

**LEADING A BIBLE STUDY
TO
HELP FATHERS HEAL
AFTER AN ABORTION**

BY

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FORWARD

This leaders guide may differ from some in that it does not follow the regimen of an accompanying Bible study. Here we offer a simple communication model. A step by step process of communication to guide a facilitator in the use with any Bible study.

I was once asked: ‘What is the most important thing you can do as a group facilitator?’ I think it is developing trust. In this case it means working with a father to help him discover what motivates his behavior. I believe behavior is the result of motive.

When motive can be discerned and/or understood by a hurting father he is probably closer to entering the healing process. Personal motives are most likely the drivers of our thoughts, attitudes, speech and actions. Where do motives originate? I think, from the heart. Proverbs 4:23 indicates that the issues of life come from the heart.

If motive is the most important issue, finding a model which will discover and help a person find out what motives are driving their behavior, then appropriately deal with them, can be beneficial. If such a model exists, that model should work to facilitate whatever helping material one would choose to use in a group, or with an individual. I’ve been using a model for several years which I believe accomplishes what we are desiring. It seems to be the communication model Jesus used with his dialogues. He would ask the other person or persons what they wanted. I don’t for one minute believe He didn’t already know what they wanted or needed, but by asking them He could make sure they were really focused on what their need was. This is called BEING AWARE. It is a first step in healing.

Next, Jesus would attempt to make the conversation He was about to have with the other parties safe, so they would not close down, but continue to listen and interact. This is called SAFETY. Next, He would begin the process of BUILDING TRUST. Next He would challenge them to a COMMITMENT. Next, He would challenge them to reconsider the reason they wanted to remain the way they were or change. This is called evaluating their SUPPORT STRUCTURE. Next, He would give them feedback to see if the change was working for them. This is called EVALUATING. Next, He would either give further instruction, or let them know they had gotten it, and move on. This is called CLOSURE.

So there you have it. The model in a paragraph. The model is important because building trust means applying truth which can be verified, then be workable and ownable by those involved. Now, I have been a student of various biblical characters over the

years in a quest to keep checking this model. In addition, I have led many Bible studies, and listened to hundreds of people as they work through this model to a positive end. I by no means say it is the only one, or the best one, but it works. People want to know what motivates their actions, whether good or bad. They can make decisions for change when they know the motivating factors, or they can make decisions of reinforcement if the motivating factors are positive.

Here is how I think you can use various books in the Bible to discern motives which are innate to us all. For instance the book of Genesis universally defines several possible motives a person may have. With the Creation event we find recorded in Genesis 1:27-33;2:1-16, we learn that we are motivated to be fruitful, multiply, have authority over or manage the affairs of earth, eat, and to worship.

When we study the book of Proverbs we find it beneficial and enlightening for us as well. The book of Proverbs is particularly interesting in the explanation of contrasting character. The character of the righteous and the evil man are contrasted. The character of the wise man and the fool are contrasted. The character of the prostitute and the young man are explored. Wealth and poverty, long life and short life principals are discussed, etc. You will notice that I refer to them often. Further, observation of the style Jesus used in communicating with His disciples, and others, offer insight for us. The beatitudes as an example will be useful. Jesus discussed the various kinds of character responses to trials in the beatitudes. For instance He said that if you are poor in spirit, that is you are down and out spiritually, you can count it a blessing because God will meet you there and give you the kingdom of God. If you are sorrowful over a loss, you can mourn and expect that God will give you comfort, etc.

Back to Genesis we see Adam and Eve reflecting the motives which they were given by God in their behavior. Genesis 3 chronicles the well-known story of how Satan introduced sin to Eve and Adam through deception. Once they had sinned it changed their motive of worship. (James 1:12-16) They were operating before sin on a love/trust relationship with God, after sin on a fear/anxiety relationship. What changed? Their motive shifted because they violated their own selves in what they knew to be congruent with their inner makings. Sin (that is doing what one inherently knows to be wrong) produced that inner conflict. That inner conflict was very uncomfortable. It needed a fix. They didn’t know how to fix it so they began operating in fear. They began to run from the conflict. God found them hiding from Him, and hiding themselves because they discovered they were

naked. Satan was the catalytic agent of the change in motive then, as he is today. Did God change? No He ever remains the same, but Adam and Eve's perception of God did change. They began looking at Him through the lens of their own sin. They were ignorant of remedy so they hid, ignorant of power and of fear so they blamed. But they were not ignorant of the consequences of sin, so their life died to being ministers of giving and became ministers of taking. They were changed by sin. But, the second Adam, Jesus Christ, has given us the model for recovery. Through Him the ministration of giving has been restored. Here is the model again outlined:

We become **aware** of our sin by the conviction of the Holy Spirit. We claim His promise that we can find **safety**; and begin to trust Him for healing. We approach Him with the faith of **trust**; we repent of our sin, and we come under new **management**. He forgives us, and changes our **support structure**. We **evaluate** the better life in Him; and forget those things which are behind. That is we **close**.

It is generally observable that a father who has experienced an abortion and lost his fatherhood has changed his life focus from an investment into the future, to a spending in the present in an attempt to pay for a debt of the past. We help him decide to restore his life to an investment status. We want him to experience the reality that Christ has paid for the past and is the Lord of the present and future.

Recovery work for fatherhood lost begins when a father is miserable. Generally he has **failed** in almost all of the **motivational** aspects of his life, but he probably **doesn't know why**. His inner **conflict** has not been resolved, he is living a **lie**, and has latently become ready and **willing to change**. Most hurting fathers want to change but they don't know why or how. Men send out signals and signs when they are ready for change. Every man who has lost a child has a story. We should be ready to read these signals, and be ready to listen to his story. Paul exhorts us to be willing to help those who resist themselves. (2Timothy 2:25)

As you use this guide, I want you as facilitators to become aware of the signals (see appendix). In addition, there are several possible fatherhood lost scenarios. Each father wants to grieve and get closure. It may surprise you that many others desire closure as well. There are grandfathers, uncles, cousins siblings, etc. Since our culture has led us to believe that this is merely a woman's issue, fathers often feel awkward when they discover they have sorrow over the loss of one of their children by an abortion. They hesitate to search for healing because it is far outside of the social paradigms, both sectarian and secular. Most remain

with their hurts in secrecy and silence. We have found that abortion aftermath is likely the most **affecting** family issue of our century.

I want you to use this manual to become comfortable using the skills and concepts established within. You can learn the skills of **awareness, safety, trust, management, support structure, evaluation, and closure**. With these tools, you can help a father outfit his life for his journey from pain and fear to love and trust. You can use the communication skills I have written which will allow you to develop an ability to get to **trust**. Moreover, you will be able to help these hurting men submit to the management of Christ to change their hurts into healing, establish relationships with others who can better help them to reach these goals of change, evaluate the progress, and find closure.

An expanded grief model is included for your use. In addition to the model popularized by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, the **dimension of comfort** promised by Jesus is introduced and discussed.

Closure, including the outline and directional notes for a **memorial**, are discussed. The importance of **father/son relationships** is advanced. These concepts may lead some men to look for the **missing blessing** they can establish with their own fathers.

So, as you can see, this manual can become a useful tool for you regardless of the accompanying material you choose to use.

INTRODUCING FATHERHOOD LOST

Fatherhood, from the beginning, has meant **commitment to family**. The vast majority of fathers in all cultures celebrate this commitment. Fathers seem to be motivated to a family commitment being created in the image of God. Boys have innate drives to build their commitment skills as they mature. When the **skills of protecting, providing and preserving** are rewarded as boys grow, their confidence for commitment to family grows as well. **Commitment to worship** has been a feature of manhood and fatherhood from the beginning as well. All cultures exhibit the need within to worship. I believe the best reward for worship is a relationship with Jesus and His bride the church.

History teaches us the tragic legacies of cultures which chose to minimize the need for fathers to commit to provision, protection, preservation and worship of God. We are shown that the cultures which forget this commitment, diminish their capacity to remain civilized, then fade, and eventually disappear. Those cultures who choose to worship pleasure, irresponsibility, and diminish the need for a family eventually die.

It is my sincere hope that our culture begins once again to celebrate manhood, fatherhood, and family commitment as a predominant cultural value system. 'One nation under God,' with family as its center piece, is my prayer.

Many men in our culture are confused. It seems to me that our American culture is attempting to dissuade family values through the promotion of sexual irresponsibility. Sex is no longer valued as a sacrament of marriage. Sex is celebrated as a recreational pastime without consequence. When sexual mistakes are made, there is a technological answer. This answer is twofold. First, irresponsible sexual activity may be mitigated by the technological use of 'birth control.' Second, when this technology fails, there remains an answer. Abortion could be used 'as a form of birth control.'

Sexual irresponsibility may be celebrated due to technology, but it cannot be justified within the spirit and soul of men and women. That's where men and women must live with themselves. A guy or girl has to look in the mirror. When they do, they may see, a person of incongruent character. Their hearts tell them that family, responsibility, commitment, and peace with God are necessary for happiness. (Romans 1:18) Their culture tells them none of these things are as important as pleasure. As Adam and Eve were when they transformed their paradigm from love/trust to (good/evil) fear/anxiety, they face a dilemma. They

know pop culture is not promoting the truth, but technology can overcome so they reason it must be OK, and even if it's not, they convenience themselves that they can 'get away with it.' This action of incongruence produces a low grade fear of a future time when one's own actions will have to be accounted for. Further, it evokes a low grade contempt for the inner values which are surfacing, vis a vis, this dilemma in our conscience. (We have all heard the argument that it is only the religious person who should feel guilty because of the rules of religion. However, that is false reasoning since all persons, whether religious or not, feel guilt). But culture says, live only for today and enjoy your passions.

Then it happens! Pregnancy. A child is conceived. The first line of technology has failed. The call of the heart is to abandon technological answers. The little voice inside says 'You are a parent.' Now, the low grade fear becomes panic fear and anger. 'How could this be happening, we used protection?' one might say. Yet it did!

Now this knowledge triggers anger, confusion, doubt, fear, and the reality that sex and families are connected. Technology has failed and a haunting commitment to being a family is in your face. This is the last thing expected, and the first thing up for review.

Nearly four thousand times a day, men and women **abandon the call** to family commitment, in favor of the second technological fix, abortion. Vincent Rue, a noted Christian post-abortion counselor, has worked with hundreds of women and many men who will confess that the baby is gone, and the problem of the pregnancy has been taken care of by the abortion. As a caveat he will tell you that the men and women will say the knowledge of the baby in the womb has moved. It is now 'baby on the brain.'

Proverbs 28:16 indicates that a person who has been involved in the taking of the life of another is forever a fugitive. What this means is that the parent, who takes the life of one of their children by abortion or any other circumstance, can't escape the clutches of emotional trauma. They know they have done a horrific deed and are afraid of God. Further they have no confidence in themselves. After the **decision to kill** one's own children have been exacted, what other **decision** could be rejected as an OK thing to do? One begins to believe he is in fact a monster of great proportion. How could he have done this, and how can God ever accept him or forgive him? He is afraid of God, and others! A father who would make the decision, via abortion which would kill his own child, has done the ultimate in child abuse. The reason for the decision has little to do with the outcome. He

is afraid, he is a fugitive, with the mentality of a fugitive.

Examples by questions follow. How do you think being afraid of God will affect worship? How will it affect commitment? How will it affect the confidence level of manhood? How about when the next child is conceived, will the thrill of fatherhood overwhelm the dad, or will he be ashamed of how he ended the life of the former child (if he participated in the choice, which about 70% do)? How about his ability to provide and protect and preserve his heritage, will it be enhanced or diminished by the abortion choice? How about the effect upon his fear of women, children, and deep friendships? The list goes on and on.

I have found that men want to succeed and be blessed in five general areas. They have in fact a quest to be blessed! They want to be appreciated and successful in providing, protecting, preserving their lineage, performing as a productive citizen, father, and dad, and they long to worship God. I have demonstrated by fiat that abortion affects all these areas negatively for the father. This is what I refer to as **fatherhood lost**.

Fatherhood lost by an abortion experience fosters a fugitive lifestyle. It is life in hiding, fear, rejection, blame, anger, reduced capacity, rationalization, sleeplessness, sexual dysfunction, abuse of self and others, compulsive addition, anxiety, avoidance of God, women, children, and other persons places and things. It is life in the classic case of one who has perpetrated a series of choices, only to find that his perpetration has victimized him now as a helpless man with nowhere to grieve. It is a life of secrets. A life of trying to make up for the wrong, yet not wanting anyone to know the motivation for the works he does as he is trying to make up for the wrong.

A father who tries to stop his mate from aborting their child is nonetheless a fugitive as well. He is the father. His guilt is over his inability to negotiate for the child's life, and his silence (sin of omission) over the larger cultural issue of the abuse of abortion. His worth is devalued in his own estimation, and his fear breeds a low grade contempt for not being good enough to protect his own child.

