses it, pour it and give it to her as a symbolic gesture of Christ’s gift of hope and transformation. The key here is to help the women recognize that although the gift is always available, they must actively choose to accept it before it can bring change.

You may wish to explain that sometimes a woman may decide at this point not to continue in the group. Offer an opportunity for such individuals to leave if they do not wish to hear the group details and commitments, but remind them that they are always welcome to join a future group. All the women are welcome to stay through the details if they wish.

For those who desire to continue with abortion recovery and remain in the group, please review the details once again, including the schedule, the time required, and the attendance commitment. Explain that no new members will be added after the second session to ensure safety and confidentiality.

Review the sample group commitment form found on page 143 in the supplemental materials section of *Transforming Your Story*.

Ask group members to sign the commitment form, and make copies of the form for yourself (or bring separate blank copies for them to sign for you). This helps to ensure their understanding of the expectations.

You may consider creating an agreement form that confirms members’ understanding that facilitators are not professional counselors, that the book and group sessions will be based on the Bible and prayer, that discussions will be kept confidential, and that they can expect various emotions to surface throughout the journey, owing to the nature of grief and healing.

CLOSING

Close the group in prayer, ensuring that members have contact information for both co-facilitators. Assign guidebook chapter 1, “Reveal

the Story.” Explain that within the chapter and page 145 of the supplemental materials section are some “thought starters” to help everyone prepare to share her abortion story at the next meeting. Reassure the group of confidentiality in the next session and explain that you will share your story first.

Answer any remaining questions as you can, and remind everyone of the date and time of the next meeting.



REVEAL THE STORY

Session 2: Guidebook Chapter 1

This lesson helps group members recognize their inability to heal themselves and gives them hope that God can accomplish that healing. They begin to connect their stories to those of people in the Bible who made painful choices. They also share their own experiences, allowing God to bring restoration.

OPENING

Open your time together in prayer. Offer another deep breathing exercise to calm nerves as needed. Review the Group Commitment to ensure everyone is clear on the ground rules, particularly regarding sharing (confidentiality, no judgment, etc.). Review the lesson briefly, highlighting insights you've had on the Scriptures in the chapter, and be sure to note the importance in the healing process of sharing one's secret. We process thinking and feeling, writing and hearing differently, so sharing aloud in a supportive environment can provide deeper personal insight and promote healing as we share.

MAKE IT PERSONAL ACTIVITY, GUIDEBOOK PAGE 27

Most of the time in this session should be devoted to sharing stories. At least one facilitator should begin by sharing her own, perhaps using the "Further Questions to Consider" document found on page 145 in the guidebook's supplemental materials. This sets the tone for others to share, so consider in advance what you will share, the amount of detail, and the length of time you will take. If the group is sizable, you may wish to give the group members an estimated amount of time they will each be able to share. Every individual is unique and will share differently.

Listen attentively, and be in prayer for each person as she speaks. As a facilitator, you may wish to take a few notes to help you better understand each participant's needs, but be sure to obtain permission for note-taking in advance.

If no one else is ready to start after the first facilitator is done, then the second facilitator may share, continuing the tone of honesty and freedom. If others share easily, however, the second facilitator may speak last, and she should speak only briefly if time is running short.

Allow each person to finish without comment from others or yourself. This may be the first time some of these women have shared their stories, so it is important to allow them to simply speak, without interruption, to break the power this secret has had over them. Be sure to have tissues handy for everyone! You can close each person's time by simply stating, "Thank you for your courage in sharing." More of each woman's story will be revealed in the coming weeks as the group further explores their stories together, and during those times of sharing, you may ask for additional particulars. Members may find that they identify with these details from each other's experiences.

MAKE IT PERSONAL ACTIVITY, GUIDEBOOK PAGE 30

The purpose of the second "Make It Personal" activity is to help the women personalize their desire to get well and to remind them of God's desire to heal them, even though He knows their story.

Option 1. This lesson ends with the story of Jesus and the lame man. At the end of the session, give everyone a mat or "bedroll." You can use table placemats, square scarves, large pieces of craft paper, or other material. Encourage everyone to either kneel or place her folded hands on the mat as if to pray and close her eyes while you read this story aloud. Note in particular Jesus' healing response to the lame man. While they keep their eyes closed, approach each participant individually and ask, "[Name], do you want to get well?" As the women respond, encourage them to share their hearts with Jesus in prayer regarding their desire to get well. If your space allows for it, let them find a private spot away from the group if they wish.

Tell them when they finish speaking to Him to pick up their mats and walk, returning the mat to you or another location in the room. End the session in prayer—perhaps with a blessing or benediction such as, “Lord, may Your healing touch be upon these women.” You may wish to have music, either instrumental or vocal, playing in the background during the prayers. Examples include music by Julie True or the song “Healer” by Ten Shekel Shirt.

Option 2. A portion of Psalm 139 will be discussed in the next lesson, which is on learning the truth. Read the first ten verses of this psalm while the women listen with eyes closed. Emphasize verse 10, which describes God’s guidance and support. Also highlight God’s hand of blessing on us (verse 5). While their eyes remain closed, approach the women one by one and place your hand on their heads as you offer a blessing for guidance and healing.

CLOSING

If you have time at the end of the session, you may wish to invite group members to share anything they found noteworthy in chapter 1.

Close in prayer and encourage members to practice good self-care throughout this journey, including rest, eating well, exercise, and deep breathing or other relaxation techniques. Assign guidebook chapter 2, “Lift the Veil,” and refer to the Responsibility and Influence Pie worksheet on page 149 in the supplemental materials section. (Group members are asked to divide the pie into sections according to their view of what level of responsibility for their abortion decision falls to themselves, to other individuals, and to institutions.)



LIFT THE VEIL

Session 3: Guidebook Chapter 2

This key lesson brings a greater awareness of the painful truth about the abortion choice. Facing the truth will help members to better understand their thoughts and beliefs. Exploring their coping mechanisms will allow them to accept (and assign) responsibility as appropriate so they can begin to grieve their loss. They will also learn more about God's desire to heal them and about the Enemy's desire to accuse and harass. They will be presented with an action plan to fend off his lies and assaults. Members are invited to continue the healing journey and to make a decision whether to trust God and do so. Extra prayer for this lesson is suggested.

