

Sharing Forgiveness in the Center

1. Our sins burden us with guilt
2. All sins come with consequences
3. Christ removed our sins

Please note: When sharing forgiveness with those who have had an abortion, you may encounter three types of clients. First, there are some who have acknowledged their sin and have found forgiveness in Jesus. You can encourage them to continue to live in the new life God has given them. Second, are those who are apathetic about what has happened. They need to hear God's Law so the Spirit can work repentance in their heart. Finally, there are those who come to you for help because they are struggling to carry the burden and live with the pain. It is the last group that we will focus on in this study.

Worship

Take a moment to answer these questions privately in your own heart:

What past sin still lingers in your conscience?

What current sin is weighing heavy on your heart?

Now let us confess all our sinfulness and ask for forgiveness using the Confession of Sins from *Christian Worship*, p. 38.

L: We have come into the presence of God, who created us to love and serve him as his dear children. But we have disobeyed him and deserve only his wrath and punishment. Therefore, let us confess our sins to him and plead for his mercy.

G: **Merciful Father in heaven, I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child. But trusting in Jesus, my Savior, I pray: Have mercy on me according to your unfailing love. Cleanse me from my sin, and take away my guilt.**

L: God, our heavenly Father, has forgiven all your sins. By the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ, he has removed your guilt forever. You are his own dear child. May God give you strength to live according to his will.

G: **Amen.**

Introduction

Anne—a Christian—fell head over heels in love with a boy who made big promises and even bigger sexual advances. At a weak moment, she lost her virginity and became pregnant. The father no longer showed interest in her and pressured her to get an abortion. Anne finally succumbed to the pressure. While she was told that this would take care of the problem, her pain continues. “My baby is gone and I can't bring it back.” She reasoned, “How can God ever forgive me?”

Sin leaves burdens in its wake. When we sin, we also have guilt. When we or anyone around us sins, there are hurtful consequences.

In your own experience with sin, what have you found more difficult to deal with: sin's guilt or sin's consequences?

Studying God's Word

Our sins burden us with guilt

Can Anne be forgiven for having an abortion?

Read Psalm 51:1-15.

1. Take note of the heading to the psalm. What sin had David committed?
2. Pick out phrases from the psalm that show that David had a keen awareness of his sin and guilt.
3. Guilt is invisible. You can't measure it or weigh it, yet it is perhaps the heaviest of burdens. What is guilt?
4. In what ways does the burden of guilt manifest itself? (cf. also Ps 32:3-4)
5. Where did David find hope in answer to his guilt? (Again, pick out some specific phrases from the psalm.) (cf. also Ps 32:1-2,5)

How can guilt show itself after an abortion?

Reexperience: flashbacks of the abortion, distress from people/things that remind them of the abortion, grieving/depression near the date of the abortion or the baby's due date or Mother's/Father's Day.

Avoidance: avoid or deny thoughts/feelings or activities/situations that might cause them to remember the abortion; diminished interest in important events; estrangement from others; seeking relief from alcohol/drugs.

Grieving: at times coming out after decades of suppressing guilt; feelings of insomnia or anxiety; suicidal thoughts; often accompanied by a feeling that they cannot be forgiven.

Psalm 51

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet ¹ Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.

² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

⁶ Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.

¹⁴ Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

Psalm 32

Of David. A *maskil*. ¹

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

² Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.

³ When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. *Selah*

⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"—

All sins come with consequences

Joanne and Rob were married and had children. Rob lost his job and they were fast running out of savings when she got pregnant. Joanne felt she should get an abortion. Rob repeatedly begged her not to. Joanne was very ambivalent and decided to seek advice from her mother, whom she felt was a good Christian and someone she admired.

Joanne's mother listened thoughtfully and in a sympathetic voice said, 'I understand what you are feeling and why you want an abortion. I thought of abortion too in some of my pregnancies, and I can see why you feel it makes sense in this situation. I will support whatever you decide.'

Joanne felt her mother gave her permission for the abortion and so she went through with it. Shortly afterward, Rob got a new job, their financial situation improved, and Joanne went into a severe reaction of grief, anxiety, and guilt that required active psychiatric care. She was very angry, not at her husband who opposed the abortion – but at her mother, whom she expected to stop her. The abortion affected the entire family – the marriage relationship, the other children who knew that a brother or sister was aborted, her relationship with her mother and with other relatives who knew or guessed. Rob had felt helpless, unable to protect his child's life and felt that Joanne had lost confidence in his ability to provide for the family. The abortion taught all of them that this family was not as safe and close as they had thought. They would allow a family member to be sacrificed before they would help one another out with a loan or other assistance. The abortion disrupted the security of the family more permanently than the financial problems ever would.

