

## Men and Abortion an Overview

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Victor Perdessi had been having a sexual relationship with his girlfriend, Phetsakhone Chaokeo. She was the mother of an eighteen-month-old daughter from a previous relationship. Victor bonded with the little girl, taking care of her when the mother was out.

Then it happened. Victor's girlfriend became pregnant (O'Connor 1B). He was ecstatic and very much looking forward to having a child of his own. They discussed marriage plans. But without his knowledge or consent, Phetsakhone changed her mind about the baby and had an abortion. Victor was furious and went to her Minneapolis home where an argument began and escalated. He took out a gun and told the young mother that since she killed his baby, he would kill hers. In front of the woman, Victor shot and killed the little girl he had come to love. In another act of brutality, he then lifted the gun to his own head, pulled the trigger and died at her feet. He allowed his girlfriend to live so she could mourn not only the death of her daughter, but also that of their unborn child and former lover.

This horrifying account represents an extreme reaction by a father to the loss of a baby by abortion. However, the reality of this and other tragic situations demonstrates that men also hurt after abortion. Many individuals in today's society, certainly those in pro-life and Christian communities, understand the pain felt by mothers after they've aborted their babies. But what about the men? As the body count of unborn children exceeds forty-five million, more and more fathers are desperately crying out in the wake of abortion.

Can you hear their pain? Maybe you've noted their anguish, but haven't associated it with a past abortion in their lives. It's very possible that they haven't either.

Our post-modern culture often celebrates abortion as a sacred right. Radical feminism says that women can't reach fulfillment unless they are sexually equal to men. In their minds, this includes the right to not have a child unless it's on the woman's terms. Many men have bought into the pro-abortion rhetoric of "my body, my choice." As a result, many expectant fathers don't even bother to speak up for the life of their pre-born child when it hangs in the balance.

Arthur B. Shostak and his colleagues conducted what is perhaps the most comprehensive research into how men are affected by abortion (Shostak 8). Working with thirty abortion clinics around the country, they collected questionnaires from one thousand men who were waiting for their partners to have an

abortion. They then did follow-up interviews with a subsample of seventy-five men. These interviews were conducted in-person or by phone. Based upon their research, we can estimate that at least eight percent of men who experience abortion are deeply affected in a negative way.

These numbers may be low, considering they only interviewed men who agreed to accompany their partners to have an abortion. Those who didn't are more likely those who opposed the abortion and to suffer psychologically. In addition, there are tens of millions more men who are suffering to a lesser, but still serious, degree.

Brad Draper was very excited about the pregnancy, even though he and his girlfriend weren't married. He had seen his child via ultrasound images and was looking forward to fatherhood. Without Brad's knowledge, his girlfriend had an abortion.

Brad's response was not typical for a father of an aborted child. Most bury the loss deep inside and erect a fortified wall of denial around themselves. Instead, Brad honored his child on the obituary pages of the *Kansas City Star*. In part, it read, "Zachary Duncan Draper was beautiful as his mother, loved by God and others. My little baby boy didn't make it to his Daddy's arms. I never got to hold and kiss him, tell him stories or read him rhymes." (Obituaries B4)

This was a healthy beginning for this grieving father. He acknowledged the life of his unborn child and began to mourn. But the loss was too much for him to bear alone. On the day that Zachary was due to be born, Brad went to the Planned Parenthood abortion chamber where his son died. He placed a gun against his head and pulled the trigger. Brad died at a hospital later that night.

Those who minister to fathers suffering from post-abortion stress are aware of tragic situations like Victor's and Brad's. They have personally seen many less serious circumstances, but ones that result in heartbreak nonetheless. There are God-instilled reasons abortion negatively affects the fathers. In order to help men in crisis after abortion, we must first understand what motivates the human male heart and mind.

God has placed in men an instinct to achieve success in five key areas of their lives. These are the ability to procreate, provide, protect, perform and enjoy pleasure (Brauning). Let's examine each one in the context of abortion.