OPENING

Open the session in prayer. Review the chapter as appropriate for the group, highlighting insights you've gained during your preparations. Below are some potential questions that relate to the reading that you may ask to spark discussion and participation among the group. Be aware that some questions do not correlate exactly to specific questions in the guidebook. Rather, they are designed to expand and build on the participants' reading.

Note that the stories in this lesson delineate a variety of coping strategies (denial, blame, rationalizing or reasoning, withdrawal, repression, and so on). Then bring up some of the following questions, or similar ones.

Let's Talk, guidebook page 41

- Whom do you relate to most—Eve, Adam, or David? In what ways?
- What fears or pressures influenced your decision?

- What coping strategies did you use to manage your feelings before and after the abortion?
- How have those strategies affected you and your personal relationships?

Explain to the group that recognizing what led to destructive choices and recognizing the coping mechanisms that were used to deal with them can help members understand how they have made choices and how to make better choices in the future.

Let's Talk, guidebook page 46

- No matter what the reasons, the path of choice may bring unexpected difficulties after an abortion, as you may have experienced. One study suggests that 65 percent of women who have had an abortion have traumatic responses.² How does this influence your thoughts about abortion?
- In what way did you rely on emotions, distortions, or people to make your abortion decision? What are your thoughts about trusting or relying on God for healing now?

You may wish to note that women were created to nurture, and that abortion strikes against the core of this design. An example of this to share, if appropriate for the group, is the story of Solomon as judge in 1 Kings 3:16–28. In that story two women had a dispute over a baby, and King Solomon ruled that the child should be cut in half and that each woman receive a half. When the women heard his pronouncement, the real mother, not the pretender, was willing to give up her claim to the baby if his life could be spared. Discuss this story as a group.

Draw the women's attention to the stages of fetal development information provided on pages 147–48 of the guidebook. Have pictures, video, or models of fetal development available for the women to review, as appropriate for the group. One good resource is National

Geographic Channel's program *In the Womb* and the book of the same name by Peter Tallack.

Explain that these materials are not about shaming or punishing. Their purpose is to help understand the humanity of the loss so that previously denied grieving can begin in earnest. Balance out the imagery of the developing baby with the view from Scripture, found in Psalm 139 and Jeremiah 1:4–5.

Let's Talk, guidebook page 47

- What was most interesting, surprising, or difficult to learn regarding fetal development?
- What new information have you gained thus far on this path, about abortion or yourself?

Suggest that in acknowledging the truth and agreeing with God about it, we are better equipped to make changes in how we view it and how we allow it to define us. Also note that abortion is a loss to be grieved and explain that through this journey, the women will be able to process their emotions and responses and grieve while God heals the pain. Depending on the group, you may also choose to note the Enemy's role in the abortion choice.

Let's Talk, guidebook page 49

- How do you relate to the woman with the issue of blood? As the lesson says, "If you could touch Jesus' robe, for what would you be desperate?"
- What truths has God shown you about Himself thus far?

Highlight how the Enemy may use doubt, discouragement, and deception (as the serpent did with Eve) to distract group members from healing after abortion. Discuss their action plan to counter this.

To encourage them, let them know you (and a prayer team, if you have one) are praying for them. Be sure to follow up on this and pray throughout the week!

Remind them of God's heart for them, referencing Psalm 139:5, 10 and Psalm 51:7, which show that a broken and repentant heart is not rejected.

Review the Responsibility and Influence Pie worksheet (guidebook page 149) and encourage members to consider the influences that led to their choices, putting responsibilities in proper perspective. Take mental note of anyone who assigns 100 percent responsibility to either self or others, and track changes to this in future sessions. You may also wish to ask whether or how anyone related to the personal story of Annette.

MAKE IT PERSONAL ACTIVITY, GUIDEBOOK PAGE 54

The activity provides women with an opportunity to turn their troubled story over to Jesus and accept His invitation to recover their lives, as noted in Matthew 11:28–30.

Have a cross situated in the room somewhere, perhaps with a basket or tray at the foot. Using the “healing getaway” invitation template, offer an invitation to each group member. Create a response card for members to complete. Here is a sample:

The Favor of a Reply Is Requested

Name: _____

I accept _____

I desire rest or healing from _____

Give each woman an invitation and a response note. Consider marking the envelope in some unnoticeable way so that you will be able to covertly match the envelopes to the participants. Say, “If you are willing to accept this invitation and complete this journey, please complete the reply and then fold it and place it at the foot of the cross,

symbolizing your response to Jesus.” Encourage them to stay at the cross and pray if they would like to.

You may wish to play music in the background as you allow time for each member to ponder her response, complete her reply, and place it at the cross. Examples include instrumental worship music or the song “One Touch” by Nicole C. Mullen. Pray for each woman as she completes the card and places it at the cross. You may wish to keep the completed cards in their envelopes and consider returning them to the participants at the close of the journey. It is amazing to see how God has responded to their reply throughout the journey!

CLOSING

Close the session in prayer. Then assign guidebook chapter 3, “Tame the Heat,” and refer to the next Responsibility and Influence Pie worksheet on page 153 of the supplemental materials section. Encourage the group members to complete this new pie if there are any changes based on any new insight they have gained. Also highlight and encourage the anger-letter-writing activity in the chapter. (These letters are NOT to be sent.) Ask members to bring their anger letters to the next group meeting.



TAME THE HEAT

Session 4: Guidebook Chapter 3

This and the following lesson encourage the group to begin to take inventory of emotions and behaviors related to abortion. This chapter's focus is on anger. Members will learn about types of anger and about how they personally tend to express anger. Healthy and unhealthy expressions of anger will be discussed, and the biblical checklist for managing anger will be reviewed. Finally, this lesson will allow members the opportunity to vent their anger in a healthy way.

OPENING

Open the session in prayer. Highlight insights you've gained during your preparations for this chapter, and then review the lesson in a way that is appropriate for your group. Below are some possible questions to consider discussing with the group in order to build and expand on the reading. Alternatively, you may wish to begin the session by asking group members to share what was most meaningful for them in this lesson, then guide the discussion accordingly.