Read Matthew 26:14-16,47-50; 27:1-5.

1. What led Judas to sin?
2. Judas tried to "unbetray" Jesus and give the money back. Why isn't it possible to undo a sin after it has been committed?
3. The consequences of one sin tend to beget other sins and still more consequences. Tell how this was so in the case of Judas.

What consequences might follow an abortion?

- Guilt and shame
- Anger (at self and others)
- Self-punishment (e.g. even at times seeking abusive relationships)
- Restricted range of emotions/an inability to have loving and tender feelings.
- An aversion to intimacy or, conversely, promiscuity due to low self-esteem.
- ...

Matthew 26

¹⁴ Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. ¹⁶ From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people.

⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." ⁴⁹ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him.

⁵⁰ Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came for." ^a

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him.

Matthew 27

²⁷ Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. ² They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor.

³ When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴ "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood."

"What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility."

⁵ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

Christ removed our sins

Anne has finally found the courage to call your center. It has been years since the abortion. You can hear the pain in her voice. She desperately asks you, "How can God ever forgive me?"

Read 2 Samuel 12:13.

1. After almost a year of avoiding his sin and struggling with guilt, David was confronted by the prophet Nathan and, without making any excuses, confessed his sin against God. What was the prophet Nathan's *immediate* response to David?

Read Luke 7:44-48.

1. How might guilt and shame have kept this woman (known and probably mocked in this small town as a prostitute) from coming to Jesus?
2. "Therefore, I tell you her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." Explain. How does this apply to counseling?

2 Samuel 12

¹³ Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die."

Luke 7

⁴⁴ Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

Please note: If the client is apathetic and refuses to acknowledge the abortion, then let the power of God's Law break down the excuses and walls they have created. Apply the law with patience and love - remember you're trying to reach their heart. It is only when they begin to open up and acknowledge their sin that God can powerfully work forgiveness in their heart through the Gospel.

3. What did this woman find in Jesus?

Following an abortion it is normal to try to avoid or deny what happened; it is very difficult to confess the sin because then you have to confront feelings of guilt, anger and grief. However, it is through confession that we can begin to find healing (cp. David and the woman above). When we accept what we've done, our hearts are now ready to find peace in Jesus.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" - 1 John 1:9.

Help the hurting to acknowledge their emotions and to understand why they're feeling that way. Then patiently help them to see their Savior. Grace is the antithesis of guilt. Perhaps you might begin with sins they can believe Jesus took away, pointing to the cross. Take lying as an example. Did Jesus die on the cross for the many times we have lied? (Yes). Then, if that sin is gone, should I feel guilty about it anymore? (No). Continue progressively, each time pointing to the cross until you reach abortion. Once again, point to the cross and help them to see that Jesus died for that sin as well so that they can stand in the confidence of God's grace.

Ultimately only the Spirit working through God's Word can help them to truly rest in Jesus' arms. Below is a small sample of passages that might be used to share forgiveness. Are there any other passages that you have found particularly helpful when sharing forgiveness in the center?

Ps 36:5 Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.

Ps 86:15 But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

Ps 103:12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Is 53:5-6 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Jer 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Jer 31:3 I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

Zeph 3:17 The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.

Mt 11:28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Lk 18:14 I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.

Lk 19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.

Lk 23:43 I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.

Jn 1:29 Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

Jn 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Jn 8:1-11 [Jesus forgives the adulterous woman].

Jn 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

Rm 3:23-23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Rm 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Rm 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Rm 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus

Rm 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Eph 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Eph 2:4-5 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

Titus 3:4-5 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit

He 8:12 For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.

1 Pe 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

1 Jn 1:7 the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

1 Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

[As time permits], share with one another different experiences.

Are there success stories of someone you have shared forgiveness with after an abortion that you're willing to share?

Is there someone you're working with now and you're looking for direction on how best to continue helping them?

Summary

The pain of abortion is something that many carry in shame today. As with all sin, it clogs our spiritual arteries, making it hard for our hearts to experience the fullness of life God intends for us. It leaves messes in our lives, like the aftermath of an explosion that scatters debris everywhere. Explain how Christ is the answer to both the guilt and the consequences of our sins.