Man's desire to procreate dates back to creation. God told man in Genesis 1:28, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." By this command, man plays an essential role in the continuation of the human race. Psalm 127:3 describes children as "a heritage from the Lord." Having

offspring fulfills a God-inspired need in the male gender. "Participating in conceiving a child brings us to the door of manhood in a way that few other acts can." (Condon 55)

A man's reproductive cycle ends with the act of sex. This is the same time the woman's cycle takes full control of the reproductive process. As a result, the man's priority shifts from procreating to providing for the growing family. God ordained marriage as an environment in which the mother and children look to him for provision. Providing for his family is central to a man's psyche.

Man is highly programmed to safeguard his family. The need for a man to protect his offspring should not be underestimated. This goes beyond abortion and also encompasses the need to protect our children from the playground bully, accidents or criminal activity.

When we talk about a man's ability to perform, this refers to more than his ability to function sexually. Job performance is often primary to defining a man's success. In other words, the income it generates, the social standing it provides and the attained admiration of his peers. A man's self-esteem will often rise or fall on his success in this area.

A man's ability to enjoy pleasure also goes beyond sexual gratification and fulfillment. The Bible again sets the tone for the pleasure a helpmate would provide. Genesis shows that Adam was alone in God's perfect creation, so He created Eve as Adam's partner in life. Genesis 2:24 says, "They will become one flesh." It doesn't get any more intimate than that! In addition to the pleasure of a mate, there is the incredible joy of having children and watching them grow into Christian adults.

Society often judges a man based on his ability to perform well in these five key areas of his life. When a man experiences abortion, many, if not all of these key areas, can be damaged or totally obliterated. "Abortion cripples a man because it keeps him from making that passage to maturity at a profound level." (55)

They say the conscience is what hurts when everything else feels so good. This is certainly true when the symptoms of post-abortion stress rear its ugly head. Physical sexual gratification, and the seemingly quick and easy solution to an unexpected pregnancy that may result, can indeed give a man a false sense of feeling good. But sooner or later the conscience will kick in, and when it does, the wall of denial will begin to crack and eventually crumble. This is when symptoms appear.

The most common and persistent symptom of post-abortion stress in men is anger. It is very rare that a post-abortive man would not act on this anger in some way that is detrimental to himself or those around him. Pioneers of this issue have

coined the term "hooking." (Steinhauser) It defines a man unexpectedly acting out in anger when he sees, hears, smells or feels something that is a reminder of the abortion experience. His anger may be directed toward himself or the nearest innocent bystander. Further, he and his unaware victims may be oblivious to what motivated this burst of emotional fury, because it may be a subconscious reaction.

Anger is the most consistent symptom, but it isn't the only one. It may be accompanied by grief, shame, guilt and remorse. Feelings of profound hopelessness and helplessness are common. Many turn to alcohol or drugs to dull the pain of knowing they were involved with an abortion decision. Those who opposed the abortion, but were unable to stop it, can also experience these symptoms. In their minds they may see themselves as too "weak" to protect the life of their own child.

Some men become workaholics to avoid contact with other people. This reduces the risk of others finding out about their deep, dark secret. Another reason is that they desperately want to succeed in an area of their life, which largely defines them, trying to make up for another - their profound "weakness" of not protecting the life of their child.

Other men are unable to hold down a job due to poor coping skills or an inability to make decisions. His very core, the ability to provide and protect, has been seriously shaken. As a result, he has very little faith in his other abilities.

It is not uncommon for a post-abortive father to assume a dangerous job or hobby. He is setting himself up for failure - getting what he deserves for failing to protect his child.

Abortion rewrites the rules of masculinity. It leaves him wounded and confused (Rue 2). Failed relationships are often caused by abortion (Milling 48). Many couples sweep the abortion under the rug, but the emotional pain and stress cannot be ignored. They often vow to never speak of the "event" again, but the other person is a daily reminder of what will never be. It's easier to end the relationship than face a painful and often hard-fought resolution.