Let's Talk, guidebook page 58

- What are your initial thoughts and reactions about the topic of anger?
- What did you learn about anger while growing up?

Discuss the function of anger as a warning light, similar to one in a car (as discussed in the guidebook, pages 58, 60). Indicate that numerous things can trigger the warning light—words, maybe, or a situation, a place, a person, a sight, or a sound. Suggest to the women that they look beyond the trigger to determine its source. For example, perhaps an expectation needs to be adjusted, or a hurt or fear

needs to be addressed. If anger stems from an unjust wrong, beneficial alternatives can be explored.

Let's Talk, guidebook pages 62–63

- How was the distinction between definitive and distorted anger helpful?
- Where does your anger come from? What other emotions may be behind it?

If it would be relevant for the group, consider sharing the story of Jonah, particularly Jonah 4:1–11, which addresses Jonah's anger toward God, God's patience, and how He tries to help Jonah see that his anger is distorted. Discuss as a group how this may relate to members' personal stories.

Let's Talk, guidebook pages 61–64

- How do you usually express your anger (by erupting or by smoldering)?
- What is it like for others to be around you when you are angry?
- What purpose has your anger served?

You may wish to highlight that the control anger has over us can manifest in many ways. For example, it may push relationships away if it is harmfully expressed (aggressively or passive-aggressively). If anger is buried and denied too long, it can lead to health problems such as ulcers, headaches, sleeping issues, muscle pain, etc. Encourage the group members to pay attention to when their anger is triggered, and take deep breaths and pray to restore calm to the brain and body so they can respond in a healthy manner.

Reiterate the point that unexpressed anger gives the Enemy a foothold in our lives. Such anger can cause harm, stifle healing, and lead to bitterness. God designed our bodies to experience and express emotion in a constructive manner.

Let's Talk

- What was helpful in the biblical guide for managing anger located in the supplemental materials (pages 151-52)?
- How can this list help you manage your abortion anger?

Page 65 of the guidebook lists common targets of anger after abortion, including God. Some may be uncomfortable admitting or expressing anger toward God. Let the women know that God is already aware of their anger; it is a response to their loss. He wants them to share it with Him honestly. Highlight the psalms of lament (such as Psalm 13) or the story of Job as examples of appropriate biblical expressions of anger toward God. Some may be uncomfortable with anger toward a parent figure. Remind them that anger unexpressed is a greater block to a relationship than is anger expressed in a healthy way.

Let's Talk

Are there any updates to your Responsibility and Influence Pie? What was your role? Your partner's role? Your parents' role? Others' roles?

You may wish to ask whether or how anyone related to the personal story of Sue.

MAKE IT PERSONAL ACTIVITY, GUIDEBOOK PAGE 66

Offer various healthy options for group members to express their anger and bitterness over their abortions. This may be the first time they have expressed their anger, which may have been denied or hidden for a long time. Since people differ in their comfort level with expressing anger, have a range of supplies available so you can offer different activity options.

Option 1. Hearing and releasing the angry words can be powerful and very helpful toward healing as the brain “harmonizes” the words with the emotional experience. Listening to our own words may lead to deeper insight. Reading within the group may also offer a sense of validation to more accurately assess the impact of the abortion. Additional verbal release of anger may include shouting, crying, or wailing. You may wish to remind group members that even Jesus verbalized His (definitive) anger at times. Reiterate that anger letters are not to be sent.

Option 2. Offer the women the opportunity to express anger through art. Art can relieve stress; it is also a meditative activity and can foster connection with God. Art is also helpful for unblocking feelings that cannot be verbalized. Have ample art supplies available, such as paper and crayons, markers, watercolor pencils, stickers, or even Play-Doh. Talent and training are not necessary or important: This is for their healing, so make it clear that they are free to create without rules or judgment. They can choose colors, shapes, or textures to represent their emotions and simply let their ideas flow onto paper.

If you'd like to allow more time for this activity, you can encourage the women to take some supplies home with them and bring their work back the following week. Each member should take time to review her own art upon completion to sense what it means to her. It is not the facilitator's role to judge or interpret anything created by group members; this is merely a way of allowing blocked emotions to flow.

Some may choose multiple methods of expressing anger, while others may struggle to express anything. Encourage participation in some form, simply to release the anger and pain and promote healing, but do not force any particular method on anyone. Encourage them to also engage in an athletic activity outside the group, such as running or another sport, to release pent-up anger energy.

CLOSING

Close in prayer and encourage the women to continue expressing their anger in a healthy way. You may also suggest Psalm 94 as an example of expressing anger to God. Assign guidebook chapter 4, “Climb Out of the Pit,” and note that there is an additional Responsibility and Influence Pie worksheet in the supplemental material if group members want to make any changes based on insights gained from this session.

Additional object lesson to take home. Have small to medium-size rocks available and ask members to choose one rock for each person or institution with whom (or with which) they are still angry. Instruct them to carry these rocks every day, all day, until they are ready to release this burden of anger and forgive. Let them know that forgiveness will be the focus of a future session. This object lesson helps members understand that anger is a burden by which they are weighed down.



CLIMB OUT OF THE PIT

Session 5: Guidebook Chapter 4

This chapter continues to inventory women's post-abortion emotions. The focus here is on depression and the guilt and shame emotions that may lie beneath it. In this session, women will learn the subtle difference between appropriate guilt over the abortion and crushing condemnation and shame. They will learn to focus on God's truth and receive tools to help them reject the lies of shame.

OPENING

Open the session in prayer. Follow up on the previous lesson on anger by asking group members about their experience during the week of carrying their chosen rocks. Ask if anyone is ready to let go of any of their rocks, and why. (Some women may need additional time to process their anger, so allow them to continue to carry their rocks as long as necessary. Each week, offer them an opportunity to release their rock burden.) Ask also if anyone completed artwork or letters at home, and offer them the chance to share their work if they have not done so previously. Members who would like to hold onto art supplies for therapeutic purposes should be allowed to do so if feasible.