Fatherhood lost is a drain upon our culture. I have found that the fathers I have listened to are afraid of commitment. They are angry at anyone who wants them to be, and likely to abandon or run from responsibility. I think I can make a case for our culture to recognize the mistake of abortion on at least five fronts.

1. If fatherhood lost changes the behavior patterns of men so that they are less likely to stay

committed to their mate, we will likely continue to have more single mothers raising children with fatherless households. The financial cost of this kind of single parent family has been exploding over the last ten to fifteen years.

2. If fatherhood lost affects the worship patterns of a man because he is afraid of God and church involvement, the church will suffer greatly because of the loss of the bold belief and presentation of the gospel for this generation and for generations to come.

3. If fatherhood lost reduces commitment to family, the fatherless children will have an abandonment role model in the next generation.

4. If fatherhood lost results in abuse and compulsive addictive behavior, then the cost of treatment and recovery for the abused will continue to skyrocket as it has since 1973.

5. If fatherhood lost continues as a lifestyle and abortion continues to be the accepted norm for extended birth control methods, then the culture will fade and eventually die, as have many before through the centuries.

You are probably a motivated person in the help ministry, or you wouldn't be reading this manual. So I would encourage you to continue and step out in faith and start a help ministry for fatherhood lost.

This manual will attempt to equip the facilitator in a track which will work with a number of Bible studies or other grief models to help the hurting father recover from fatherhood lost.

The track is **simple and recurring**. In each session, the facilitator should try to help the group or individual:

1. **Be aware** of his feelings

2. **Feel safe** about sharing them, challenge their reality in a way which will

3. **Build trust**, try to establish a

4. **Commitment** to come under new management, repent for the past failure of the abortion decision, receive forgiveness for overcoming, examine the

5. **Support system** which will be used in the recovery attempt,

6. **Evaluate** the progress, make changes which are appropriate and

7. **Close** and provide restitution.

As you can see in the table of contents, this manual will attempt to follow **its own recommended track**. I intend to make you **aware** of what fatherhood lost is, give you **safe** advice on what I have found to help fathers overcome it, suggest ways you can use to **build trust**, identify ways to help fathers **manage** their healing journey, give practical advice on establishing **support systems**, make suggestions on how to **evaluate**, and how to **close**.

CHAPTER 1

THE LOOK AND FUNCTION OF A FATHERHOOD LOST SUPPORT GROUP

THE LOOK . . .

In the early going I quickly found that men will not come to a 'Post Abortion Stress Support Group.' Let me give you a couple of reasons why. They were not physically aborted, and in their mind anything associated with abortion is for women. Even calling the group a post abortion stress group is a male turn off. It is really simple for a father to disconnect if we stay in the defining realm of abortion. All the pain he has can be there but he will not define it in connection with an abortion at all!

Another thing I picked up on is that holding the meeting at a crisis pregnancy center or the like will keep them away. 'It's too pink' as one man put it. I'm telling you these things so you won't have to be disappointed when no one shows up for the meeting if you choose to call it a post abortion support group for men or hold it at your pregnancy help center. It's not because men are not in need of help, or they are really more shy than women.

I found men who wanted to talk, wanted to do so privately and with confidentiality on neutral turf. They didn't want to talk about the abortion so much. What they talked about was **fatherhood lost**, the pain of losing the relationship with their mate, and the potential relationship with their child who died. Was this a cop out? I don't think so. The father often was just the financier of the abortion, so it is easy for him to be disconnected to the event itself. It took a couple of mistakes for me to get a clue on these issues.

I started with one man. One-on-one 'grouping' is good. It meets the need of the man, is confidential, and is usually on his turf. I have done several successful one-on-one's. They haven't all been successful. Once in a while I've found a man to be too angry or too scared to complete the workbooks or the grief work assignments. For some, hurts they have, have been more than they think they can trust God for. This apparent departure doesn't necessarily mean there hasn't been a measure of success. It means I didn't see all the goals he set out to accomplish come to fruition, so I've counted it as only semi-successful for me. If you were to ask him, maybe he would say it was the best thing he ever did. You see I don't get to see the harvest sometime.

Another factor to keep in mind is that professional counselors usually number a group for group therapy at six or more. I think this might work with

female groups, but it doesn't work for me. It may be my shortcoming as a facilitator, but I'm going to suggest another possibility. I've found when men meet together in groups of more than three, only two or three of them will talk. I think this is because lots of men don't feel very comfortable sharing past pains about their lost children. So if there is a larger group, they can continue to remain silent and hide. They can develop trust relationships and disclose more easily in a smaller setting. In larger groups they can hide in a way that is acceptable to the other group members who are less inhibited, but I can tell that they don't get the benefit of healing they could if the group is smaller. For that reason I recommend keeping it at two or three people and the facilitator. We even had one 'group' where we had one father and two facilitators. It was wonderful! It was like a tag team, wrestling against the powers and principalities.

When I started doing this work, I thought the ideal thing would be to get groups of homogenous flair together. (i.e., all fathers of the lost baby who pushed for the abortion; or all fathers who tried to keep it from happening; or all grandfathers of the lost child; or all etc....) You get the picture. I felt that if the groups were homogenous, the trust factor would be easier to develop. Let me tell you that I don't think that will work, nor is it necessary in my opinion. Every man has a different story for us to hear. I've found their pain focuses on the loss of what they should have been able to do as a father, grandfather, or other acquaintance of someone involved. They want very much to get over the deep guilt and shame they have as they face this failure. The key is not homogeneity as much as keeping the group size small and developing expectations in the group which can be realized. That can build trust. As an example, God builds trust by first promising to do something for us. This makes us feel safe with Him. He gives us realistic expectations about Himself, then when we believe His promise and He comes through, we trust Him. Sometimes we get so exuberant with our trust in His promises that we begin to crave them. Then, when they don't happen, we wonder where God is. Later we find that He was just letting us know that He will not be manipulated and that our trust must be in Him rather than His promises.

So here we have a sketch of what it looks like. Two to three men and a facilitator, meeting on neutral turf, with 'a do or die' promise to one another for confidentiality and expectations that we will support each other through it all.

When we first started group meetings, we had no prepared Bible study for 'Men's Post Abortion Stress.' There were plenty of women's Bible studies

out there but none for men. In fact there was only one book on the issue that I've ever found. It is written by Arthur Shostak. He is not a Christian and he is 'pro-choice.' That puts a damper on the process right away. (I think he remains pro-choice because he would have to admit the serious wrong and try to resolve it if he didn't rationalize the pro-choice position.)

He researched one thousand men after they had accompanied their mate to the clinic for her abortion. He didn't ask them if they were religious, but he did ask them to tell him how they felt. He found that the men felt a sense of relief and deep loss at the same time. He often found that men felt loss over the breakup of their relationships with the mother of their aborted child. Arthur himself felt a profound loss and sorrow over the abortion loss. He also absolved his relationship with the woman whom he accompanied to the clinic.

We couldn't find any information for men only, so we used the '**Women in Ramah**' Bible study, and adapted it whenever possible and applicable. It was awkward, but healing took place. I think it worked to the degree it did because God wanted these first men to be healed and He wants the Glory! Later New Life Ministries wrote a study for both men and women in recovery from post abortion stress called Conquerors. In 1994, 'Turning a Father's Heart' (a study for fathers) was written by Cochrane and Jones. The latter two studies have been published and are available. (See appendix)

The important sense I have is that men recovering from fatherhood lost face a challenge in three spiritual areas. They need to reconcile, grieve, and forgive. Studies which feature these elements will likely serve your purpose. Trust in the success of the group is best served if the members understand their expectations about the time commitment. So, what can you expect for time commitment? Most recovery efforts suggest that it can take from 10 to 12 weeks of meetings to complete the material. I have personally had groups which lasted as little as 13 weeks and as long as 27 weeks. Although there is a set timetable for length of the group, if it becomes clear that will likely change, the members will need to decide upon that change. This can go a long way to preserve trust. At the beginning of each group I ask for at least a 13-15 week commitment.

Some research is being done on a "weekend" workshop followed by a 'do it yourself' study which has shown to be somewhat successful for men. However, the weekend workshop is usually attended by both partners and is not intended to be a 'men's only' effort. There is some merit in searching for an

effective program which will be shorter, yet one which will allow a father to process his hurts. On a weekend, I think the most we can expect is a resolve to a commitment to change. I think this process just takes time. Here's why.

Fathers have usually built a way of life around the pain. Changing requires the courage to significantly alter that. Change to what? The new way is not really clear in most cases. It must be tried to see if it can be more comfortable than the behavior now experienced in the 'pain' lifestyle. Moreover, the changes may be met with resistance. As a case in point, a young man in a group once told me that his spouse was in a funk because he wasn't fighting with her as much. She thought he may have lost love for her, and may even be seeing another woman. She had learned to live with his pain. So it wasn't he alone who was changing, she was forced to make adjustments as well.

In addition, even though, the group is 13-15 weeks long or maybe longer, it is important to let a father know that he might still have some unresolved issues once he has completed the group. I want fathers to know that a group should accomplish as much as it can to resolve issues, and to 'outfit' a father with tools to reconcile with God, overcome grief, anger, and the symptoms he might have down the line. A group will never be long enough, or cover enough spectra to allow all the feelings of the months or years to surface and find resolve. But, if he can learn the tools of how to let God manage his anger conflicts and learn how to 'bless his losses' down the road, he can overcome much more than the pain of fatherhood lost.

THE FUNCTION

Are groups necessary? In my opinion, a father can find healing without a group, without a facilitator, and without a Bible study. All are simply tools in the hands of God's servants. I have listened to men who initially found some healing in talking to bartender who would listen to their story. The Story of Balaam may be appropriate here. He was a prophet of Israel who wanted to do religion his own way. His donkey was the vehicle of transporting him from one place to the other so he could accomplish his own thing. When God intervened in his life to correct him, He used the donkey. An angel invisible to Balaam was sent by God to stop him from his own foolishness, but God let the donkey see the angel. When the donkey refused to move forward in fear of the angel, Balaam began to beat him. The donkey spoke to Balaam, then Balaam could see the angel and he was able to repent. Our job as facilitator is much the same as Balaam's

donkey. We let the group know they can expect us to help carry a hurting father through the problem areas of his life. When we get beat upon, we simply speak the truth in love, and in a sense we protect the hurting father from the fallen angels and try to keep him on the road. This is God's work. Unless He builds the house, it is built in vain.

I want facilitators to know, that it is not they but God that exacts healing. Group members need to expect that God is doing the healing. But, it is not to be taken lightly that a facilitator must do all things in the group to the glory of God. He must be as prepared as he can, and enter the group sessions with the fear of God in mind.

There are a few axioms I'd like to share with the facilitator at this point. These will help you to gain confidence and boldness in bringing men to their issues.

1. I believe all men whether hurting or not have a genuine desire to worship. I believe the desire comes right from the heart of the Heavenly Father. If we study the need and listen well enough, we can point the way to the Father's heart for him.

2. I believe behavior, which continues to condemn a man in his heart, drives him further away from God's blessing. I'm talking about his own behavior and behavior he experiences from others in reaction or response to his pain. I would challenge the facilitator to be an encourager even when exhorting.

3. I believe Jesus Christ ever intercedes for everyone all the time. Jesus knows exactly what kind of prayer to give up for each person. I think you can teach a father to have confidence in his prayer life, that he can ask Jesus what His prayer is for him both now, and in the past. **This is one of the most powerful tools any father can gain.**

4. I believe worth is restored to an individual by giving him honor. One sure way I've found to honor another person is to listen. Receive them and what they have to give you. At first it will only be words, but later it will be their story and their dreams. If a father can give his life for the sake of Christ, he can keep it. Teaching fathers to be a living sacrifice as a means of restitution for the lost child will honor them and the child, and give other hurting fathers hope. This is a very important axiom. Fatherhood lost comes from not having received life, manhood, and fatherhood. These are not parts of existence which just happen. They are gifts from God. Once an abortion is experienced, the guilt, shame, and self punishment a father has may result from his rejection of God's gifts. Having done this, he reasons that others will reject my gifts as well. Sin has a way of making us look at God in reflection of ourselves, kind of a reverse image

thing. The father feels he has failed to honor God by ending or otherwise destroying these gifts. So, the last thing he expects is to be given honor in receipt of his gifts. When his gifts are received, he begins to overcome the blockage he has built in not receiving gifts of God.

5. I believe in using trite slogans, euphemisms, metaphors, and catch phrases to cement thoughts I want fathers to remember. Here's a comforting biblical catch phrase: 'this too shall pass.' Jesus often spoke in phrases, word pictures and metaphors. The parables are full of rich meaning partly because the stories spoke pictures into the people places and things in the life of each person.

