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RECLAIMING FATHERHOOD

A Bible Study for Men Seeking Healing After Abortion

The Vision Before Us

Ads and social media posts show slick-looking guys in fantastic suits. Their confident smiles, great clothes, expensive tech—everything about them says *success*. We *have to* admire them.

The people who create these images know they have about a second to grab our attention and fire their message deep into your subconscious mind: “If you buy our product, you can be as successful as this guy—in business, in bed, in life—and enjoy the admiration of others.”

The people who create these images know one important thing about the human psyche: an image can make a powerful impression and motivate us to do almost anything the influencers ask. However, making ourselves as successful as the guy in the ad is completely up to us; the only change they are interested in is that we change our money into their money.

As men who have experienced an abortion, we long to view ourselves as the guy in the ad. But for many of us, we deem ourselves worthless and are full of self-loathing, continually challenging our own self-worth. Regardless of our level of participation (or lack thereof) in the abortion decision, we cling to the facade that we are ok. We stuff the emotions. We’ve been told *loudly* that abortion is

a woman's issue and that we have no say, unless it is in support of reproductive rights. So where does that leave us?

Abortion is the most-talked-about, best-kept secret, especially among men. It's debated in the public square, and it seems that everyone—from politicians to pastors to passers-by—has an opinion on it. While there are women who will “Shout Their Abortion,” there are very few of us men who will admit to having one in our past, even to those closest to us. And some won't even acknowledge the abortion happened, since it happened to her, not to us. For us to move forward in relationships, in business, or in life, we have to acknowledge the damage that's been done as a result of this decision. This book can be the first step in repairing that damage.

We are motivated by strong images because they speak to needs and desires deep within us. In this book, we will see how abortion turned us into fugitives running away from the journey to healthy manhood and made us prisoners of our choices. Make no mistake, this is not a self-help book. We can all admit that, in many respects, we are powerless to help ourselves. You may not be a Christian, or you might be someone who's been following God for a number of years—either way, this book can help you.

As we begin this process, we want to encourage you to keep moving on your personal journey to masculine maturity. We're not talking about a slick, superficial appearance but a powerful inner transformation. And so we want to plant in your mind a vision of the path ahead and the type of man you can become as you grow inside. Because *inside* is where the only significant growth takes place.

To aid in that inner transformation, there are introspective questions throughout this book. Take the time to contemplate and answer them. Begin with this one:

What three words or phrases come to mind when you think of God?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Read the following Scriptures about the character of God:

Genesis 22:1–14 **Yahweh-Yireh** (God, My Provider)

Exodus 15:22–26 **Yahweh-Rapha** (God, My Healer)

Jeremiah 33:14–16 **Yahweh-Tsidkenu** (God, Our Righteousness)

Genesis 16:1–16 **El-Roi** (The God Who Sees Me)

Ezekiel 48:30–35 **Yahweh-Shammah** (The God Who Is There)

What do these scriptures reveal about the character of God to you? How does this compare to the three words or phrases you previously wrote?

TRUE GROWTH

As we are remade from within, our masculine growth will always have two important parts to it: the first part of our growth is the transformation we will be experiencing, beginning today. By digging

into Scripture and working with a counselor or spiritual mentor, we can experience some dramatic growth.

Facing our past choices and weaknesses takes an act of courage. Many people like to hide their failures and keep running from themselves their entire lives. They live on excuses. But taking the path to spiritual manhood takes guts, faith, and humility because it means exposing the things inside that are not easy or pretty. You're here because you're desperate for something to change. Everything in this world is telling us to take the easy way out, but the easy way is a path to nowhere. Creating real change in our lives and growing in spiritual manhood is going to take a great deal of strength.

In this book, we will learn how to stand face-to-face with the God of the universe and receive His saving grace while accepting His godly direction as we come to terms with the consequences of our choices, actions, and inactions.