Review chapter 4 in the guidebook as appropriate for the group, highlighting insights you've gained during your preparations. Below are some questions to consider asking the group in order to build on and expand the reading and to spark contemplation and participation. Alternatively, you may wish to begin the session by asking group members to share what was most meaningful for them as they prepared for this session, then guide the discussion accordingly.

Let's Talk, guidebook page 70

If you relate to Elijah's depression, what drives that feeling in you? What fears or anxieties have you acknowledged? What bitterness might you be carrying?

If you shared about the story of Jonah in session 4, consider contrasting the stories of Elijah and Jonah. Each prophet suggested that God take his life—one because of fear and anxiety, the other because of bitterness. Allow the women to relate to this if it applies to them. Remind them of the importance of expressing both emotions to help deter depression.

If you sense the need, highlight the notation in the guidebook on the first paragraph of page 71 about severe depression (professional help is recommended in such cases). A checklist of symptoms and a list of potential resources are in the supplemental materials, page 155. Share any additional resources you may have.

Unresolved guilt can lead to physiological responses, as noted in Psalm 38 (see page 72 in the guidebook). This is similar to the effects of unconfessed anger or bitterness on the body, as noted in the previous chapter. This underscores the importance of processing our emotions.

Let's Talk, guidebook pages 72–73

How do you relate to Peter's or David's response to guilt?

Review the need for a “course correction” (guidebook page 73)—the difference between constructive guilt and destructive guilt or distress. (See 2 Corinthians 7:9–10.) Discuss the differences between conviction and condemnation.

Let's Talk

What has been your experience with abortion guilt?

How has it been constructive or destructive in your life?

Discuss the difference between guilt (*I did something wrong*) and shame (*I am wrong*), found on page 74 in the guidebook. Shame involves a sense of unworthiness and unacceptability, which can lead to avoidance of emotional, physical, and mental intimacy. It can rob us of real relationships with others, self, and God.

If possible, show a brief video of Jesus' exchange with the adulterous woman (an excellent portrayal can be found in the movie *The Passion of the Christ*). Or read John 8:1–11 aloud. Encourage group members to imagine themselves as the woman.

Let's Talk, guidebook pages 76–77

- How do you feel? What are your thoughts?
- How do you react to Jesus' words to the adulterous woman—to you?

Consider discussing the story of the Samaritan woman from a shame viewpoint, if time allows and if it would be appropriate for the group.

From page 78 of the guidebook, review and discuss how a stronghold develops: A circumstance (such as abortion) wounds us, thoughts about it become distorted, and we accept and believe Enemy lies about ourselves. This in turn leads to self-condemnation (e.g., *I am a failure*), which then becomes a stronghold of shame and a negative self-identity (*I am hopeless*). When we see ourselves through a negative lens of this type, true intimacy and healthy relationships are hindered.

Let's Talk

What strongholds of lies, if any, do you recognize in your life?

Review the weapons we have to triumph over strongholds: truth, prayer, and safe community. Remind group members of the importance of paying attention to their thoughts and of capturing and refusing them when they are lies and replacing them with truth. This will

take practice, but it can become a habit over time. If pertinent to the group, you may consider sharing a powerful biblical example of community—the story about the friends who brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus by lowering his mat through the roof (Mark 2:1–12).

You may wish to remind group members that shame, although exposed and torn down, can be triggered again by sensations, images, feelings, or situations. The Enemy may use these triggers to reignite the cycle of shame. When you experience sudden shame, breathe deeply, focus on God's truth, pray, and share what happened with a trusted friend. Then consider what may have been the trigger: Sights or sounds reminiscent of past experiences are common examples. Recognizing what triggers shame in you is a first step in confronting it.

MAKE IT PERSONAL ACTIVITY, GUIDEBOOK PAGE 81

This lesson allows group members to tangibly break down a stronghold of lies and replace it with a stronghold of truth. Remind them that, whether shame has come from what they've done (abortion), from something done to them, or from some other source, freedom comes when they reject or tear down lies and replace those lies with truth.

Option 1. Toddler building blocks are ideal for a vital object lesson—creating and dismantling a tangible stronghold. In advance of the session, type or write words associated with shame onto small labels or pieces of masking tape. (Examples include *worthless*, *failure*, *unforgivable*, and *hopeless*.) Make similar labels using the corresponding opposites—that is, words or descriptions taken from the Truth Scriptures on pages 81–82 of the guidebook. (Examples are *valuable*, *chosen for success*, *forgiven*, and *capable*.) Place a shame label on one side of a building block and a truth label on the opposite side. Do this on a number of blocks. Place a few shame blocks on a small base of blank blocks, so you have a small wall for each group member.

During the session, have the women place a few remaining shame blocks on their respective walls. (You can assist if necessary.) You can also give them blank labels and blank blocks so they can add

to their wall any additional shame words or phrases with which they struggle. Remind them that the Lord wishes to release them from strongholds of lies.

Next, urge the group to renounce the lies of shame and destroy the stronghold by pulling the shame-word blocks from their walls. Encourage them to renounce the lies aloud, using the power of light to destroy the darkness of the lies. One example is to say “I am NOT worthless!”

(If you choose to add music to this activity, one option is “Hello, My Name Is” by Matthew West.)

Once the wall is down, remind group members of God’s heart for them by reading Isaiah 61:1–4 aloud. As you read verse 4, remind them of the importance of rebuilding “the ancient ruins” (NIV) with God’s truth, for protection from the Enemy.

Encourage them to turn the blocks over to see the truth words and suggest that they create additional truth labels to place on empty blocks. You may wish to have some blocks ready with words like *freedom*, *beauty*, *joy*, and so forth, to reflect the Isaiah passage.

Ask members to begin a fresh wall and complete it with truth words or Scriptures to counter the lies. Give them suggestions as needed.

(If you choose to play music, some options are “Just the Way I Am” and “Fields of Grace” by Big Daddy Weave and “You Are More” by Tenth Avenue North.)

Option 2. Ask the group to use the worksheets found on pages 159–61 of the guidebook, which look like brick walls. These pages can be removed from the book or photocopied. Ask members to fill in the bricks of the first worksheet with words that trigger feelings of shame in them. Once the wall is completed, have members tear or shred the stronghold of lies. As they tear up the paper, encourage them to renounce the lies of shame aloud, as noted above.