6. I believe in challenging existing support systems. As I have indicated before, this may be why groups take longer. Changing support systems is a very threatening endeavor. Support for bad behavior makes the time of changing longer. If a father has been successfully masking and hiding, he will likely have a support system which honors that behavior. He may want to change that so he can find support from those who won't allow him to mask and hide.

7. I believe a father should know when the group is over. There is a time for everything, but not a lifetime. I once interviewed a man who said he had been in several prior support groups. This sent up all kinds of red flags. The question I had for him was 'Tell me, what common elements have you received from each group, and have you felt confident enough to try them?' He confessed that all the past groups had told him he would not significantly improve until he changed his support structure. His wife was one of those in the support structure, and he didn't believe he wanted to get a divorce. I think it was his first time to think about the conclusions he had reached. He felt he would have to divorce if he changed his support structure. I asked him to come in again with his wife so we could talk. When we did, we reached agreement that she would help him change. She had no idea that was a goal for him until we met. She said she had been trying to change his "friends" for years. He didn't need another group. He needed agreement with his spouse. The point is, a father need not remain in misery and pain forever. There is a time for grief and a time for dancing. Teaching a father how and when grief takes place, and when it should end, will do much for his spiritual warfare. He can use those tools when the accuser of our souls comes around and tries to stir up old guilt, shame, and sorrow.

It is for this very reason I feel a memorial service should be offered. Don't expect every man to want to do it. They won't. However, those who take advantage of it can look back to a specific time and

date when they had closure. The memorial is a ritual close. When the accuser tries to bring it up again, they will have a memory of the exact time when it was over. They can remember burying the child (in kind), the guilt, the shame, the anger, the depression, and the past at the memorial service. There will usually be witnesses to back him up in case his memory goes bad. The ritual of closure is also a part of restitution. There is a sense of a return to dignity with a ritual closure.

Once I had a father's group decide they wanted to do closure by making some little thing or buy a little memento for their lost child. One man carved a little boat and just let it float down the creek as a way to complete his own memorial. He watched it until it was out of sight. His goal was to be as David when he grieved over his lost child. This father said 'It's over.' And for him it was. He had closed. He had given something of himself back to the child. The memory of that closure will sustain him because he is a father forever, but he knows he has forgiveness and grace in his closure.

Several fathers in past groups decided to ask their fathers to give them a 'blessing' into manhood. At first this seems contradictory. They are already men and fathers. But they did this because they felt they were men only in age and not in the blessing of the lineage of their own families. They also asked their fathers to give them their blessing as having fathered a baby which was lost by abortion. When these grandfathers lay hands upon the heads of these fathers and bless them as sons, and as men who have fathered their lost grand child... well, just get a box of tissue. Only God knows how much healing goes on there! What a way for a father and grandfather to be validated and accepted!

Most fathers at some point in the group voice genuine concern for the well being of their mate. Many times these fathers no longer have a relationship with them. As I described before, sometimes abortion refocuses and often sabotages or ends the man/woman relationship. My own group statistics chart 83% of the relationships have ended or no longer have a congruent open and sharing value.

Fathers have said they would like to go find ...and apologize to her. They want to know she is OK. They have a sense of unfairness if they are finding resolve and don't think she is. I think this is their natural instinct to protect and preserve her which is surfacing.

When this happens, I give this advice. 'Let God run her through your life if you are supposed to say anything to her.' I do this because many times the woman who was involved is now married or in another

relationship. I've seen much more heat than light result from such efforts when not God-orchestrated.

One man in a group was stunned when all at once at a trade show, she came over to him and said 'hello.' He remembered the advice: "If God runs her through your life go for it." With sweaty palms and a dry mouth he began a really awkward apology. Once he'd started, it began to flow and it was well received. They departed under good terms, and both were more free from the prior history pains they'd had. It's amazing to watch God do this work.

8. I don't believe you need to get fancy or too organized. Fathers can sense your anxiety if you think the meetings should be moving along faster than God intends. Give some place for the Holy Spirit to deal with each man's own stuff. Every meeting doesn't have to follow format. If someone is particularly hurting, feel like its OK to stop and ask everyone to pray with him. Take your time, let things develop in a comfortable fashion. On the other hand, I don't feel sticking around until 2:00 A.M. is necessary either. My advice is to try to find a comfortable balance and try not to grieve or quench the spirit!

Now, you can see how the group should look and function. Fathers can find closure for the lost child in this support group. Churches and para-church organizations need to welcome men who have this prior history to make them aware of these support groups.

If a facilitator can let the churches know that many fathers have abandoned the faith over this issue, then many churches will begin to run to the rescue. I think this is what Jesus was saying when he talked of our ministry to the fatherless. It is part of the stewardship of God. When God sees our need, He goes to work to meet it.

I've been told by many fathers in my groups that they feel a deep bitterness over losing a child. Although they believe it is partly their fault, they mostly blame God. Many have stated that this is a large reason some quit attending. But there's more.

Many fathers who attend with the "secret" don't involve themselves in full worship because of their own belief that they have a breach in their relationship with God. Some have even told me they cower in worship. On the other hand, some may try to show God how sincerely sorry they are by over zealously worshipping or involving themselves in church or parachurch related work.

In all the cases, Jesus has the answer to a father's problem. The church has Jesus, but fathers must be able to see Him there! Fathers need to feel welcome as sinners looking for a savior. They need to feel it is a safe place to find forgiveness and reconcil-

iation. You can a build a liaison relationship with a church.

CHAPTER 2

THE GRIEF MODEL

Grieving has been studied over the ages. Famous sermons and poetry have been written about the way we respond to tragedy. When tragedy strikes, we have a sense that a person in that vulnerable state should have the right to cry and feel emotionally distraught. So what is this thing we call grief? Well, the dictionary's definition is to experience a deep and poignant distress caused by or as if by bereavement. To mourn is a synonym to show signs of grief for a death.

Each person will have an opportunity to grieve the loss of a loved one in death. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross revealed a process of how grief occurs in her book 'On Death and Dying'. She found five common elements and stages with grief: DENIAL; ANGER; BARGAINING; ACCEPTANCE; LETTING GO (CLOSURE). We will explore each step. In addition, we will explore the idea that there is more than closure needed. A grieving person needs **comfort**. Especially when he doesn't even feel like he has permission to grieve. He needs to know there can be a reward for his trek into this unknown fearful place. Jesus promises comfort to those who mourn. (Matthew 5:3) He associates mourning with blessing.

Starting with the last first, let's examine comfort. I believe there are at least three elements in comfort. Peace, compassion, and hope. When these feelings of assurance are present, there is completion of the grief process. No wonder Christ called it comfort and referred to it as a blessing. Comfort makes us able to go on with added enthusiasm. One desire of a father, who has completed grief, is to try and bring restitution. But, he cannot restore life to the child. His alternative is comfort. He can find assurance in comfort that the child and God have forgiven him. Through comfort he can bring honor to the child by feeling comfortable that the child is in fact a part of the family tree. He can acknowledge this fact to others, thereby bringing a form of vicarious restitution for the child.

If **comfort** is the goal, why is it so hard for a father who has lost a child by an abortion to move into it? I think the answer lies in the realm of the absurd. He has either been supportive of the death of his own child, or been unsuccessful in negotiating the prevention of the child's death. He doesn't feel he will ever have the right to be comforted by God, because he thinks God is angry with him.

Proverbs 28:17 refers to the man who has been involved in the death of another as locked into a fugitive lifestyle. This fugitive father has a deep want

for healing from God, yet a deep motivation to fear approaching God to even ask. He literally is afraid God will kill him! He is double-minded on this. James 1:8 refers to the man who is double minded as not receiving anything from God. These two factors form a blockade to his road to comfort. In addition, he feels guilt, shame, and deep embarrassment over the cowardice of his actions. In short, he doesn't feel he has permission to grieve or find comfort.

So what happens to him? Moreover, what happens to a whole nation of men who are afraid of God? The nation is called to grief! Hosea 4:1-3 is both instructional and inditing at the same time. Ecclesiastes 7:4 instructs that there is a return to wisdom through mourning. Proverbs 4:7 tells us that wisdom is the principal thing, and commands us to "get" it. 1 Corinthians 1:31 instructs, that Christ is made unto us wisdom.

This is not circular reasoning. It is essential instruction for our generation. It's just like God to show up with just what we all need just when we need it!

Now, we are ready to explore the first five steps of grief. The father who believes comfort is hopeless will probably change his lifestyle to accommodate this belief. He will form a wall of **denial**. This stronghold becomes a fortress to protect his "little secret." Denial is the wall he can hide behind. He can rationalize his position and be OK in denial.

When he thinks someone is getting too close to his secret, he is afraid his wall of denial might be about to crack and crumble. He panics and lashes out in . . . you've guessed it, **anger**.

Anger, as the next stage of grief, becomes a defense to isolate him from intruders into his secret. Reasoning that no one wants to be around someone who is angry a lot, he can keep the secret safe through this and through further development of denial. When the wall of denial is penetrated and his anger is controlled, he may begin to search for help. In the quiet of his own spirit he has been there before. He has been bargaining with God. Most fathers have at least asked God to take away the pain, and tried to bargain with Him for some relief.

Bargaining is the third stage of the grief process. Bargaining doesn't work, it only delays the pain. The reason he might feel bargaining will work is that he might think it can get him to the magic of comfort without acceptance of his own accountability. It seems this is one of these things that doesn't work, but he keeps trying it over and over, thinking it will. He is afraid to face the accountability of his past. It would require him to **accept** his role in it. It would require admitting his sin, shortcomings, and failures as a

father. Where would he go from there? In the normal stages of grief he could have **acceptance** from the rest of the world for his grief, have **closure**, and let go. With an abortion to grieve, he cannot. It is not proper in the eyes of society or his friends to grieve over an abortion. Besides, it is a secret full of festering shame and guilt. He could not let go of such things. So he desires and attempts to remain ever in the cycle of denial-anger-bargaining. He will build a support structure around these and he may form this as a lifestyle. This fortress of protection for his secret allows the wounded father to function, but underneath he knows he is living a lie, which can seriously diminish his capacity.

The first step to recovery is to break the cycle. Here is how it is done. Hurting fathers need to know they have permission to grieve. They need to know they are forgiven by God for their sin. They need to know they can receive the blessing of comfort by completing the grief stages. The more information we disseminate to churches and other para-church organizations about the many hurting fathers and how to help them, the more confidence they will have to come forward and accomplish the work of grief in their lives.

Bible studies are available to be used one-on-one, or in a group setting. This manual can act as a coach for the use of these studies.

CHAPTER 3

THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GROUP FACILITATOR

As I stated before, a facilitator is not needed for a group to function or for fathers to find healing. When a facilitator is desirable, he should be familiar with grief work or recovery group work. I've found some of the best facilitators come from the group. Some fathers have gone through a group with me, then asked at the end if they could help facilitate the next one. This is ideal. A father who will do this can be really helpful to others. He knows what hope looks like when it is realized.

But what if you don't already have a facilitator? Then this is my advice. Find a man or woman who has had some experience. I believe the best choice to be a man because men will share things when another man is leading a small group, or Bible study. You also avoid the common trap of a group member becoming infatuated with the leader. Ask the leader to observe this training manual and study some of the Bible studies I recommend in the appendix so as to become familiar with the kind of traumatic loss a person has by losing a child by abortion. In the alternative, there may be a person who has done some work in small groups with other kinds of recovery. In that case they will appreciate the information in the Bible studies which can help them get up to speed on this issue.

If you don't have a man or woman who is familiar with recovery work, but find a person ready to do the work, check with a pastor in your area. The pastor may be able to recommend recovery information which can be studied by the potential leader, and it will be information, in most cases, geared toward a layman's view point.

As I stated in the introduction, this manual is for the layman. Professional counselors don't need this information to know how to run a group. A professional counselor might be a prospect for your group leader. If you can find one who will be willing to do the work and train a facilitator for your next group, do so. Realize of course, when you ask a professional to facilitate a group or train a facilitator, you are asking a lot. Professionals are reluctant to do these groups because of their personal liabilities. For the same reason they are reluctant to train facilitators. Once in a while you'll find one who may be willing to do a workshop on recovery, which can be helpful.

I think recovery work is different from small group leadership in four major areas.

1. With recovery work there is unresolved pain. The leader must learn how to help the father identify the pain. Fathers must take off the pain like layers of an onion. The leader must learn skills in drawing the information out.

2. Recovery groups require strict confidentiality. The disclaimer to this rule is as follows: When a father confesses sex abuse to a minor or suicide, the leader cannot guarantee confidentiality.