But there is a second aspect of our healing that we must know about to maintain a right vision of where we are going from here: our healing and growth are ongoing. In fact, they will continue throughout our entire lives. As we move forward, there will be setbacks: the echoes of pain and remorse are inevitable in the healing process. Something—or even nothing at all—can trigger a flashback, flooding us with all the images of the past. Along with the old images can come the old feelings, slamming us with the same force they did back then, trying to drag us back into that deep pit of despair. If we don't learn how to handle the emotions that can be triggered, we can be left in pain, confusion, and discouragement.

In response to old memories and old feelings, we will learn to fix our eyes on the new man we are becoming rather than focus on the past. We will learn how to tell ourselves, "The past is gone. It cannot be changed. I can change only today... and tomorrow... by the grace and strength of God." This is a good lesson for us all.

Understanding God's character is paramount to the growth process. The following Scriptures attest to His nature:

All-Powerful

Jeremiah 32:17
Psalm 77:13–20
Ephesians 3:20

Able to Protect

Psalm 18:1–3, 16–19
Psalm 32:7
Psalm 34:4
2 Thessalonians 3:3
John 17:11

All-Knowing

1 John 3:19–20
Psalm 44:20–21
1 Corinthians 4:5

Never Changing

Malachi 3:6
Hebrews 13:8
Numbers 23:19
Lamentations 3:22–23
Psalm 18:50
2 Peter 3:9

What attributes of God came as a surprise to you? How does this change your view of who God is?

HEALING IS BY GOD'S TIMING

It is important to have a right understanding of healing so we can know what to expect as we make progress in the weeks and months ahead.

For most of us, the word *healing* implies a finished act. A small cut heals and leaves no lasting effects—maybe not even a scar. We heal from the broken finger we got playing softball and rarely think about it again. It is a once-and-for-all experience.

But when we talk of healing from a soul-wounding act like abortion, it is more accurate to speak of *regaining* health, or *learning to live in spiritually healthy ways*. What does this mean? The following analogy can help explain:

Our bodies have a healing mechanism known as the immune system. If it is working correctly, we will heal from almost any kind of injury or illness at a reasonable pace. But if our immune systems are worn down—say, by prolonged worry, poor nutrition, lack of rest, an aggressive virus, or the onslaught of too many stressors at once—the system fails under the overload. Your body is run down and cannot heal itself. (In fact, the medical community theorizes that immunosuppression may be the underlying cause of many modern-day ailments.)

However, if the immune system is boosted, it can be restored to normal functioning. Then the ailments that took over are likely to come under control or disappear quickly.

When we follow the steps to spiritual healing outlined in this book, we are strengthening our masculine souls. We are opening ourselves to God so that He can begin to restore the image He created in us: man as the protector, provider, and caregiver. When we escape from our self-centeredness and begin to think of and care for others, the old prison of self-protection we used to live in will be demolished.

One who has experienced the restoration of the body's immune system can experience rapid healing of major symptoms. So if too many things wear the body down or too many outer stressors attack, and the body begins to suffer again, there is now a significant

difference from before: *the immune system knows the steps to take to quickly restore the body's immune function and bring relief from old symptoms.*

As men who are being restored in the aftermath of abortion, our vision of ourselves will need to include this understanding: we are men who are learning the way to spiritual healing and maturity. And in our constant seeking of Christ, we can take comfort in the fact that we are “works in progress”—and when the past and old behavior patterns try to breach our spiritual systems, we will know the right steps to take to stay on the healthy track.

In working through this healing process, we have to be aware that God's timing may not meet our expectations. While we may want a quick fix, God might have a lesson for us in waiting. The following scriptures give us insight into His timing:

2 Peter 3:8–9

Proverbs 16:9

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Jeremiah 29:11

Lamentations 3:25–26

Proverbs 3:5–6

Based on these verses, how might waiting on God benefit you?

SEE YOURSELF AS A MAN OF ENDURANCE

What we have just described about the body and its immunity is, in a way, what goes on in the spiritual part of our being.

What we *want* is to experience relief from our symptoms. Some of us like instant gratification. Others just like things simple and done with because we do not like the ongoing messiness of real life. If we expect instant, once-and-for-all healing, we will be sadly disappointed.