(Once again, if you choose to play music during this activity, one fitting option is “Hello, My Name Is” by Matthew West.)

When the wall is down, remind the women of God's heart for them by reading Isaiah 61:1–4 aloud. As you read verse 4, remind them of the importance of rebuilding “the ancient ruins” (NIV) with God's truth, for protection from the Enemy.

Ask group members to begin a fresh wall, using the second worksheet, and to complete it with words from the Truth Scriptures on pages 81–82 of the guidebook. These truth words will counter the lies. Words such as *free*, *beautiful*, *joyful*, and so forth can also be used to reflect the passage in Isaiah. Give the women suggestions as needed.

(If you choose to play music, some options are “Just the Way I Am” and “Fields of Grace” by Big Daddy Weave and “You Are More” by Tenth Avenue North.)

CLOSING

Refer once again to the Truth Scriptures on pages 81–82 of the guidebook. Encourage group members to plant these verses in their hearts. Encourage them to keep these Scriptures in a visible place to remind them of their value in God's eyes. Suggest that they spend time repeating God's truth every day for three to six months until it becomes part of their thinking.

Some may wish to continue using art to express emotion—whether anger, shame, or something else—so again offer art supplies to anyone who wishes to use them.

Close in prayer and assign guidebook chapter 5, “Surrender to Grace.” Also point to the “Who Is God?” list on guidebook page 169, which describes aspects of God's character with supporting Bible verses. You may wish to have additional copies of this list on hand.

Optional assignment. Encourage group members to ponder and journal each day for a week about one or two of the Truth Scriptures as their personal, true identity. You may wish to invite them to share their insights with one another at the next meeting.



SURRENDER TO GRACE

Session 6: Guidebook Chapter 5

This lesson is intended to help the group members become ready to repent and understand any obstacles in their lives to receiving grace. They receive tools to see God's grace in their lives and gain understanding of His character. Group members are given an opportunity to humbly ask God for His forgiveness and to accept His grace and forgiveness in a tangible and definite way.

OPENING

Open the session in prayer. This session is shorter than some previous sessions to allow for discussion of any outstanding items—perhaps rocks that members wish to return, artwork that they bring from previous sessions, or changes in the responsibility pie. You may also wish to follow up on their journaling on the Truth Scriptures and their identity, if you suggested doing this in session 5.

Highlight insights you've gained during your preparations for this chapter and review the lesson as appropriate for the group. Below are some questions and ideas to consider asking the group in order to build on and expand the reading and spark contemplation and participation. Alternatively, you may wish to begin the session by asking members to share what was most meaningful to them in their reading for the week then guide the discussion accordingly.

Review the story of Peter's betrayal or sin from the previous chapter (guidebook page 71) and the "course correction" offered by Jesus in this chapter, culminating in a grace-filled restoration (page 88).

Let's Talk, guidebook page 88

- What are your reactions to this story of grace and restoration? How do you imagine Peter felt?

- How do you feel about grace being extended to you?

Briefly review the adulterous woman story and “change,” from guidebook page 89.

Let's Talk

What are your thoughts about Jesus' words to the woman and about the concept of change or repentance?

Then review the “Restoration” section on page 91.

Ask the women how they relate to the story of the prodigal son on page 91 of the guidebook. Ask them to close their eyes and picture themselves as the son. Read the story as needed. You may wish to note some highlights, such as the father giving the son *half his estate* while he (the father) was still living; the father *running* to meet the son; the father forgiving the son *before* the son had completed his speech; and the father giving the son a *signet ring* (a sign of authority and restoration). Draw attention to the timeline worksheet in the guidebook's supplemental materials, page 165.

Let's Talk

- As the Father welcomes you (as the prodigal) home with loving arms, what is your reaction? How do you feel?
- As He gives you the ring, how do you respond?

Review God's extravagant gift to us, the gift of Jesus Christ: Grace is free to us, but very costly to God (guidebook page 94).

Consider discussing the difference between punishment, consequences, and discipline. Jesus took the punishment of our sin, but natural consequences of our actions may remain. Because of Christ's sacrifice for us, we are free of penalties and punishments (Ephesians 1:7–8: “Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we're a free people—free of penalties and

punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. *Abundantly* free!”). Any correction or discipline we may receive from God is the loving discipline of a father, to promote growth or change in us. You may want to mention Hebrews 12:5–11 (and also Revelation 3:19, which says in the NLT, “I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference”).

Draw attention to the timeline worksheet in the guidebook’s supplemental materials, page 165. The timeline is a great way for members to learn more about themselves and God’s work in their lives. Encourage them to take time to work on their timelines, even though the group sessions may end before the timelines are complete.

Direct attention to the “Obstacles” section of the guidebook, pages 95–98.

Let’s Talk

In what ways have you struggled to receive God’s forgiveness? Have you ever tried to work for it?

Reassure the women that letting go of the pain is not letting go of their lost child, nor does it negate the loss or the gravity of the sin; it simply opens them to receiving forgiveness.

If group members refer to problems with father or parent figures, review some of the “Who Is God?” characteristics, found on page 169 of the guidebook. If they felt abandoned by a parent, note God’s promise to never leave us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6); if an earthly father was not involved or was completely unavailable, note that God is a “father to the fatherless” (Psalm 68:5, NLT) and that He defends orphans (Psalm 10:14).

Remind these women that God wants to meet their needs for love and acceptance in a way that human, imperfect parents could not. Reiterate some of the Bible stories discussed in this study, or share other biblical stories that illustrate this point.

MAKE IT PERSONAL ACTIVITY, GUIDEBOOK PAGE 99

This activity offers group members an opportunity to accept God's grace and forgiveness in a tangible way. There are two options listed below, but allow each concept to spark your creativity in tailoring the activity to the women in your group.

Option 1. Grace is referred to as a gift in various places in this lesson. In advance of this lesson, identify an object that you could wrap and give to each member of your group as a "grace gift." One option could be smooth stones, a symbol of the stones the adulterous woman's accusers dropped in John 8:1–11. (Stones are also a reminder of God's grace and His deliverance of us from our enemies in Joshua 4.) Wrap these stones, or your chosen objects, in tissue or with ribbon, or place them in a fancy box. Write each group member's name on a card and affix it to her wrapped gift. Consider writing on the stone or including a card with "neither do I condemn you" (or with John 8:11 or Luke 15:22).