As the laws are written, the father of an unborn child has no legal right to even be informed before his wife or partner has an abortion, much less give his permission (Casey 2824). He has absolutely no legal say over the crucial and intimate decision of whether his unborn child lives or dies. This may generate a great deal of anger toward the mother of his child, or women in general. Often a man may find an intimate relationship with a woman difficult or impossible.

The other side of the coin is a promiscuous lifestyle due to a low self-esteem and a desperate desire to find love and

acceptance. Jumping from bed to bed may provide sexual release, and enable him to avoid an emotionally committed relationship.

Since the abortion is so closely tied to the act of sex, sexual dysfunction can also be a symptom. In a small number of cases, men may experiment with homosexuality (Berger 251). This allows them to experience sexual gratification with no risk of pregnancy. Addictions to pornography and masturbation are also tools that give physical satisfaction, but allows the man to stay in total control of the outcome.

Other symptoms include insomnia, panic attacks, flashbacks, nightmares, self-imposed isolation or suicidal tendencies.

Men are less likely than women to deal with the symptoms of post-abortion stress. The longer a man buries his feelings, the harder it will be to get him to bear his soul. Many men are seeing their world crumble around their feet, totally oblivious that the root cause is a past abortion. When counseling men, it is sometimes effective to share the common symptoms of post-abortion stress and then ask them to reflect on their own lives in that context.

Before we go any further, let's define what is meant by "counseling". Webster's Dictionary defines counseling as "professional guidance of the individual by utilizing psychological methods..." We'll deal with modern psychology later. In this context of helping post-abortive men in crisis, a "counselor" is not a professional licensed or degreed individual using psychological techniques. A counselor or facilitator is a volunteer who has a passion on his or her heart for helping men recover from post-abortion stress. This is a mature Christian who is familiar with the Word of God as the ultimate authority for mankind, and is willing to invest whatever time it takes to help a hurting father along the road to spiritual and emotional healing.

Don't let Satan intimidate you into thinking you aren't qualified to help these men. We are simply the human tool God has chosen to facilitate HIS healing power. Trust that He will send the Holy Spirit to give you the wisdom and knowledge to make sure you're up to the task. Luke 12:11-12 is more than God's promise to the Apostles. It's also His promise to anyone who works in His vineyard. "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say." Another way to say this is, God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called.

When dealing with the symptoms of post-abortion stress, the most effective tool is one of the most readily available. It's the Bible. Within its pages is everything you will need to

offer hope and healing to a post-abortive father. It is the infallible Word of God, from His mouth to our eyes and ears. The Bible's instruction is as timeless and relevant today as it was in biblical times. Man's sinful depravity hasn't changed. The root cause for all evil in the world is man's sinful heart. The only way to affect lasting change is to apply God's perfect Word. 2 Titus 3:16 assures us of this, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." That includes ministering to the broken heart and spirit of a post-abortive man. Scripture also assures us that His Word is perfect. Proverbs 30:5 says, "Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him."

Once a man reaches out for help, it is crucial that he find a safe, nonjudgmental, gender-free environment. Crisis pregnancy centers are often decked out in lace and other feminine decor. This only further enhances the false assumption that abortion is only a "woman's" issue. A post-abortive father needs to know that everything he shares will be held in the strictest of confidence. Trust between counselor and counselee is essential.

In most circumstances it is probably best to have a man counsel a post-abortive father. The post-abortive man may have a need to confess, in great detail, his lifestyle that led to the abortion. For obvious reasons this is best shared with another man. In addition, the possible anger he harbors against the mother of his aborted baby, and maybe women in general, could be directed toward a woman counselor.

Having said this, there is ample evidence that women can also be effective in helping post-abortive fathers. Further, women have successfully counseled coed post-abortive groups. This has enabled both men and women to discover the depth of guilt, pain and remorse felt by the opposite sex and may be an effective way to deal with a prominent anger issue toward the other sex. It would be ill advised for a woman to counsel a man one-on-one. Always approach a counseling situation with common-sense caution, advice from others and lots of prayer.