What we *need* is to understand how to live—how to build a lifestyle that fosters continuous spiritual growth and wholeness. Only this will keep us on the path of spiritual health so that our souls stay strong and recover quickly from the blows that life delivers. Developing a lifestyle of inner health is far more important than the quick-fix, instant deliverance we would love to have.

Our real need is to rely on God to give us endurance. When we are held prisoner to our choices, we have no clue that enduring discomfort can be a secret to personal development. Rather than endure a good healthy sense of guilt that could drive us to God for freedom and forgiveness, we find ways to soothe away those impulses. Spiritual men have always known that learning to endure afflictions of the soul—even recurring waves of guilt—could help drive them closer to God and to other people instead of causing them to give up. The Bible is full of people who learned to endure the pains of remorse long after the sinful act was over and forgiven. Each time guilt came to accuse, they endured its fiery arrows and became even stronger by clinging more tightly to the grace of God.

In our view of ourselves, we will need to include this understanding: we are men under God's care and direction. If we trust Him and follow His guidance, He will bring a redemptive purpose out of our losses and failures.

The greatest healings we will ever experience are not like the miracles we sometimes hear about, such as the guy who is instantly healed from Stage 3 cancer. Our miracles will come as we learn to

walk with God in the path of healing He lays at our feet—one day, one step at a time.

Romans 5:3–5 says, “Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

Having read the passage from Romans, how might your suffering be seen as helpful rather than hurtful?

SEE YOURSELF AS A MAN IN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

As our spiritual healing will depend on learning mature endurance, it will also depend upon staying in a right relationship with God and other people. This means several things:

Seeking forgiveness and strength from God. For some, it’s difficult to admit when we are wrong, whether it’s from shame or hard-heartedness. Pride can blind us to our greatest weaknesses and set us up to fail repeatedly. Pride can cause us to blame God and everyone else when the flaw is in us.

Read Luke 15:11–32. We are the Prodigal Son. And as prodigals who want to return to our Father, we will never forget the welcome we receive the moment we turn our hearts back to God. Every day we will need to seek strength for moral courage—that ability to be

gut-level honest with God about our sins—and be willing to make amends where we can.

Remembering God’s forgiveness toward us and practicing it with others will keep us close to the One who is the strength of our souls.

What would it mean to you to be lovingly welcomed home by your father? If your relationship with your father was, or is, less than ideal, how does it impact the way you view the story of the Prodigal Son?

Living by faith—not by feelings. Jesus told His followers, “My Father... [and I] will come to [you] and make our home with [you]” (John 14:23b), “I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20), and “He will never leave you nor forsake you” (Deut. 31:6). It’s tempting to believe that God has left us, especially when we are feeling guilty or depressed.

Our emotions are not the measure of our relationship with God. As we continue to grow, we will need to remember that our faith stands on what God has promised: He will never leave or forsake us (see also Hebrews 13:5).

Do you think God will reject you because of the bad decisions and/or mistakes you’ve previously made? Why or why not?

Building bonds of trust and intimacy. In the past, some of us placed way too much trust in fallible humans and were burned when they failed us. This can drive us to bitterness and withdrawal.

By trusting in God's overarching care and goodness, we become bonded to Him. Seeing ourselves under His authority will allow us to rest more easily in our relationships with others, knowing that even if they fail us, we will not be destroyed because we are under God's care. We do not need to run from the imperfection of human relationships. Instead, we can grow stronger by staying in relationships and working out the practical messes of life.

What might it mean for your life if you were to trust God fully?

Valuing the things God values. While the voices of the world tell us to love things and use people, God tells us to use things and love people. Work, hobbies, home projects, money, and possessions—any of these things can get in the way of worshiping God or loving the people in our lives. And when we do, our thinking and our actions become disordered.

God values people first. When we look for the good we can do, the blessing we can bring to the life of another, we will remain on the track of spiritual maturity.

Recall a point in your life when you valued something more than you valued the people in your life. What resulted from that? How was that resolved?