During the session, remind your group members that the grace, forgiveness, and freedom offered to the prodigal son and to the adulterous woman are also available to them. God's grace silenced the adulterous woman's accusers, who dropped their stones when they heard Jesus' challenge to them. Turning to the woman, Jesus encouraged her to release her fear and shame and to sin no more, demonstrating His love and forgiveness and offering her freedom from sin in Christ.

In the story of the prodigal son, the father was ready to forgive his son, but his son had to turn away from his past sins, his pride and bitterness, and return to his father. The father's grace was always there; the son simply had to accept the lavish gifts that were waiting for him.

Likewise, God's gift of grace is available to each woman in your group. Place the grace gifts on a table and explain the symbolism behind your choice of object. Remind the women that the gift symbolizes God's forgiveness and grace, waiting for them to choose to accept it. They can also choose to refuse the gift and leave it on the table. Encourage each woman in the group to release whatever

obstacle she holds onto and to accept the grace being offered by taking her gift from the table and keeping it as a reminder that she has been forgiven and delivered by God's grace.

Option 2. Drawing on the story of the prodigal son, have a mini “welcome home” ceremony for each group member. Before the session, locate a specially decorated or sparkly robe or shawl and obtain several rings (the stretch kind work well for different finger sizes). Highlight the key elements of the story and invite each woman, in turn, to wear the robe or shawl. Place a ring on her finger while sharing verses or truths about God's forgiveness and His love for her. If group members are comfortable with it, hug them as the Father would hug them. (Always ask first!) Let group members know that they can keep the ring as a reminder of God the Father's grace and forgiveness and of their restoration into the family of God.

For either activity, music selections could include “When God Ran” by Phillips, Craig & Dean, “Not Guilty” by Mandisa, “Beauty for Ashes” by Crystal Lewis, or “Beautiful” by MercyMe.

CLOSING

Close in prayer and assign guidebook chapter 6, “Release Others—and Yourself.” Ask group members to bring their anger letters from chapter 3 to the next session.

Before dismissing the group, gently introduce the concept of the memorial service. The service will be held the week after the next session, to coincide with chapter 7, “Allow Time to Grieve.” This is often a very difficult concept for group members to take in, so remember to pray first regarding the best way to broach the topic.

Without applying pressure, encourage members to prayerfully consider their child's gender and name during the week, as noted on page 114 of the guidebook. (You will use this information about the baby to create “Life” or “Remembrance” certificates for each child, to be presented to the women at the memorial service.) If group members seem distressed about not knowing the gender or not having a

name, pray aloud with them for God to grant them insight at the right time. Reassure them that the right time differs for everyone. Some women may know already, some may not know until the day of the service. There is no need for them to pressure themselves—they should simply be open to conversation with God. Let them know that providing any information about their child is optional; however, the intent of including that information is to honor the child.



RELEASE OTHERS— AND YOURSELF

Session 7: Guidebook Chapter 6

This lesson describes the elements of forgiveness, including personal obstacles to forgiving oneself and others. In this session you'll encourage the group members to begin forgiving others, and you'll provide them with some practical tools. This session will also address forgiving themselves, accepting their grief, and naming their losses—including their children.

OPENING

Open the session in prayer. Review the lesson as appropriate for the group, highlighting insights you've gained during your preparations. Below are some questions to consider asking the group in order to build and expand on the reading and to spark contemplation and participation. Alternatively, you may wish to begin the session by asking members to share what was most meaningful for them, and then guide the discussion accordingly.

Review the story of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21–35), pages 103–4 of the guidebook.

Let's Talk

Regarding the abortion, why are some people or institutions more difficult to forgive than others? What are some barriers or conditions to forgiveness?

If appropriate for the group, consider pointing out that others may also be hurt by an abortion. Use the story of David and Bathsheba to illustrate this point: Uriah was not the only soldier killed;

Joab had to choose whom else to send into battle to die. Could Joab or Bathsheba have felt guilty, hurt, or angry? (See 2 Samuel 11:22–23.)

Let's Talk

In the “Fundamentals of Forgiveness” list on pages 105–6 in the guidebook, what was most striking to you?

Highlight what touches your heart in the Forgiveness list and reiterate the idea presented in the guidebook that a member should not contact someone if doing so could potentially harm herself, the individual, or others.

Let's Talk

How did the “Fundamentals of Forgiveness” section, along with the Colossians and Luke verses on guidebook pages 107–8, modify your thinking on conditions and barriers?

Note that forgiveness is for our benefit—for our well-being and the health of our relationships.

If it would be relevant for this group, and if time allows, consider sharing the story of Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers (Genesis 37–50). Focus on his forgiveness toward his brothers (Genesis 45:1–8; 50:19–21) and his godly perspective.

Review the importance of praying *about* and *for* a person (guidebook page 108) as practical tools to foster forgiveness and banish bitterness, which some call a spiritual cancer.

Let's Talk

What are your thoughts on this idea of praying about, and for, a person who has wronged you?

Encourage group members to write letters to God as part of their effort to pray about people they need to forgive (use Psalms 58 and 94 as examples).

Review the story of the woman forgiven of many sins (Luke 7:36–50) on guidebook pages 109–10.

Let's Talk

Whom did you identify with most in the story—Simon, the guests, or the sinful woman? In what way?

MAKE IT PERSONAL ACTIVITY, GUIDEBOOK PAGES 111–12

Option 1. To gain a tangible sense of release from unforgiveness and bitterness, allow group members to burn, shred, or otherwise destroy their anger letters. Remind them that this act of release applies to anger toward others as well as toward themselves. As they destroy their letters, encourage them to say something similar to this: “I release my anger toward this person. I choose to learn to forgive and trust God’s justice and trust Him with my healing.” If you cannot safely burn paper, then consider a shredder for the letters.

One song option here could be “Forgiveness” by Matthew West.