3. Grief work must be learned by the leader. The stages of grief must be studied. A leader must know that denial is real, and try to develop skills to break its addictive cycle. Anger is a stage which must be dealt with. Anger is the visible part of the iceberg. The underlying pain may include but is certainly not limited to guilt, shame, vengeance, bitterness, blame, lying, self preservation, rage, abuse of self and others, physical destruction of things and hopefully not people, etc. The leader will likely want to learn how to diffuse anger, and how to lead a father into repentance and forgiveness without making him mad!

Bargaining is a stage of grief. Fathers will try to make deals with anyone and everyone in an attempt to alleviate pain. Making deals doesn't help much. It is a convenient hiding place, but it does not let healing occur. The leader must learn skills in leading fathers to take responsibility for their part in the loss.

A leader *will likely* have a group goal in leading fathers to accept the past as past, even though in the present it may be consuming him. A leader can help fathers trust in Jesus as the Lord of the past, present and future in order to help him feel safe enough to accept the loss. It's very important to get beyond bargaining and accept the past. Now, no one can change the past, but changing motives and attitudes about it can change the course of the future.

A leader can lead fathers in the grief phase of letting go and help them close. This "letting go" is a tricky phase. In this phase a leader may find himself faced with anger again. Here's why I think this happens. When a father is faced with the phase of closure, he might find he didn't peel the onion back far enough to discover some deeply hidden anger issues. Now that he must close the chapter on this issue, he realizes it is still there. Another thing which will happen even months or years after the group is over, is that residual anger will show up. I know that statement sounds dogmatic, but I've seen it over and over again.

So here is my advice on closure. Have some sort of ritual which is a real time and space happening. For the father who lost a son or daughter to a tragic accident, the funeral serves the purpose of closure. For

the fathers in your group, they need a memorial of some sort to date the closer event. By completing a ritual closure a father can have a 'milestone' in his memory to rely upon when anger strikes unexpectedly. He can say, 'I closed this issue out, and I purpose to forgive and forget the basis for my anger here and now.' He can even pray this prayer: 'Father God, I forgot to include this anger I now feel, in fact I didn't even realize it was still there, when I closed the memorial of my son or daughter whom I named _____. Will you please amend my closure to include this anger, and give me strength to forgive ____ for their part? I realize I was blaming _____ for _____ and that's why I'm feeling angry now. Please cleanse me of this sin of anger and include it with the burial of my son/daughter _____ at the memorial service. Thank you Lord Jesus, Amen.'

One additional phase which was not included in Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' study which she wrote on in her book 'On death and Dying' is the **phase of comfort**. Jesus promised comfort to those who would grieve. A leader can lead fathers into the hope eternal of the comfort of God. God brings comfort beyond closure. Some fathers have decided to include their lost child in the 'family tree.' Restitution for the loss of the child is accomplished in honoring him or her into the family. It seems to me that restitution is a part of comfort. Of course the life of the child can't be restored, but honor in the 'family tree' can become restitutorial. I think comfort results because now there is nothing to hide. Fathers with an open life story have comfort, and God will honor the life of the lost child in many ways. Steve Arterburn often tells of his tragic fatherhood lost while attending Baylor University many years ago. When he speaks of his pain over the loss, he gives recognition to the lost child, which he or she would not likely have received without his openness. This kind of restitution is substitutionary but it is nonetheless restitutorial for him and the honor of his child.

4. Friendships which could develop between leaders and group members in other kinds of groups ought to be thought through carefully. Here's why. Group members in recovery may need to develop new support systems to encourage changing behavior. If the facilitator becomes the support system, he can burn out easily. In addition, fathers need to find support outside the group because the group will end in a few short weeks. When a leader finds one or more members want to develop social time outside, he should consider the member may be becoming dependant upon him for support. Dependance for support is not friendship, it is sheltering the fear of reaching outside the group. I suggest a leader keep it to a mini-

mum.

It is very important for the facilitator to acknowledge that he has received substantial healing and restoration with God. He should be comfortable with his own ability to talk about the past and how he has gained victory. He should feel a compassionate call and/or a desire to minister to other hurting men.

A facilitator needs a strong support network of friends, family, church and outside counselors to call upon for his own strength. Having his own support structure and accountability structure outside the group in place can be helpful. He will have a safe place to work through some unresolved issues awakened by his facilitation of the group. The trap a facilitator may find when leading the group is that he may have unresolved issues. He must guard against becoming dependant upon the group as well.

Now we have covered the major differences *in leading a support group and just leading a group*. Leaders need to know the material being considered for use in the group. In addition, he should have a commitment to stay well read and informed through ongoing training as new information about men's post abortion healing becomes available.

I think sometimes a leader may jump in too quickly. He may feel substantially healed and ready to lead, but here are some warnings I have:

1.) Try to avoid over focusing on the needs of others in identifying or stigmatizing them as "needy" and "in need of your help"(This leader may see an aborted father in every crowd).

2.) Be aware of a desire to facilitate before completing the support group time in which he is currently involved. This leader may have a 'compassion peak' during the group because God has such compassion upon him. This makes him want to be zealous in helping others. Sometime he may even want to stop meeting for his own healing, and get on with it for the other guy. I've seen this happen. My experience is that a leader who makes this move is open for falling into the trap of legalism. He offers compassion. A group member is either cold or luke warm toward his gesture. He can't understand why the group member may not see it his way or like the approach. This makes him think he's not doing it right, or with enough effort. He presses on. Group members get even colder. He tries harder. They resist him. He starts making rules to try to force them to receive compassion. BIG MESS! My advice, finish the group. The old saying 'bloom first where you are planted, then spread your seed' makes sense.

3.) Resist a desire to jump in because someone is asking you to fill a needed position of group leadership because there are shortages of facilitators.

A recovery group is easier to go through than lead. Learn the issues, solutions, and track, then consider it. My advice is to avoid a friendly opinion of how good you'd be at it as the deciding influence for your decision.

4.) Resist at all costs the desire to make atonement for the loss of the child through being a facilitator. My sense is that trying to 'work for God' as a way to show him you really feel bad about the abortion is a quick way to support a legalistic form of healing. It doesn't work. God offers forgiveness freely and requires no 'deal' for you to be free. The desire you have may mean you are in the bargaining stage of grief, and want it to be the way God will heal you. God doesn't make deals. He settles them. A desire to do the facilitation as a means of healing one's own loss could happen with a person who wants to be a leader and is a near relative of the lost child, or the father or mother of the father of the lost child, not just the father of the lost child.

5.) Avoid the desire to facilitate because you want to sharpen your counseling skills. My advice. Find a class which will help you do this. Don't practice on those trying to deal with their pain as a means to facilitate your own self improvement.

The caveat to this is in the co-leader role. You may want to be a leader someday and just want to go through a couple of groups to get the hang of it. You see the difference is in motive.

THE FACILITATOR CHECK LIST

The following list turns out to be a resume of all the things I've had to do as a facilitator. You may or may not find these applicable, but I don't want there to be any surprise! *I also want you to relax!* These are just things I've found that I have had to do as a facilitator, but don't let them be intimidating, they weren't for me. They were just things I remembered I had done, but I really didn't think about them as burdensome while I was doing them.

A.) The facilitator will usually be the manager of the group: What this means is that he is supposed to provide the advertising, recruitment, and selection of group members, find a SAFE and suitable place to hold the group meetings, prepares the format and provide the materials for the meetings, set up and take-down before and after the meetings, and appropriately thank the providers of the space for their use, make coffee, etc. . . . Anyone who has taught a Sunday school class or sold soap in the evening has had to do these things too!

B.)The facilitator is expected to be a greeter/host as he helps new group members feel safe

and welcome at the meeting place and feel safe with the other group members.

C.)The facilitator is thought to be a teacher who will help each man discover a pathway for his healing experience. Really scary isn't it. Don't let it be, God is really the one who teaches and brings the things to light He wants each man to deal with. But, remember to give Him the credit when they thank you for doing it so good!

D.)As a facilitator you may find yourself a moderator, discussion guide, and floor whip to keep the meetings moving in the right direction. Or what about that meeting where no one feels like doing anything? Make them focus! Make them be clear about their statements even if they only grunt! Seriously you may need to help them to focus on clarity of the discussions of the group.

The facilitator directs the flow and dynamic of the meetings, focusing appropriately on successes of the members in their progress. Be a back patter. Give space for each to make progress.

E.)The facilitator becomes the referee in certain cases, honest! Not that anyone will come to blows, but it's been close at times. He may need to become the mediator, to settle differences between members. But what about when someone needs to mediate between you and a member's strong feelings? I suggest you swallow hard, bite your tongue, count to ten and save it for later unless it is beneficial for the group to resolve the feelings in real time.

In summary, the responsibility of the facilitator is to formalize the group, recruit and select the participants, select the materials to be used within the group, and establish the group format. The facilitator is committed to the group and accountable to the church or other authorities which allow him to have use of their facility for the group meeting place. **The facilitator is not responsible for healing, counseling, or in any way guaranteeing the outcomes of any group or any individual group member.**

THE GROUP MEETING PLACE

Group members may prefer to meet on their 'own turf.' It suggested here that the meeting should be somewhere besides the woman's pregnancy center. An office of one of the members, or of the facilitator is beneficial.

A NOTE ABOUT RECRUITING

So, a father has called and wants to meet. You are excited and have thoughts of starting a group as soon as you can round up some more men. You

meet. He tells you his story (briefly). You listen, and determine he can be in a group. Then you find there aren't one or two other men within a hundred miles who want to group. So you call him and say lets meet one-on-one. He says ' I'm OK now. Thanks for meeting with me the other day, I don't think we need to meet again.' You scratch your head and begin talking to yourself. 'Either I'm really good' you say, 'or somethin's going on.' You'd be safe to assume the latter. I've found when I am recruiting fathers for a group, they often bale after the initial interview. Why? I think it's because they have shared their heart, they truly feel better, and actually think they are 'all better.' This is not uncommon. It is also not uncommon for the same father to call 6-9 months later and say "when is your next group? I really need help, I thought I was better but I'm not, I need a group."

A NOTE ABOUT SELECTING

This is short and sweet. Don't let fathers who are on drugs, alcohol dependant, or have problems with rage and acute anger join the group. Take them one-on-one, and upon the condition that they "dry out" or "get clean" before you do a one-on-one. Healing is not going to happen when a father is on a mindaltering substance, or so angry he cannot be tender to the Spirit of God.

A NOTE ABOUT THE MATERIALS

There are a few Bible studies listed in the appendix. Choose one that will make a group member feel comfortable with himself. I once held a group that went on for twenty-seven weeks. Why so long? One member had never opened a Bible before the first meeting. He said he was a Christian and had no problems with using a Bible or with prayer in the intake interview. He was right. What he meant by being a Christian was that he was born in the U.S.A., and he didn't feel negative about the Bible or prayer either, it turned out. The selected study began with many scriptural references and character studies about God and famous biblical characters. A favorite phrase of his was 'this book is sure controversial.' Well, you can see much discussion centered around Bible history and just introducing Christian concepts. It was my mistake in using that particular study, or my mistake in taking him into the group. I've learned two things from that group. God heals even if it takes 27 weeks to get through the study, and God overlook's big mistakes I've made as a facilitator.

A NOTE ABOUT TRAINING

There is no 'Lay Counselor Certification' or A facilitator certification program currently available for this work. It is a pioneering effort. Many booklets are available in group leadership and group dynamics. Most authors will suggest that group leadership involves the following:

- 1.) A commitment and desire to work with people in difficult circumstances.
- 2.) An understanding of the issues faced by the group.
- 3.) A clear mission for the group which is agreeable to all involved, including a set of group guidelines.
- 4.) A start and stop time for each meeting.
- 5.) A start and stop time for the duration of the group in concert with its mission.
- 6.) A sponsor which sanctions the purpose for meeting.
- 7.) A development of communication skills for group use.

A few Bible studies exist for men regarding fatherhood lost. Generally, a man desiring to be a group facilitator should get copies of these studies, read them, and gain a level of comfort with the healing process.

Here are some possible scenarios of men who may wish to facilitate a fatherhood lost group:

The trainee may have some past experience with group leadership. In this case he is experience-ready, but may or may not feel content-ready or be very familiar with post abortion issues. He should study the available Bible studies and familiarize himself with abortion issues, and issues affecting manhood and fatherhood.

The observation of an existing facilitator, and familiarity with existing material, is recommended as a good way to become trained.

I don't think this an exact science, but rather a developing art.

WHAT ABOUT CO-LEADERSHIP OF A GROUP?

A facilitator may want to train a co-leader for his support group.

The goals for the role of the co-leader must be planned and worked out ahead of time before every group meeting. The group members should know who and what is expected of the facilitator and the co-leader, and have agreement about his function in the group.