Allow the post-abortive father to grieve the loss and shame that results from an abortion decision. Today's culture gives post-abortive men no societal incentive to mourn the loss of a child to abortion. First, few in the secular psychology profession acknowledge the existence of post-abortion syndrome in women. It is likely even fewer will concede the presence of post-abortion stress in men. Second, it is more often considered less than manly to cry. As a result, most men stuff

their emotions deep inside and try to forget that they are there. One of the first priorities is to let them mourn.

Mourning after the death of a loved one is biblical. Jesus mourned at the tomb of His dear friend Lazarus. And in Matthew 5:3, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

Mourning is a very personal experience. What helps one person process his grief may not work for another. As a matter of fact, what brings comfort to one may seem odd, outrageous or even offensive to another. Using the filter of the Holy Scriptures, we should give hurting men considerable leeway to travail the lonely path of mourning in the way that provides the greatest comfort to them.

The job of a counselor is to immerse them in the comforting waters of Scripture. There is no better tool to provide healing than the promise that Jesus has died for all of our sins - including abortion. Jesus' words on the cross, "It is finished!" mean what they say. He didn't bleed and die for only the so-called "little" sins. Jesus paid the price for all our sins, even the gravest and most vile offences man's sinful heart has devised.

Mark Twain said, "Forgiveness is the fragrance of the violet left on the heel that crushed it." That is a very poignant message for the hurting father. Forgiveness can be an enormous hurdle to clear on the path to recovery. First there may be the need to forgive the mother of his unborn baby who decided to abort. Forgiveness may also be required for several others besides the obvious abortionist. This grieving father may need to forgive the woman's parents, friends or relatives who pressured or even forced her to abort their baby. Unresolved anger toward others will eat away at his soul. Further, he will be giving these individuals power over him as long as he harbors hatred toward them.

"People may confuse forgiving with excusing, pardoning, forgetting or reconciliation. Genuine forgiveness is none of these." (Coyle 38) Oh, it's far from easy. Forgiveness takes a lot of consistent, hard work. What is forgiveness? "It is the conscious decision to withhold both retribution and resentment and to instead offer mercy to the undeserving offender." (39) However, forgiveness is essential for total healing after abortion. It is also the foundation for conquering the next and possibly most difficult step - allowing his repentant heart to fully accept Christ's free gift of forgiveness.

Many post-abortion counselors and facilitators, myself included, have fallen into the misconception of "self-forgiveness." The truth is self-forgiveness isn't a biblical principle. You will not find it within the pages of Scripture.

The Bible speaks of vertical forgiveness, that is God forgiving sinful man. It also speaks of horizontal forgiveness, which is one man forgiving another man. But the Bible is silent on the issue of self-forgiveness.

When a father says he can't forgive himself, he might instead be saying that he can't or is unwilling to receive God's forgiveness. The need for self-forgiveness may be manufactured to satisfy his lingering guilt (Jones 5). The father may still be in denial that he is capable of participating in the death of his unborn child (9). He could be venting regrets for failing in his life (10). Or the father "may have ascended to the throne of judgment and declared himself to be his own judge" (14). In this case, 1 Corinthians 4:3-5 is good advice, "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My Conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God."

The concept of self-forgiveness is a natural progression of modern psychology, which holds to a philosophy that man is genuinely good. Further, in order for him to make others happy, he must first make himself happy. This conflicts with the biblical principles. First, man is not good. Romans 3:23 says, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Because of Adam's fall from grace in the Garden of Eden, man's heart is rotten to the core and beyond hope if not for the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Second, Christ does not ask man to put his happiness and self-interests first. Quite the contrary, He would have us follow His example. Matthew 20:25, "Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus gave His life, in a most brutal fashion, so that we might live eternally with Him.