Making a healthy contribution to life. In the past, many of us have felt sidelined, as if—given our own choices—we had no business giving anyone moral guidance or advice. When we seek godly direction, we will find order and purpose, and we will know that we have something to offer: godly wisdom and human insight gained by tough experience. We will no longer be fugitives, running away from others. We will have creativity, intelligence, humor, and that all-important measure of grace and understanding that we can share with others who walk a similar path.

Because we will have been forgiven and accepted by God, we will have something the world needs: hope and a future (see Jeremiah 29:11). Our growth in maturity will continue as we give to others what God has given us.

Giving to others what God has given us completes the cycle of growth by working out the reality of what we believe in our lives. As James reminds us, faith without works to back it up is useless and dead. Giving of ourselves to help others proves what we believe (see James 2:14–26). When we humbly find our place in the network of

relationships, we take part in God's redemptive, creative impact on the world and on our own generation. Finding our place in God's work cements our growth in maturity.

What would you like your legacy to be? Write three words that you would like people to use to describe you, aspirational words that you would like to grow into.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Resting under God's authority. Thus far, we've been living on our own, calling the shots and living by our wits. As we've governed our own lives, we've made some decent choices and some poor ones. If we choose to open ourselves up to God's direction, we will experience deep peace as we trust Him to care about our welfare on life's pathways.

Think about this: to have authority, we must live under authority. God, as the creator of all things, is the ultimate authority. The Bible is His word and our roadmap for life. It is not a series of "thou shalt nots," handed down to make our lives miserable. It is a letter from a loving Father to His sons and daughters, imparting wisdom for how to navigate this world. Where have we been deriving our authority from? Whose orders have we been following, and how's that working out for us?

In learning to trust God, we have to come to terms with the fact that He has placed people in authority over us. Their bad calls may affect us, but they don't have to derail us. Instead, we will be able to

learn from their mistakes, grow in some aspect of our character, and respond in a mature fashion to bring the best out of a less-than-ideal circumstance. We will show the love of Christ to those around us.

With God's help, we can develop the perspective Jesus expressed regarding authority. We can respond with the same confidence and peace He displayed when the Roman tyrant Pilate arrogantly declared his authority to grant Jesus life or death. Jesus said, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (John 19:11). We can speak this truth to the taunts and reminders from the enemy—our past.

What three words or phrases come to mind when you hear the word "authority"?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

SEE YOURSELF AS A SON OF THE LIVING GOD

The apostle John looked at the men of his generation and said with amazement, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are" (1 John 3:1)!

Throughout this book, we will take a long look at rebuilding our relationship with God in the aftermath of abortion. When all is said and done, the single most important and personally sustaining part of our new vision of ourselves will be this truth: we who were once fugitives and prisoners are now true sons of the living God.

We have a home—a safe place. We have a Father in heaven. And every part of our lives is under His care, correction, and direction because we belong to Him!

If we dare to think we are no longer in need of daily dependence on God, we are likely to either revert back to old patterns of behavior or become self-righteous. But if we abide in the One who calls Himself our Father, He will give us the creative power and balance we need to keep going and growing.

This is the greatest knowledge any man can live by. Let it be the light that guides us on all the pathways of our lives.



DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Vision Before Us

The Discussion Guide is designed to further your healing. The questions asked are more specific to your experience, the people involved and how you've processed your emotions. It is our prayer that you have a trusted confidant that you can share this section with. This study will have a greater impact if you allow other men to walk with you.

Ponder the following Scripture:

For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through the generations. (Psalm 100:5)

QUESTIONS

1. In what ways did your life change (e.g., emotionally, spiritually) as a result of your abortion decision?
2. What areas of your life would you like to see healed?
3. If you are not a Christ follower, what holds you back from taking that step of faith?

ACTION STEP

Whenever you make an important step, the change within can feel huge, as if you have catapulted into maturity all in one step. These are the first steps in your journey—they're not final. Take the next step. And the step after that.

Your unacknowledged loss and unresolved grief have brought you to this point. Will you commit to doing the work necessary to heal the broken places in your life?

If you are open to exploring what following Christ might look like for your life, we will walk with you.