A learning curve for exacting some of the arts of listening, and forming directional thoughts is expected and can be evaluated after each group meet-

ing.

Here are some tips on making you effective. I may be stating the obvious here, but please bear with me.

1.) Spend time together planning outside of the meetings.

2.) Agree upon crisis intervention protocol. That is, when someone becomes ill, faints, or otherwise begins to fade during a meeting, have a plan for whom to call. Keep a list of emergency numbers close just in case.

3.) Agree not to be competitive with ideas or members' attention. Know who will be in charge and back it up 100% during meetings. Settle your disagreements outside the meetings.

4.) Be accountable to the group in your endeavors to be a team.

The facilitator should prepare himself to skillfully utilize leadership techniques, and be able to model them for the co-leader. He should model openness, listening skills, acceptance, respect, honesty, problem-solving techniques, sensitivity, enthusiasm, and exhortation (safe risk-taking).

5.) He should validate the group members and the co-leader, model protection techniques, use dialogue techniques to encourage members to share their discomfort, use skills to enact feedback, and endeavor to keep the group ever moving toward its goals.

Next, your job as facilitator is to introduce a very painful concept of:

6.) **Accountability.** It means 'the buck stops here. There will be an end to blame. For some this could have become a lifestyle. A favorite hiding place for many is blame, which allows one to avoid becoming accountable.

Use the tools of awareness, building a safe island, building trust, and making a plan of action to encourage accountability.

Whether we know it or not, we are individually accountable in five areas. Our hearts and conscience tell us every time we slip up in one of these categories that we are accountable:

We are accountable for our **motives, attitudes, thoughts, speech, and actions.** Your job is to encourage each man to take a realistic look at his motives. Explain that he owns them all, good, bad, or ugly. Motives are the **drivers.** From motives we develop attitudes, thoughts, speech and actions.

Help each one explore the motive present when the lost fatherhood first happened.

Each man can learn and use this phrase for everything surrounding him 'I am accountable for . . . everyone can see it's attached to me.'

Remind each man of his own need to take accountability for the loss of his child. He must in addition take accountability for his fatherhood of the child. Jesus reminded His disciples that each man would be responsible for his own life and what he had decided to do with it. Paul also echoed these truths, telling us that we would all be rewarded for our works, and that what we sowed, we would reap. This is a familiar theme throughout scripture.

When one realizes his own accountability for past motives which led to his attitudes and ways of thinking speaking, and acting, he can see that what he owns may need to be traded in for what God has for him in exchange.

Next, your job as facilitator is to make the group members aware of their:

7.) **Internal and external support systems.**

A support system is made up of several people places or things which enable continuing behavior, and encourage it to remain 'as is.' For instance, one man in a group once disclosed 'if my girlfriend knew I was here she would leave me . . .' This man became aware that his support system was a hindrance to his own healing. He could not attend the group and be congruent with his own accountability for honesty. The support system needed to be examined, challenged, and changed if necessary. Paul writes that bad company corrupts good manners, and tells us to prefer the brothers to strangers.

Proverbs enlightens us to spend time with those who can teach us wisdom, understanding, knowledge and truth.

Establishing a plan of action for becoming congruent with oneself and others may result in more pain. A support system may need to be removed just as a festering splinter must be removed before the wound can adequately heal. Removal is preferable to allowing the splinter to incorporate, thus disfiguring and diminishing capacity of use of the infected area.

Teach the group to become comfortable with saying 'no; I don't feel comfortable about . . . ;' 'I'm not willing to . . . ;' and other useful ways to stop being incongruent. These tools will enable them to confront the existing support systems. At this point, the only alternative support they may have is the group. That is OK for a temporary fix, but it is not OK as a long-term arrangement. The group can be supportive, but each member must know that it will be over soon, and they need to incorporate new supports which will enable a much more healthy way of life. Suggest they plug into a men's group at a church of their background if any. When they have none, encourage them to find one.

Next, your job as facilitator is to help the

group know when it is over.

8.) **Ending and evaluating** the group and the old way of life is both necessary.

All events of the past are over. Nothing can be changed. It happened and cannot be redone. Personal perceptions and judgements made about the past can be changed. By taking account of the motives, attitudes, thoughts, speech and actions regarding the past events, changes are possible. The new motives of today can change the effect of the past in the future. When one places the past, present and future of one's life under the management of Jesus Christ, applies His holy word to those accounts, and resolves to be congruent with His help, then the past hurts which have hampered one's efforts can be mitigated. Teach group members to say and believe 'this too shall pass . . .' The pain of lost fatherhood, the loss of the child, loss in many cases of the relationship with the woman involved, loss of relationship with God and others, and loss of hope for the future can be over. The end in sight is the hope of a new beginning. Old ways do not forever have a hold upon a man. He can be set free by Christ. The way one sees himself need not remain clouded with regret, self-disdain, poor self respect, and acute fears and avoidance behavior. A man can know the truth. Through intimate prayer and trust in God, he can know forgiveness, relief from depression, and have enthusiastic hope for tomorrow.

Teach the group members to develop a prayer life which seeks to know how Jesus viewed past events. He ever intercedes for each man. He knows the real truth about that day which began changing your life from then until now. He will give each member knowledge, love, and grace to understand His forgiveness and restoration as He reconciles Himself to them through their times of communication.

Similarly, the group cannot last forever. There are start and finish times. Goals for developing supports outside the group and planning new life paths in a new relationship with God should be emphasized each week.

The tools gained of grief, prayer, forgiveness, and the powerful relationship which overcome the past should remain as fixtures in each member's life.

The ability to congruently evaluate feelings in the light of prayer and relationship with God should go on with each member for a lifetime.

Paul writes that Jesus would not want that any should perish, but that each man would be saved from his own sin . . .

David was reminded by God that his enemies

would be defeated because they refused to change.

HOW THE GROUP WORKS

GROUP GOALS AND GUIDELINES

I think every meeting, which is intended to accomplish common goals, works because group goals and guidelines are established and respected by everyone.

Some common guidelines, which are either understood verbally or offered in writing, may be beneficial. I noticed when a set of guidelines was used, some members kept them handy and used them as a pattern for developing their own plan of action. Here are some we have used through the years.

- 1.) Keep the group anonymous for the safety and protection of the members.
- 2.) Keep what is shared within the group as confidential to the group.
- 3.) Focus on one's own healing 'plan of action.'
- 4.) Respect each member and their own plan of action for healing, free from your "expert advice."
- 5.) Make it safe for each member to openly share pertinent subject matter and make sure he can be heard without dominating the group.
- 6.) Agree to behave within the guidelines the group has accepted.
- 7.) Be committed and accountable to the group.
- 8.) Agree upon the limitations and responsibilities of the leader, the group guidelines, the acceptance of each member one for another, and the materials which the group will use.

The group then becomes a powerful authority structure of its own. This can contribute to safety for the facilitator and each member. A sample support group document is available in the appendix for your use if needed.

CHAPTER 4 THE HEALING MODEL

AWARENESS

We begin here to explore the healing model spoken of in the FORWARD section of this manual. We will focus on **awareness** in this chapter.

Jesus once made the comment that those surrounding and questioning Him could easily read the weather signs, but could not discern the signs of the times. We watch Him as he indites them for their lack of awareness. We haven't changed. Men are still unaware. When I ask fathers how they feel about the loss of their child, some cannot explain how they feel. They say I don't know. Men are much less likely to know how they feel about things than women, and almost never engage about such things outside of a probing interview. They do not know what it means when they start to tense up; feel an upset stomach; feel dry mounted; feel sweaty; etc. Those feelings are not noticed as the behavior in which they are engaged takes shape. In other words, they don't know WHERE THEY ARE! Unless we gain certain skill's as facilitators, we don't know **where we are** or **they are either**.

Awareness is mostly a listening skill. I don't mean just hearing what is being said, but knowing how to listen by observation of body language, tone etc. It's not what is said but how it is said. A father may be relating his story with his arms folded. What does this tell you? He may be defensive about the topic; he may be angry with some character in his story; he may be cold (I mean the temperature in the room may not be warm enough). To discern which it is you will need more information, so you will need to ask **open questions**. (See Appendix)

Awareness is also a goal. As facilitator, you want to become aware of where your group is on any one topic of discussion. Again, ask open questions. Why do you care if you know where they are? Knowing where they are will help you guide the group in the particular discussion you are having. You need to know as well, **where you are**. Are you needing to process some of your own stuff? Maybe you didn't even know you had stuff until the group started talking about . . . !

Awareness is a statement of fact. Each party in the group must be aware of where they are. You can know where they are, but they need to know as well. For instance does the angry, closed, or cold man in the first paragraph know he is angry, closed, or cold? Well, he probably knows he is cold, but he may not be in touch with his feelings enough to know if he is defensive or angry. Asking the right open questions will guide him to learn how to be **in touch with his own feelings**. Awareness is an identifiable position for

a father. It allows him to know where he is, why he is there, and what he would like to do about it. It defines who should be involved in his life as a support, and how he might like to pursue change. It marks how far he has come, what is working-what is not, and what he will expect to develop as a result of his awareness. In a sense, awareness not only asks the question of what, which, who, when, where, and how, it defines them as well.

Having read the introduction, you are now perhaps more aware of some of the pain of fatherhood lost, some of the behavior which results, and some of the decisions a father will have to make to recover. You know he has failed in his responsibility, commitment, and innate senses of fatherhood and manhood because of the abortion. You know he is in a position of diminished capacity because of fear and deception. You know he is probably mad at someone, and most likely mad at God. You are aware that he doesn't feel he has permission to discuss it much, and that he might be afraid you will reject him. You are aware that he might not be aware of any of this as it connects to his behavior, but you also know that he is searching for help, or **he would not be talking** to you.

What you also need to know is that you are aware that **he may not want to come back again** after he talks to you. He may feel he has settled the issue just because he has talked about it. This is most likely not true. Most likely he has just visited the problem openly for the first time and he feels better having done so. Be aware that it took a lot for him just to make it that far. He is further than most fathers. Most have stuffed it and developed a way of 'living with it.'

It is your job as the facilitator to offer the opportunity for each group member to be aware of what you are aware of. Timing is everything. He needs to be aware, but when does this need occur? When the awareness need will benefit him. If he thinks you know too much, he may be offended and close down. How will you know? Observe the body and the words. Ask permission to be personal and frank if necessary. Keep observing and keep asking, it is a give-and-take process.

Each time you meet your job as facilitator, you bring every person in the group up-to-date on the awareness issue. No matter what the topic is, you must be aware of where they are, where you are, and they should be aware as well. You are responsible for reminding them of where they were before and where they are now. Make them aware of their progress or lack thereof. This is the first key to healing. Every father who wants to heal must be aware of his opportunities and risks to the process. He should know what can happen and what can hinder that from happening.

The old adage is true, unless someone wants to change, they cannot be helped in that change. A man cannot change if he doesn't know he needs to. For instance, if he must talk to someone whom he wants to restore fellowship with, it may be helpful to point out that the other person might reject him. Explore the alternatives which would occur if he were rejected. Does he even know how he feels when he is rejected, or does he just get mad? Allow him to be aware of his responsibilities and those of the others involved. He should be aware that his desire to restore others is a part of his own healing, etc. (The term intimate, means to be in fear of sheer rejection at the most vulnerable point). If you are aware that a group member is in fear of rejection, you should define your facilitating project as bringing him through that fear, etc. Most people react and respond to life from how they feel. If he feels afraid, he will react by running, fighting, or ignoring. There are a thousand ways a father can do any or all of these.

Through awareness, discovery of what pain needs healing and the preferred process occurs. For many men this may be the first time that they have ever openly discussed personal matters at any depth. Give them space. Make each person aware of the need to use the golden rule. If you have other group rules, use them. The majority of what determines a successful group is the measure of what the group expected, and how close the group came to meeting those expectations.

Lessons from the master:

When Jesus encountered people needing His healing touch, He respected the axiom of awareness. He would ask them what they wanted, even if it were obvious. He would also make them **aware** of whether He could help them or not. Then He would make them **aware** of what was necessary for their healing to occur. Notice, He worked with those who wanted help. He also let those who wanted no help become aware of what they needed. He made them **aware** of the cost of change. He was on a mission of making the world **aware** of Him, themselves, and what choices they needed to make.

Jesus was about His Father's business. He made us aware that the **ones who need help are the targets for our work in His kingdom**. He once sent disciples out to minister, instructing them that they should heal the sick and raise the dead. They returned to Him with a report that they were not able to cast out the demons from one of the persons to whom they were ministering. Jesus made them aware that the healing of some comes only by prayer and fasting. As I stated in the last chapter, I believe Jesus ever inter-

cedes for us. He is always praying for us that we may be healed. He fasted often because He was aware of the power of a FAST! Isaiah 58:6-12 makes us aware of the benefits of fasting in this work. Not only should we as facilitators fast on the day of the group meetings, but we should encourage the group members to do the same. Fasting will often break the bonds of the enemy's hold on fathers' lives, and afford them a platform to receive from God.