A vast majority of psychologists have eradicated the "s" word — sin — from their vocabulary. This shouldn't come as a surprise if you understand the roots of modern psychology. Many of the founders were avid atheists or agnostics. Freud held a "bitter antagonism to religion and all forms of religious authority." (Wollheim 16-17)

Sin is central to the issue of abortion. Most often it is the sin of adultery that results in pregnancy. This paves the way for the sin of abortion, which breeds many other sins of lies, deceit, neglect, alcohol and drug abuse, etc. The list can be endless. To heal post-abortion stress, sin must be recognized and dealt with. Only a repentant heart can find healing.

The Bible is full of scriptural principles which conflict with modern psychology's "man is the center of his universe" philosophy. These are primary reasons why Christians should avoid modern psychology and lean on solid biblical counsel. The Scriptures have everything needful for whatever ails the souls of man.

There is a distinct difference between healthy guilt and unhealthy guilt. Healthy guilt makes us feel bad about a sin we have committed and works as a deterrent for repeating it. Healthy guilt leads a man to take emotional responsibility for having sex outside of marriage and the pregnancy that resulted. Healthy guilt would be appropriate if he pushed for or supported an abortion decision. Once healthy guilt helps him to recognize his sins, he can repent of them.

Unhealthy guilt is Satan's way of heaping undeserved coals upon his head and pulling him away from God. It is taking moral responsibility for something he did not do or had no control over. Satan uses unhealthy guilt very effectively in persuading the post-abortive man that he is unworthy of the forgiveness of Christ. Revelation 12:10 calls the devil "the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night." Satan constantly reminds the grieving father that he was too weak or unwilling to protect the life of his unborn child. If only he had done this, or if only he had done that, life would have been much better.

To help a man discern which is healthy and unhealthy guilt during the counseling process, it's imperative to take time at the beginning of the process for a very important step. At the very first meeting, the counselor should spend ample time, hours if necessary, listening to the man recall his abortion story. Many times, as he bears his soul, it is told in minute detail.

Once all the necessary information has been collected, it is possible to later deflect the arrows of unhealthy guilt the counselee may be aiming at his own heart. The counselor is able to wade through his emotional minefield and point him in the right direction.

It's not easy to counsel a post-abortive father and deal with the intense emotions that result. But we must press forward if we are to help them spiritually deal with sin, repentance, forgiveness and healing.

The aborted child must be real to the father if he is to effectively grieve his loss. The child cannot be a vague spirit, hovering somewhere in eternity. One way to accomplish this may be for the father to name his aborted baby.

So many men who come for counseling have said, "If only I knew then what I know now. . ." Their attitude is now in direct contrast to the carefree lifestyle of a man participating in risky sexual behavior, or exploiting women for his own sexual gratification. Millions of grieving fathers are painfully aware of the intense pain this sin has caused in their lives, as well as others. Many fathers who have lost a child this way know that the act of abortion doesn't just make the couple unpregnant; it makes them the parents of a dead baby. This is a designation they will carry to their graves. How they deal with this depends upon how well they process the grief and shame the abortion brings.

Abortion has devastated our culture morally, spiritually and emotionally. Many of those who have participated in abortion are in our churches. Unless their grief and shame is dealt with, their collective emotional baggage will have a corrosive effect on the whole church. Many men who have experienced abortion are what I call "back-pew Christians." They desperately want to reestablish a relationship with God, but feel in their hearts that He cannot forgive them for the grievous sin of abortion. Many feel God hates them. As a result, they literally sit in the back pews of the church. "Many abortive men live with the constant wariness, like a shadow on the back wall of their soul." (61)

The church must be a spiritual oasis for the dry, parched soul of the aborted man. Men who have lost a child to abortion and find their way to your church should hear a clear and concise message. Here is the place to ease your burdened souls. Here the loving arms of Christ, disguised as a congregation, yearn to embrace you with the gospel message of love, forgiveness, hope and healing.