Option 2. Forgiveness letters may be offered as another means of expressing forgiveness. (Note the format example on page 112 in the guidebook.)

If members have any remaining anger rocks, ask them whether they’ve gained further insight about the burden those rocks represent. Invite group members, if they wish, to return the rocks and name the burdens. Then invite them to ask God to replace the rocks with peace, a restored self-image, healing, joy, truth, or forgiveness.

Draw attention to the gratitude list suggestion in their guidebooks (page 112). Encourage them to write or maintain a gratitude list on a regular basis as one reminder of God’s grace and forgiveness. Having an “attitude of gratitude” can open us up to the presence of God and enrich our everyday lives. Consider sharing Colossians 3:15: “And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.” Verses 16–17 also reiterate the encouragement to be thankful.

Note that Jesus forgave the woman in this story (Luke 7) and that choosing to accept the costly gift of His forgiveness means we can forgive ourselves. Part of forgiving ourselves includes naming, accepting, and grieving our losses.

Reiterate that the next session will be a memorial for the participants' children. Explain the reasons for this service: to grant dignity to the children, honor the children's place in our hearts, and gain a new perspective on this loss. Some may also believe this to be a way to make amends to their children.

MAKE IT PERSONAL ACTIVITY, GUIDEBOOK PAGE 114

Ask group members whether they contemplated their losses—including the loss of their child—during the week. As needed, give members time to contemplate this now. Pray aloud for God to grant them insight as they meditate, with soft music playing in the background. Encourage them to write down any insights they gain. Music options here could include “Be Still and Know” by Steven Curtis Chapman, “Redeemed” by Big Daddy Weave, or “My Beloved” by Kari Jobe.

At the completion of this time, you may wish to gently ask for memorial information. This information can include the child's name and gender; the estimated date or year of birth (as best remembered); and the woman's name at the time of the abortion. All this information can be written on a small card or paper for you to refer to during the service. Avoid pressuring the women for information now, and allow them to get it to you later, if possible. Trust God's perfect plan and timing in bringing this type of information to the members of your group.

The group may benefit from another reminder of God's grace and forgiveness as well as His love and encouragement before the members take this important step.

CLOSING

Close the session in prayer. Assign guidebook chapter 7, “Allow Time to Grieve.” You may choose to invite members to request a particularly meaningful song to be played at the service (if practical). Encourage group members to consider how they would like to honor their child at the memorial service, such as by writing a letter or poem to their child, singing a special song, or creating a piece of art.



ALLOW TIME TO GRIEVE

Session 8: Guidebook Chapter 7

This lesson encourages group members to seek God as they grieve their loss. This session is unique in that you will most likely not review the week's chapter from the guidebook. Rather, this session will be a service dedicated to honoring the members' lost children. There are many ways this time can be arranged, so the ideas here are merely suggestions. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in designing this time for your group. If you typically meet in a home, consider conducting this session in a different room, or in a separate location such as a chapel, retreat house, or church.

Here are some ideas to make it special:

- Arrange the room in advance, perhaps lighting candles to soften the mood. Consider including a cross on a table or stand.
- Bring flowers, tiny dolls, or other objects to symbolize the children.
- Have single candles available for members to light to represent the souls of their children (one candle per child being remembered).
- Create a memorial leaflet listing the order of the service, the Scriptures used, and the music selections. Sample program leaflets can be obtained from a local church or online.
- Choose special music (perhaps instrumental) that will play as you welcome the women to the service.

OPENING

Open the service in prayer and explain the purpose of the gathering—to commemorate and honor the lost children—as well as the order of the service.

Select and read special Scripture passages aloud (passages from the chapter or others the Lord brings to you). Consider reiterating concepts from the chapter. These may include the belief that children have unique, personal souls, as suggested by 1 Corinthians 15:42–44 (see guidebook page 118). Or consider pointing to the story of David in 2 Samuel 12, which suggests that children after death are with the Lord in heaven (guidebook pages 118–19).

You may wish to include additional songs or music during the service, chosen by the participants in advance.

Allow the women to dedicate their children to the Lord. Invite group members to light one candle per child and place one flower or doll (or other symbol) per child at the foot of a cross (or in a basket or vase) to represent releasing their children into Jesus' loving arms, trusting that they are in heaven with Him.

As they dedicate their children, encourage the women to state the names of their children and honor their children in whatever way they have chosen—for example, by reading a letter or poem, by singing, or by displaying artwork.

As each woman completes the service, give her a flower, pin, or other item of remembrance along with a certificate that includes the child's name and gender and the estimated year or date of birth (as described in the previous session). You may also choose to include a special reading or poem. One example is "Father's Love Letter," available at <http://www.fathersloveletter.com/>.

After all the women have honored their children, you may wish to close with a special song or Scripture. Examples of appropriate songs are "Tears in Heaven" by Eric Clapton and the hymn "It Is Well with My Soul."

CLOSING

Close the time in prayer and blessing.

You may wish to allow the group members to take home their candles and remembrance items. They should not take home the flowers or other symbols placed at the cross or in the basket, because those symbolize the release of their children to Jesus.

Assign guidebook chapter 8, “Dare to Hope.” Invite the women to this last session as a celebration of completing this portion of their journey.



DARE TO HOPE

Session 9: Guidebook Chapter 8

This lesson is for reviewing the journey, underscoring the principles and practical tools that have been gained and their application to other areas of life. Celebrate group members' new healing and freedom and discuss how to continue growing spiritually through prayer and fellowship. Consider including a meal (perhaps a potluck) for all to share, to symbolize biblical feasts of celebration. This is a time to reflect on lessons learned, fellowship gained, and hope restored. You may wish to have some fun, celebratory music available. Emphasize that this new beginning can mean new adventures, such as serving others and carrying to others the message of healing and recovery.

OPENING

Open the session in prayer. You may wish to review this lesson while enjoying your meal, to create a more relaxed atmosphere. Share insights you've gained during your preparations for this chapter and review the lesson as appropriate for the group. Below are some possible questions that expand and build on the chapter and the overall journey to encourage participation.

Let's Talk

What issues have you been processing since the memorial service—emotionally, mentally, and spiritually?