I have a personal testimony which follows:

In the summer of 1978 while attending a workshop on the effects of abortion as a stressor event, a very humbled man asked me to pray with him. He was the janitor of the church where the workshop was held. He was eavesdropping in the next room while the seminar went on. He said a post abortion stress seminar was of interest to him because he could identify with many of the symptoms. He explained that he had paid for an abortion many years earlier, there hadn't been a day goes by that he hadn't regretted it. He'd lost his firstborn son.

He explained how he'd wake up in a sweat, regretting that he couldn't do the things he dreamed of doing with him. 'He's gone forever, and I'm stuck in this merry-go-round of bad dreams.'

He couldn't tell anyone about his fatherhood lost because he felt guilt, shame and was afraid he would be rejected. He confessed that he could mask the pain no longer. In further meetings, we decided to fast and pray for healing. With this kind of seeking attitude we had success. He recognized how sin had deceived him into the great loss. Then, for years, that same sin had mocked him and treated him as a loser.

I recommend having long 'listening sessions.' That's where you do little talking and lots of listening. It took me awhile to accomplish this as a marriage counselor for our church before I began listening to men tell their stories of fatherhood lost. Listening, I've found will validate a man. He knows he has your permission to process his thoughts and pain. Listening can also build trust. A time for prayer should follow. Some of the men I've listened to don't know how to pray, or they are afraid to. I'm no great prayer, but I have modeled some prayer for men. I tell them to just talk honestly to God, like they have to me, and ask Him for the things they want. An interesting thing I noticed about prayer is that it increases confidence and decreases pain. It helps develop a comfort in the presence of God.

In addition to his bad dreams, he had experienced panic attacks. These are not uncommon. Fear and anxiety are strong enough to make you think your heart is going to race so fast it will burst. Talking to

God in prayer seems to help these diminish.

He was like many men who set up defenses by blaming God for things. As we continued to meet and pray he was **no longer blaming God**. The more he was able to pray, the more trust was building. He had given up singing and playing the guitar, but as we continued to meet, he began to sing and play the guitar again.

It is worth noting at this point that we had no Bible study, no facilitator, and no real course of action. I was available and sincere in my desire to see him heal. God just kept showing up when we met to pray and discuss things. We built a beautiful friendship which has lasted through the years. He is a very healthy dad of two sons now and happily married. God restored his fatherhood to him and reconciled the relationship between them. The symptoms of post abortion stress subsided and he is on track. He is ministering to youth in his local church.

SYMPTOM AWARENESS

I feel I should list some of the symptoms here, so that when we talk of them later we will be familiar with them.

These are the symptoms of fatherhood lost: uncontrolled anger; depression; domestic abuse; self-abuse; addictions to food, alcohol, drugs, and work; avoidance behaviors (women, children, persons associated with the experience); poor bonding with children; intolerance of women, children, co-workers; reaction formations; compensatory behavior; defensive and combative attitudes; taking inordinate risks; unstable employment; loss of respect for authority figures; broken relationships including divorce, seclusion, and psychological numbness; out of touch with feelings; impotency; suicidal thoughts; sleeplessness and/or nightmares; severe rejection; isolation from friends, church and God; helplessness; hopelessness; flashbacks; anniversary syndrome; etc.

Not all fathers have had all, but each had some symptoms. Fact is, when I ask some of them about these symptoms, they immediately look like ‘a light just came on.’ They recognize them for the first time when asked of them. Others deny the symptoms initially, but recognize them when I begin to probe a bit. These fathers have had discomfort, stress, and a loss of confidence. They desire to end the pain. I believe there are millions of men who would like to get past the symptoms of fatherhood lost. I made a comment on a radio talk show once that men hurt from abortion but they don’t even know it. The host said that is a fantastic statement, void of understanding, please explain. I explained the knowledge I have

of dissociation, then he understood. He himself revealed that, after he thought about it, he could easily see how men would hurt from losing a child by an abortion experience.

Many men define their life before and after the abortion experience, but they are not usually aware that it was the abortion experience which acted as the pivotal point of their behavior.

Some men find the courage to talk with someone about it but don’t know where to look, or can find no one to listen. I think it is because of such a lack of information and awareness out there about this issue. Some listeners feel inadequate and this comes off like rejection to men who open up. Even seasoned colleagues cower at the mention of having to deal with this when I share at pastoral breakfasts or at men’s seminars. It is very disconcerting for fathers when they find less acceptance after sharing than they had if they had just remained silent. Abortion is very personal, very private, and very politically incorrect for men to discuss. If after sharing, they find rejection, it is not likely they will be anxious to share again.

I hasten to add, that many hundreds of men are finding help through Bible studies each year. The Lord has decided to heal these men, and restore boldness to the church as a result. Even after processing things through a Bible study, though, men face the memories.

Men need some tools for the toolkit of life which they can apply to the pain when it resurfaces from time to time. Tools will be helpful in dealing with the symptoms positively. Not all of the men I’ve listened to are finished grieving or working through the issues of fatherhood lost. For many it is a journey, not a destination. Some have chosen to go part of the way and stopped. Some have found the cost too high and never started. Those who have, have been blessed by God’s grace, grieved the loss of their child and their fatherhood, and moved on with life. Nothing about abortion, whomever made the decision, is an unforgivable sin. God can and will forgive a father for his abuse of his mate, his child, and himself whichever or all is the case in his repentance. He will further restore him, and give him a story to help others. In this way He can provide satisfaction of restitution to a father who has lost his fatherhood. When his story is an open book to others, he gives honor to the lost child and God gets the glory.

CHAPTER 5 THE HEALING MODEL

BUILDING SAFETY

As a facilitator, remind the group members each time you meet that confidentiality is still in effect. Let them know that they are safe with you and with each other. If a father feels accepted, and he can accept you, he will likely feel safe. As various topics are broached, safety must be built and rebuilt. One incident of rejection, no matter how small, can wreck hours of acceptance. Safety comes from a father's ability to see that you are in need of the acceptance of God as well. This is why I suggest that you schedule a prayer time at the beginning of the group sessions. Introducing God into the beginning of the group sessions gets it started at the right level. Most of the ministry to be done in recovery is allowing the member to accept what he knows to be true in his spirit (Rom.1:18) with what he believes in his mind and emotions. The great battlefield is in the will. (Gal.4:17) Let each member know it is safe to do battle with the will during the group sessions. It is safe to lose, as well as win. It is safe to disclose the motivations of the heart. It is safe to expose them to the light of scripture. And it is safe to pray. A father once asked me if it was safe to pray. I answered him like this. If you pray and nothing happens, what have you lost? You are in the same position as you were, except you know nothing bad happened either. If you hadn't prayed you would have the fear of not knowing, so you've reduced one fear to nothing, just by praying.

Use the scriptures as a guidepost for your group. Opinions of the world, and of each member, may vary on individual topics, but the Word of God is forever settled in heaven. (Ps. 119:) Ask: 'Let's see what the Word has to say about these issues.' The Word promises safety. Read Psalm 119 if there is any doubt. Each group member already knows this in his heart of hearts. We can be sure they do because Paul disclosed in Rom.1:18, that the Word is written upon the hearts of men. We can find true safety in introducing the Word, even if the preparations of the heart of the group member or members are at first resistant to it. It will act as an anchor for the group.

As you do this, you will become aware of where they are and where you are with the Word. Where do you feel safe? Ask them where they feel safe. Talk about their 'religious background' and what they know about the Bible. Every father knows he can be healed if he can feel safe enough to trust that God is no longer mad at him and that he is forgiven. Remember, your goal as a facilitator is to build safety. In a safe place, and in a trusting place, trust between

individuals and God can be developed.

In addition to scripture, the integrity of the facilitator is useful in building safety. Be willing to openly share what you have overcome yourself. Be willing to give a testimony about how God has restored some area of your life. Safety comes from confidence in the Lord. (Rev.12:11) We overcome by the word and our testimony.

In a nutshell, what you are doing by building safety is building a safe haven where each is allowed to replace the fear created by their losses with the peace and confidence of hope in the Lord. (What they don't know at this point is that in all probability what they want to keep confidential now will likely become a testimony they can boldly share with others someday. But, they won't get that far if they don't feel safe and secure.) We as facilitators try to move them from fear to trust.

So, what do you do if you feel inadequate in creating or maintaining safety? Use your awareness skills and offer to pray. If you don't feel safe yourself, try to become aware of what may be causing the uneasiness. Discern the problem and apply the correct fix to it. This will generally make you feel more safe and secure yourself. If you feel confident, they will sense you are and likely feel confident as well.

The object for us as facilitators is to help return congruent behavior by identifying pain, fear, and hurts, then trusting the Holy Spirit to resolve them through relationships with God and others.

Let me give you some examples of what I heard some of the men say upon our first encounter. These are paraphrased because I didn't have a tape recorder or take shorthand. But, I think you can get the idea of what kind of pain we are talking about. In these vignettes you can identify the anger, guilt, pain, shame and other associated behaviors. As a facilitator, these are typical encounters you may have with men early in the process or as the idea for grouping them unfolds.

Some of these men have completed a group. Some have not. When we can identify the pain, he and God can establish a plan of healing through scriptural application to the root cause.

VIGNETTES

Love Relationship Affected

'I was relieved after the abortion was over,' John said, 'but it was kind of eerie. When Beth and I drove home, we didn't talk. We were distant from each other in a strange way. We both knew something had changed big time, but we weren't sure how to fig-

ure it out. It wasn't something you just talk about. Later, we broke up; our relationship just deteriorated. We got to the place where we just fought all the time. I know it was the abortion that did it.'

Fathering Questions

'Sometimes when I get close to Jimmy (my 3yr. Old son), I become saddened by the memory of my aborted child. He would have been Jimmy's step-brother. He would be five now. I try to shake these feelings but they won't go away. It's like he knows somethin's goin' on. He just looks at me sometimes and says, 'What's wrong Daddy?' I wish I knew myself. I wonder if I'll ever get over this.'

Domestic Violence

'I left him because I couldn't take the beatings anymore. He never ever forgave me for the abortion. He would get so angry, then break things and hit me. Then he would leave, sometimes for hours or days. We used to try to talk it out. He would never admit it was the abortion but I know it was, 'cause he wasn't like this before. I guess I hurt him real bad twice, when I had the abortion, and then when I left, but I just couldn't take it no more, you know.'

Alcohol Abuse

'I just kept waking up and seeing her little face. I could have stopped the abortion but I didn't try hard enough or somethin.' Anyway, the only time I can feel good anymore is when I'm hammered. Isn't there any way out of this nightmare?'

Employment Problems

'Yes, I've had five jobs in the last six years and I've been out of work now for six months. I've thought through it and I'm going to work for myself now. None of my supervisors understand me or appreciate how good I am. They're afraid if I stay on, I'll take their job.'

I'm not the kind to just show up and keep my mouth shut. When I see somethin' that goin' to save money for the company I have a right to say so. Anyway I'm starting my own company now. In six months I'll probably run them out of business, because I know how to do it right!'

End of vignettes

When listening to a father, I think it is impor-

tant to try to listen for recognition of motive. My observations have been that motive can be the driving force for behavior. As I've stated before, when you become aware and can clearly identify the motive, you can start to develop an approach to deal with the pain. I have noticed that our mind filters pain, but in the process it leaves a residual of fear and insecurity. The story of the cat who sat on a hot stove is appropriate. Not only will the cat not sit on any more hot stoves, he will not sit on any more stoves at all. His experience with the pain has left him afraid of the pain, so he won't even try the activity again.

I like to probe to become aware of fears, because they can clue me into which persons places or things a man will likely avoid. Becoming aware of avoidance behavior allows him to confront the fear. Confrontation in the group is safe, so he can feel safer when he confronts it outside. Michael Jordan once said he wins the game a dozen times on the plane ride before he even gets to the opponents court. It's safe for him to imagine the entire game and imagine his role in the game in his mind. So, it is safe for a father to imagine God forgiving him and accepting him in his imperfection. For example, when a man thinks God is going to be out to get him for his abortion decision, he will try to avoid God. He will likely not be ready to go to church or want to pray. Asking him to develop a relationship with God can be really scary. This example could have been avoidance with women, authority figures, children, etc. The point is this: When fear mentally enlarges the possibility of increased pain, it is natural to want to avoid it. However, I feel good about the group if we can set a goal to remove the obstacle of fear. Then, with the help of God, a man can increase his capacity of achievement in relationships and accomplishments. One of the tools I use widely is role play. It is not a real 100% experience, but it is at least real for the father as a 'dry run' for his plan to overcome fear and find safety.