So many parents of aborted babies dread exposing their dark secret for fear of being judged and rejected by their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Men who are guarding the dark secret of abortion should hear the pastor say from the pulpit that he is not alone, he will not be judged and that the church wants to help him. Post a phone number or email address in conspicuous locations that will enable a man to privately ask for help without abandoning his comfort zone. Create a safe environment where he will feel comfortable to repent of his sin and begin the road to healing.

The church is uniquely positioned to assist these men. They have the most effective tool on earth. The answer to every

doubt, fear, anxiety, anger or question they have can be found within the pages of the Bible. It is one-stop shopping to help the man in crisis. The Bible is fertile ground for ministering to a forgotten father. Here are some of my favorite passages from the NIV.

*Psalm 34:18, "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." Brokenhearted and crushed in spirit are very accurate terms when describing a post-abortive father.*

*Isaiah 40:11, "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart." Post-abortive men feel distanced from God. This passage shows how dear they are to Jesus.*

*Psalm 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." This passage is carved into the hearts of many fathers of aborted babies. It's an excellent scripture for any sinner.*

Revelation 21:3-4, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" This is my favorite healing scripture. It's a tender love-note from the Creator of the Universe to the lowly sinner. Death, mourning, crying and pain are daily companions for the father of an aborted baby. Here God assures them that when the day comes to go to their eternal home, it will be a perfect world, void of any pain or suffering.

We all too often underestimate the power of prayer and the Holy Spirit. Satan whispers into the ears of the would-be counselor that the problems of a post-abortive man are far too complex and large for him to overcome. Approach counseling men in crisis with love, prayer, humiliation and a servant's heart, and you will receive the gifts he needs to minister to hurting souls.

Likewise, Satan is continually whispering into the ears of the father, telling him he is worthless and that his situation is hopeless. At times like these, when Satan reminds them of their past, they must remind Satan of his future.

These men in crisis may actually be diamonds in the rough. Their past experiences, newfound hope and spiritual growth can make them excellent candidates to counsel other fathers. However, considerable caution should first be given to make sure they have completed their own healing process. The counselee has enough emotional baggage to deal with without the counselor introducing his own into the mix.

The Father of Lies uses abortion as one of his most effective tools to drag souls to hell. If you and I don't stand in the gap between Satan and their eternity, who will? Armed with the power of the Holy Spirit and equipped with the Bible for protection and effectiveness, we are certain to win over the evil one.

It's time the church took a bold stand in loving support of millions of hurting men - men who struggle each day with the reality and false guilt that Satan imposes on them through abortion. God-fearing men and women, dedicated to their Lord and Savior, must keep an open eye out for those who struggle with a past abortion. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we must intercede on their behalf, offering the hope and healing that is only available through the precious blood of Christ.

We must stand in the gap and say to Satan that he cannot have this hurting soul. We must do what it takes to keep forgotten fathers from his evil clutches. And then, we must love these men into eternity. Guide them into a renewed relationship with Christ, one that ushers in peace, hope and contentment. We must offer them a relationship that brings a true healing. Their new goal is an eternal one. "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:13-14.

It's important to pause here and remind ourselves that all the credit for making a new man out of a desperate father goes to the Holy Spirit. Without Him, neither you, I nor the hurting father can come to know the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Always keep your eyes fixed on Jesus for both direction and the praise that may follow.

God created these hurting men to be loving fathers and husbands, productive citizens and, most importantly, obedient children of God. When destructive life choices interfere with God's intended purpose for their lives, we as Christians must step forward to assist their walk with Christ. Because what we do for them, we do for our Heavenly Father. Matthew 25:40 says, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

We are motivated by our love for Christ. His underserved grace bought us eternal life. That love compels us to reach out to these forgotten fathers, wrap them in the love of Christ and bear them up in their spiritual struggle. Then, when our final day comes on this earth, we may hear the words of Matthew 25:23 echo in our ears, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

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