Highlight that other personal and spiritual issues may have surfaced during this healing journey, and encourage the women to seek additional resources as needed (some are listed in the guidebook's Further Reading and Online Resources sections, pages 175–79).

Offer resources as appropriate. As noted in the guidebook (pages 165–67), the timeline exercise can help members read their own story and determine their next steps.

Review the concept of gaining a “new life” (see the Ephesians and Colossians passages on guidebook pages 127–28). Emphasize practical ways to thrive in this new life.

Let's Talk, guidebook page 129

- How can you cooperate with the Spirit to renew your thoughts and attitudes (Ephesians 4:23) and nurture your relationship with God? The more we practice remembering the truth of God's view of us, the more this refreshes our self-attitudes.
- Briefly summarize the principles of the healing journey, found on pages 130–31 in the guidebook. In reviewing the journey, what was most helpful or memorable for you? How can this principle or experience help you in your new life?

Reiterate that these weeks have been a journey in the grieving process: accepting the reality of the loss, working through the emotional roller coaster, releasing the energy from secrecy and denial, and switching focus to a hope for reunion. It may be time to consider reinvesting emotional energy elsewhere.

Let's Talk, guidebook page 132

How might you be able to comfort others? (This can be a brainstorm session.)

Discuss with group members the possibility of sharing their story, either publicly in a group or one-on-one as God leads. Reiterate the comments from the book regarding motives, benefits, potential harm, and the importance of prayer.

Consider reviewing the rest of the story of the Samaritan woman (John 4:4–42) as noted in the conclusion of the guidebook (page 139). After Jesus reveals that He is the Messiah (verse 26), the Samaritan woman runs through her village telling about her experience with Him (verses 28–29). As a result, many Samaritans come to meet Jesus and believe (verses 39–42). Ask for reactions to this and to the story of the lepers, and ask how these stories may apply to group members.

Address any other areas that may be outstanding, as appropriate. This may include returning any remaining rocks and art supplies, sharing art projects, or bringing up particular insights. Be aware that it may be best to address some issues individually.

If you choose to not address sexual soul bonds within the group, draw members' attention to the "Severing Sexual Soul Bonds" section on pages 171–73 of the guidebook, and encourage them to review it and complete the exercise. Alternatively, you can offer an additional, supplemental session for the group to break soul bonds together. Information for this optional session is included in the next chapter of this guide.

MAKE IT PERSONAL ACTIVITY, GUIDEBOOK PAGE 133

Point out the action plan section in chapter 8 of the guidebook (page 133) and encourage the women to complete this list for themselves. Allow time for them to note ideas they may have gained for this during the lesson together. People are more likely to follow through with a commitment when they write it down.

In addition to any remembrance items given at the memorial, you may wish to give each group member a small gift to commemorate the closing of the journey. This could be a pin, a journal and pen, a piece of jewelry, a bookmark, or anything suitable you can imagine that fits your budget.

CLOSING

Encourage members to share contact information with each other (if they are comfortable doing so) so they may continue to pray for each

other and support each other. You may wish to offer a “reunion” session in the future (4–10 weeks later) to simply reconnect in fellowship, encouragement, and growth.

Close the session, and this journey, with prayer and a blessing.



SEVERING SEXUAL SOUL BONDS

Optional Session 10

Most post-abortive women experience sexual bonds or soul ties with the father of their child or with other previous sexual partners. These bonds may continue to affect their lives, even after healing. If this is true for the members of your group, you may want to share with them about ways to break sexual soul bonds, such as an exercise in which they pray for the Lord to break bonds of previous relationships that may be holding them captive.

The guidebook's supplemental materials include brief information on this topic, as well as an exercise, on pages 171–73. Additional information on this topic can be found in books such as *Sex and the Soul of a Woman* by Paula Rinehart and *The Invisible Bond* by Barbara Wilson. This can be a powerful and liberating add-on session for your group to complete together.

As noted in the guidebook, spend time as a group in worship and Scripture reading. Offer enough time after worship for group members to create lists and to journal. You may choose to play instrumental music in the background. Music by Julie True is one option.

Have a separate room set aside for individual prayer. After each woman is done journaling, she may voice her prayer of repentance in this room, using the prayer in the guidebook as an example. The presence of one of the trusted facilitators in this room may serve as a powerful witness to the prayer. The facilitator may also pray over the individual woman and offer a method to symbolically break or sever the ties. Ideas include cutting the list in half with scissors or shredding or tearing the list.

Following the individual prayer time, some women may wish to rejoin the group for a closing blessing, but some may simply wish to go home to continue to interact with the Lord.



A STORY TRANSFORMED

Conclusion

Congratulations, facilitators, on completing the journey!

At times, this may have been an arduous path to trudge as you sought the Holy Spirit's direction and guided group members toward personal and group transformation. You have been used mightily by God! Remember that this has been His work, so praise Him for what He has done and will continue to do in the members of the group.

Facilitators should meet at the end of the journey to review the work that has been completed. Reflect on areas in which you personally have grown, discuss challenges faced and lessons learned, and brainstorm ideas for enhancing the next group's experience. Encourage one another in love, praying for and with one another.

Remember to take a Sabbath rest from your labor before you begin another group. As the apostle Paul states in Galatians 6:9 (NLT), "So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up."

You have cared faithfully for the flock God entrusted to you, and I pray that when our Great Shepherd comes, He will reward you abundantly.

And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive
a crown of never-ending glory and honor.

—1 Peter 5:4



NOTES

1. This material has been presented by (or gained in private correspondence with) Vicki Thorn, founder of Project Rachel and executive director of the National Office of Post-Abortion Reconciliation and Healing in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It is used with the permission of the author.
2. Elliot Institute, "PTSD Rates Increased by 61 Percent after Abortion," February 14, 2008, <http://afterabortion.org/2008/ptsd-rates-increased-by-61-percent-after-abortion/>. The article reports on the findings of a study by Sharain Suliman et al., "Comparison of Pain, Cortisol Levels, and Psychological Distress in Women Undergoing Surgical Termination of Pregnancy under Local Anaesthesia versus Intravenous Sedation," *BMC Psychiatry* 7, no. 24 (2007).

Soli Deo gloria!