It is almost automatic for a father to move into trust when he feels safe. It is at the level of trust that the work can begin. Problems can be observed, discerned and remedied when trust is present. Let's look at trust now.

CHAPTER 6 THE HEALING MODEL

BUILDING TRUST

Building trust is one of our most important jobs as facilitator, and one of the most illusive to determine. The complexities of harm done by the fatherhood lost experience make healing a huge challenge. You might gain the feeling that a group or group member completely trusts you, then discover they are lying through their teeth about a certain topical area. Talk about rocking the old boat. Here you thought you had trust established, then bingo you don't.

Well, lets apply the model here. Let's go back to the beginning and become aware of what is missing for trust to be established and remain. I don't want you to be deceived that this is easy. Fathers who have been living in pain for several months or years have developed excellent masking skills. You may feel trust is there, but they may be masking. They are not being congruent. Becoming aware of this, back track and build more safety. Keep trying to remove fears, whether real or imagined. You can usually find what happened for him to mask a trust, or fake a trust.

I've found that a father may be very comfortable disclosing about certain topics, but not others. If he feels trust and acceptance from you in one area, he may be too embarrassed to tell you that he has little or no trust in another area. Moreover, when he thinks he has built trust with you, and vice versa, he may become vulnerable to the thin line between trust and perceived friendship. Once he feels trusted, he may start lying to protect his "friendship" with you. He might not feel confident that you will accept him as a friend, where he felt very confident that you accepted him as a group member.

Trust is a fragile concept, and from topic to topic, feeling to feeling, it may change in an instant. It is a dynamic to say the least. Yet trust is necessary to reach commitment. Trust is necessary if you are going to find the motive for behavior, and discover whether to and how to resolve it.

I have found three skills which generally work to reach trust in the group, yet still allow variance according to safety from time to time. Listening, leveling, and confronting. In short, listening is generally observation of spoken and nonspoken communication without evaluation. Leveling is generally reporting where I am, and where I think the group or an individual member is on a given issue. Confronting is used when a member is becoming angry, then exhibiting some hostility toward a facilitator or another group member. Confronting is a kind of let's stop

action and see what's going on skill. Confronting is evaluating whether the course in progress is healthy or unhealthy for continuing group discussion. Will it get us what we all want? Will it help us move closer or further away from our goal? Will it strengthen or weaken safety and trust? It is a skill which lets the situation and circumstances be the judges, and not the person or persons in the group. The skills can be used in progression or simultaneously. Really, we are listening all the time and advancing the two other skills as necessary.

For instance, if when listening we find there seems to be a slight incongruence with what we know, we can use some other skills. We can LEVEL with the incongruent father. Leveling is a set of words which starts with 'I'm feeling like you may have some more to tell me about . . .' 'Am I to understand that this is the full story about . . .' etc.

When a father is putting himself down as a way of hiding and trying to stay in denial, you can use the skill of confronting. He may start to put someone else down or even you to protect his secret. The set of words goes something like this: 'When you say that about yourself is that making you feel better or worse about yourself?' 'If you keep saying that, are you more likely or less likely to feel better about yourself?' 'Could we agree that only your ____ can say those kinds of things about you. It's off limits for you to say those things about you, OK?'

When he is really in a continuous mode of put downs and being negative, these tools can help break the cycles and get to trust. We need to get to trust so we can start thinking about committing to building a plan of action. Getting to trust can break the barrier of fear and start to develop the feeling of friendship.

I bring up the point about the fine line between friendship and trust between a group and the facilitator. The group and the facilitator are the **temporary** replacement support system the father needs to in order to change. When the group member begins to treat the facilitator as a friend, clear lines must be drawn. The facilitator must establish the difference between trust and friendship. Trust is forever. The group is not. Support structures and friends are relationships resultant from the need to belong and be accepted. Trust is an element of congruent character. Trust is not a tool for making or keeping friends. It is a goal for the father to develop as a way of life. When he feels safe and is trusting, he is ready to **COMMIT** to a plan of action!

CHAPTER 7 THE HEALING MODEL

COMMITMENT: MAKING A PLAN

You might be asking why I waited so long to get to this element. Committing to a plan of action usually requires that the first three communication elements be in place before it can be accomplished. You've probably heard of the old adage, 'ready, fire, aim.' That's what happens if the first three elements are not in place first. Let me explain.

When you become aware of what the real problem is, and where it fits in the overall picture of the man's healing journey, then you have likely discerned the root of the problem. But, you can't find the root unless a father feels **safe** enough to disclose it, and you can't expect he will try to do anything about it unless he **trusts** the action will bring positive resolve. Awareness is the most fluid. It is often revised after reaching a good level of **trust**. What a man thought was his problem before he felt safe enough to go into deep water in the discussion of the issue, may change after he visits the need with a closer and more congruent look. If he feels he can trust you and the other group members, he might feel like trusting God for some insight as well. When this happens, he can get a true awareness of his need(s). With this true awareness, and the comfort of some trust now present, he is ready to 'commit to a plan of action.'

Proverbs 3:5,6 directs us to trust in the Lord with all our heart, and lean not to our own understanding. As a congruent facilitator, you must let each of the group members know that you are not going to make up the plan for them. They are going to make the plan. Here's how. The group and they themselves are going to take the problem straight to prayer.

Your group function is to encourage them to pray. **Prayer** changes things. This is a larger-than-life reality check for many group members. Some have abandon prayer, hope, trust and God. Others may have never prayed before. Now the separation of wheat and chaff begins. A father needs to be aware of how he feels about prayer; develop safety in his approach to God; and find trust in working with God to develop a plan. To bring them to this point you can:

Ask permission to pray for them. Ask God to give each of them an ability to get over the problems they are facing because of the abortion experience and loss of fatherhood. Next, ask them to pray for you. Ask them to pray that you will continue to be an effective facilitator. If they have never prayed, or they feel that now they cannot pray, teach them to just talk to God as if they were talking to another person. Encourage them to honestly talk to God about how

they feel. They may feel they are just talking into the air at first, but as confidence builds, they will be less restrained.

Explain the benefits of prayer and introduce them to the books of Proverbs, Psalms and Nehemiah. These books will be helpful to them in the planning process. Their plan, with the help of prayer, can be successful. Remind the members that they would probably not be there if their own plans on their own had been working. They need the help of prayer and each other.

Developing a plan of action begins with commitment. This may be the first time they have come face-up to the reality that they really must change to recover from the loss. This may be the hardest part of the group because each man desires change, but he doesn't know what it will be like when it happens. He may be pretty scared at this juncture. But, you know what to do. Introduce awareness of the fear, build safety, and trust, then give some reassurance about God's love and care. Using the 'feel, felt,' found technique can return them to a 'safe island.' It goes like this: I, know how you must **feel (aware)** about changing, I **felt (safety)** the same way, but I **found (trust)** that with God's help it can work.

Explain that even though Jesus was very man, He was very God as well. (**Aware**) He chose to pray early, often and needed guidance from His Father to accomplish the changes needed for all mankind. (**Safety**) He found the strength to overcome by praying and in the relationship He had with the Heavenly Father. (**Trust**)

Most Bible studies have homework. If the one you are using does, this would be an excellent tool to enlist commitment. Their first goal for change could be committing to finish their homework for the next session.

Each group member should develop a plan of action with aims and goals. Aims are smaller goals which ultimately accomplish the larger GOAL. Direct each man to establish **his own plan to change** from where he is at the beginning to a healed man at points during and after the group.

A plan must have four elements to be accomplished.

1.) It must be the man's own plan. (He must own it!)

2.) It should be written out on the heart, then on the "door posts," that is, in a place where it can be seen readily each day.

3.) It must be achievable. Lofty goals are nice but may be unattainable and further defeating. Ask how he will accomplish the goal if it seems to be too overwhelming.

4.) It must be measurable. A man must know when he has met the goal. No plan will work without commitment and a desire to accomplish it. It is helpful to make a verbal commitment in front of the other group members, even though it may be difficult and scary. Each man has some milestones to accomplish with each homework assignment. From his initial feeling of awareness of hurt, he can tell as the weeks go by how he is changing. He can evaluate how his plan is working.

When Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, he utilized all four elements of the planning process to accomplish the desired task. He made sure each worker had the goal as their own. It was upon their hearts. They could accomplish it because it was their own, it was achievable and was measurable when they were finished. They could all see the wall finished, and they knew they had done their part.

Planning is only the first step in this transition stage of the group. This is really a phase where the fathers in the group will begin to exchange management of their lives. They have been managing in pain, fear and anxiety. Now, we are asking that they begin to make the transition to management by love, trust and commitment.

Management has five basic elements which operate through a time space learning curve. These five elements are as follows: planning, organizing, directing, delegating and controlling.

The pain/fear/anxiety level of management puts great emphasis upon control. In this stage, planning usually is situational rather than long term; delegation is often out of the question; directing is through frustration and anger; and organizing is panic oriented. It is all mixed up. So, how does one change this?

Understanding that awareness, safety and trust are real possibilities, which allow a father to think about change. Confidence in these three elements allows him to plan the change. Confidence comes by acceptance and from the forgiving deliverance from fear. Forgiveness comes from God. When a father feels that God is approachable to help him plan his life, he begins to live in the reality of forgiveness. It is important to emphasize that he needs God's help in planning. Let every father know that he would not be in the group if his former or present planning was working!

A facilitator might use Psalm 127 and Proverbs 3:5,6 as reference to the promise of God to help a father manage his life. (Aware) Management is from the heart in trust with confidence that God can do a better job of management than any individual. (Safety & Trust) So here is the structure for the plan of action.

First, encourage a regimen of prayer about the elements in each father's life that are allowing fears. Once these are identified, make a list of them: People, places, things.

Next, through prayer, identify how he would like it to be, then whether this is in concert with the way God would like it to be. I will use the example of the man who had attended many groups again here. He knew how he would like it to be, but he knew God would not like him to divorce his wife, so he was stuck. How would he congruently change his support system? His fear of discussing it with his wife kept him from moving forward. Once we met with his wife, he could move forward. His plan of action needed an intervention from outside, but fear was keeping him from it. Many fathers will face this. The facilitator should let them know fear can be a great hindrance in their planning. It keeps them from owning the plan. Their fears should be openly discussed, then prayed for. Once a father feels delivered from a fear he can move on and take ownership of the goals of his own plan.

Next, he should take co-ownership of the plan. He and God will own it. He should write it down. He must have confidence that it is achievable. And he must be able to tell whether it is happening or not.

Next, he should decide in prayer how it will work. How will the plan be organized? How will he direct it? Who will help? That is will he need to delegate some parts of it to others? He should be honest with himself about whether he feels confident that he can do certain elements of the plan. If not, he should delegate them. Delegation, and 'copping out' must be distinguished. Adam was not delegating when he told God it was the woman who caused him to sin in the garden. He was copping out. Lastly, what kinds of controls will be necessary for him, and how will they be implemented?

With the plan complete, the old adage becomes real. He has planned his work, now. He can **commit** to working the plan!

CHAPTER 8 THE HEALING MODEL

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

The lifestyle developed from the pain of fatherhood lost allows and facilitates continued pain. The father who surrounds himself with friends and acquaintances makes sure they are those who can accept his present condition: fear, pain, anxiety, etc. He can feel safe with them and still keep his pain.

The challenge to change is HUGE! Family, friends, business associates, church members, clients, etc., will be up for review. Let's talk family first. Let's use the man who had attended several recovery groups and still felt he needed one more. He was looking for a group who would not challenge his need to evaluate support systems, as he felt he would have to divorce his wife in that case. Family is a support group which has become accustomed to the ways of a man who has trauma from fatherhood lost. As a facilitator, one of your jobs is to encourage the family to meet with you. They will likely remain a support structure, and most likely embrace any positive change the father is wanting to pursue. I suggest this because it will give him confidence to pursue a plan of change where needed. It can reduce his fears of further loss. Few families are truly happy living in an environment where the father is miserable from fatherhood lost. They will most likely welcome the plan to change, and become a positive ally in facilitating the recovery from other negative support systems. You can see what I am suggesting here. I am suggesting that his family become **aware** of his desire to change. I am trying to help him and they feel **safe** in that pursuit. If he **trusts** me, and they do too, I have a strong support system for him. It will be easier for him to **commit** to the change. I realize this will be an extra time commitment for everyone, but it will be well worth it.

Let's define a **support system** in its elementary elements:

1. The system is aware of your life and accepts you. The motive may be pure in acceptance, or is in some way capitalizing on it for their own gain. They might even be afraid not to accept you!

2. The system enables the behavior it accepts to become a way of life.

3. The system may become as dependant upon you as you are on it to allow or enable continued behavior.

4. The system is 'safe' for you, or at least you are convinced it is, even if you are wrong.

5. There is trust in your system. This follows the axiom of two walking together as long as they agree. (Micah 4:6) The support system is beneficial

for a sense of love, belonging, acceptance and confidence in lifestyle.

What kinds of support systems are there? From my vantage point there are three. The internal, the external, and the imagined. The internal and external are real, the imagined are the ideal support system the individual really wants. The wanna-be support system, if you will allow me that digression.

INTERNAL support systems are self and family, both blood and marriage. The **most universal problem** with an internal support system I have noticed is that of the perceived relationship a **father** who has experienced an abortion has **with his own father**. This is a lineage issue, the preservation of the 'seed' if you will.

The secret of the abortion is usually most hidden from the grandfather of the aborted child. Most of the men I have listened to initially, have a great fear that their father will find out. In the cases where their father has knowledge of the abortion, there is an embarrassing feeling of inferior, subservient cowering in the description of the relationship. Listen to the following report one man gave during a group. 'I'm not half the man my dad is. He would have never made this mistake, and I'll never live it down.' The shame of the choice motivates secrecy, hiding, masking, lack of confidence in manhood, lack of trust in self reliance, and authority relationship problems, both internal and external.

An aborted father realizes he has a unique position within his blood line. He would not exist if his own father had made the same decision he made. The thought troubles him, whether he pushed for the abortion, or went along with it for the 'right of the woman to choose.'

Another important internal support system is the father's immediate family, his current mate and other children. There is a strong desire in most cases that the mate (if different from the mate who shared the abortion experience) not know of the abortion, and that the other children never know. This shroud of secrecy is very common. I think it is part of the dilemma a father faces as the fugitive motive described in Prov. 29:16.

Another important internal support system involves the internal tapes which fathers play in their mind. The tapes of continual self-demeaning judgement, and the rehearsal of self-worthlessness and lack of confidence are common.

Some of my colleagues who work with the trauma of abandonment find the same characteristics present in the self-appraisals of their clients. These might include hopelessness, helplessness, self-blame,

hollow feelings, sleeplessness, frequent anxiety attacks, lack of direction, dissociation with the act, an inability to complete tasks, self-sabotage of achieving, etc. Many fathers have decided they were not successful in the role of protector, provider, and preserver of their child, therefore it is not very likely they will be successful in anything else. When success does occur, they are quick to credit it with something or someone else, or explain it away as sheer luck. Some even feel shame if they succeed, or even loath the accomplishment. They will often unconsciously succeed in making what they perceive as success a failure. Even this is troublesome because they have succeeded in self-sabotage!

Whether the support system is internal or external, the motive is to keep it under wraps. When life circumstances crowd in on the secret, the motive for secrecy is even higher. Anxiety, anger and fear rule this father. He will lie, cheat, betray and use other bazaar behavior to cover it up. This incongruent lifestyle is at least diminishing his capacity, and at most debilitating or worse.

This internal support system of the mind is a fertile battleground. The motive for self-punishment for the dire mistake and consequences of the abortion is gripping. For a father to change this support system, he must overcome the belief that he cannot be forgiven. A facilitator can make him aware, help him feel safe, build trust, and help him commit to change through acceptance and forgiveness.

EXTERNAL support systems are as internal, except these support systems are not within the immediate circle of family or self. These systems may be expanded to include almost any activity in which he will involve himself. These might include work, school, church, sports, or other hobby associates. The father gets his 'strokes' from his external support system. He never discusses his past with them. For the most part, the relationships he has with people in these categories are surface, shallow and incongruent. As with the internal support system, this system must never know of the past. The skills a facilitator uses to help facilitate a change commitment are the same in any case: awareness, safety, building trust and commitment.

The **IMAGINED (MAKE BELIEVE)** support system is the hardest to describe and deal with. It is that system with which a father may identify that he neither knows personally, nor interacts within reality. Music, video, movies, magazines, the Internet and other media elements are used. These replace the successes he feels he will never achieve either because of his dastardly deed, or because he doesn't deserve them. Some men will turn to alcohol, drugs, sex

games, pornography and prostitution as a source of support in this make-believe/external support world. In this world he can find instant success. He can make believe he is special here. He can identify with the characters or music and find some value. Some fathers become scholars and master the areas of study with which they pursue. Their motive is to be prolific and successful.

A father with the fugitive mentality after an abortion experience, has a deep-seated belief that God cannot, and will not bless him. (Prov. 29:16) Although I feel his spirit ever calls out to be blessed by God, he cannot believe it unless he can believe he can be forgiven. In the absence of repentance, wherein he finds a true and trusting relationship of restoration with God, he will accept success as a substitute for the blessing which he does not believe he can ever receive. In this pursuit of make-believe, he can find almost instant success. In this surreal world, all else can fade out. The stimulation and instant gratification of this world allows him to have a quasi-fulfillment which is otherwise missing. He we find the application of the proverb about the heavy-spirited man. He may laugh and be merry for the moment, yet he is filled with regret later. While this world offers success, its entrapments are even more cruel than the pain which may be driving the desire to retain this support system. This system may even lead to compulsive or addictive behavior by the father. Addictive behavior and compulsive behavior are both shameful. The demands of this master are so heavy that they can further erode confidence without apparent delectability of the victim. The shroud of secrecy is characteristic of this classic behavior. Fathers who become increasingly dependant upon this imaginary support system may become very angry, even hostile when they are discovered.

The facilitator's role is to try to lead a father in discovering his own areas of accountability. (Aware) Bring the message of hope, knowing that the reaction may be 'kill the messenger.' (I hasten to add that facilitators are not responsible for the father or his behavior). But, by being vulnerable, the facilitator can introduce some safety. The facilitator can lead him to change, but must not feel obligated to insuring any change will happen. The trust which is built between the facilitator and the father could be real, or it might be a false trust. Even professional counselors are often manipulated and otherwise baffled by the masters of deception who claim they want freedom from their negative support systems, yet never commit to doing it. I think the reason it is more difficult is that changing the imagined support system is less tangible. It might take a lot longer than the time of this kind of

group can commit to. However, over time I think most fathers can overcome their problems with this system. When a facilitator can observe that a father has become committed to another group of men, (i.e., an accountability group) outside the recovery group, he can feel more confident that the change can occur. To change imaginary support systems, a committed external support system outside the recovery group is beneficial.

I think the best a facilitator in this type of a recovery group can do is to help identify what support systems there are, then help the father decide whether he wants to keep them or wants to change.

THE CHANGE PROCESS begins with awareness of present conditions; examination of the conditions for reality or fantasy; finding a safe way to accept the need for changing with a congruent goal in mind; trusting that it can be better if change occurs; and then committing to the change. A facilitator helps a father to recognize the need to change the system. Use the communication tools which will help you get to 'commitment' on this critical issue and accomplish the goals.

TOOL 1:

LISTENING: Listen with ears and eyes. Develop a skill of observing body language to see if it is congruent with what the father is saying.

TOOL 2:

LEVELING: Know where you are when conversation becomes difficult, and request permission to say how it feels to you. Know where the group is, individually and singularly. Give permission for each to say how it feels to them. Make a suggestion about where you believe God is on the topic. Request permission to say how the word of God feels on the topic. When the positions are clear, reach agreement quickly.

TOOL 3:

CONFRONTING: Overcome the temptation of personal and pejorative conversation. Most negative situations occur because one or more group members or the facilitator has left his comfort zone. When this happens, the natural defenses are employed. We tend to circle the wagons and go into a protective mode. This will close down conversation, not open it up. I have listened to men who have been unable to get past this with other groups, or with individual counselors and therefore have not finished the work necessary to complete the group, or their own grief plan. This technique for communicating simply stops action, takes inventory of feelings, and decides whether it can continue and if how. Finding out where you and the group

are coming from, and how scary it is for each, will open the door for permission to continue communication. We must remember we are dealing with a lifestyle here. Each father has developed a fort around his feelings to protect himself. He does not want others to know of his abortion or other ancillary failures. If he is scared, he is not safe. If he is not safe, he will not trust, and if he does not trust, he will not change.

Another part of the confronting skill is a technique called **CONTROLLING HARMFUL BEHAVIOR:** This technique is a frontal confrontation technique to be used when a father simply won't move off the dime on his issue and he begins to become caustic to you and others in the group. He really wants to change, but he is stuck in the pit of being right rather than doing the right thing. His position is more important than his relationship in the group. He would rather battle than communicate. Here is how it works. When he engages himself and others into a battle, you first stop action with a statement like 'I wonder if we could just stop for a minute, I think we are locked into battle and I don't think we want that, do we?' Confirm this with each individual. Next, ask 'If we keep going this way, we will likely not get what we want, is this true?' Confirm it with each. Then, ask each to agree to conversation which will respect and affirm each other member. While this does not solve any problem they may have or move them into resolve, it keeps communication open so that the problem can be addressed.

These tools and techniques lead to commitment, and commitment leads to change.

The conversations which allow a father safety, trust and acceptance, no matter what has just happened, or what is generally going on in his life, will eventually allow him to commit to change.

When we are building a plan of action, we may have to keep returning to the model on specific issues and using the communication skills to bring a father to a comfort level to solve his problem.

Getting commitment in communication can be achieved by mutual agreement where each feels safe and trusting, or by manipulation. The former will bring positive and lasting results. The later will bring nothing. Here are the elements of this tool of communication. What will be done, when it will be done, how it will be done, and who will do it? You ask each father to say how he thinks it will be when . . . What will hinder him when he . . . Who or what will help him when he . . . What will he do if it is different from what he thinks it will be when he . . . What will he do if it is when he . . . What will the next step be if it is when he . . .

I think you should concentrate on the imagi-

nary support system more than the other two. He owns the make-believe lock stock and barrel. The internal and external support systems are really a result of the direction he pursues from his make-believe system. There is a pitfall in asking a man to change his friends. His friends are there because of how he is in his own mind and spirit. Better to deal with what is real to him in his make-believe system. When this changes, other things will as well. A wise preacher once told me he never had to tell a sinner to stop sinning, once he convinced them that they should start reading the Bible. Why? They already know they are sinning. The results of their own behavior are judging them without anyone else pointing it out. A father knows if he keeps doing what he is doing, he will keep getting what he is getting. What he needs is hope that if he starts doing something else, he can end the pain associated with what he is doing now. The focus, however, should be on helping his hope be in Christ. As one colleague put it, if we just make fathers feel better, and don't give them an opportunity with Christ, it is like sending them to hell on Bridgestone tires.

CHAPTER 9 THE HEALING MODEL

EVALUATING: IS THIS WORKING?

Without a way to measure the value of the plan and the value of all this work, the work is in vain. As mentioned in the commitment to the plan of action, one must build an evaluation system into the plan. Here is how it's done.

The goal for grieving for instance is to find comfort. How do you measure that? In the generic sense, the elements of evaluation are whether the goal was achieved or not. It is really subjective, so each hurting father must define what it is. To facilitate this, you must see from the plumb line of life (the Word of God) what people, who were comforted by the grieving process, found as comfort. How do we know they were comforted and what were the elements of comfort? My suggestion: Have each father read the Psalms in search of the meaning of comfort. David showed, by example, a man who grieved more than any other in scripture. How was he comforted? What did he look like when he was comforted, etc.? When the goal of comfort is designed into the plan of action, the elements are clear, so it is possible for a hurting father to identify when he has reached it. Further, definition of comfort should be in the plan as well. Should 'comfort' be a one-time event, or ongoing? Should it be a goal which can be achieved through relationship with God? Is there a process? If so, what is it, etc.?

Reevaluation of the reality of the goal, to begin with, must be established at the time of evaluation. If Scripture promises comfort for those who mourn, then it should be realistic to believe it can be realized.

Ask him to evaluate whether he has taken ownership of the plan and the goal. Did he really believe he could receive it from God? If so, he would have had to overcome the doublemindedness referred to in James 1:8. He would have also had to overcome the fugitive self-image created by participation in the death of his child, found in Proverbs 28:16. If he doesn't feel he has reached comfort, an evaluation in how he feels about these two critical issues may be necessary.

Evaluation of hinderers such as Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' should be considered as well. Paul reasoned that he could be content in whatsoever state he was in. He relied upon the relationship he had with God for that kind of comfort. For him comfort was relationship. He could believe it and own it, therefore he could experience it when it was there. He further reasoned that God was the ultimate authority and that all plans were under His scrutiny. He was understand-

ing of the Proverb of trusting in the Lord with all your heart and leaning not upon your own understanding. He knew that in all his ways, if he were to acknowledge God, God would direct his paths.

Evaluation must be defining for a continuing plan or for designing a new plan. Much as the guided missile is never on course until it hits the target, our evaluation process should be ever communicating with the Lord for new guidance on our course toward the goal. A signal from the missile to base and back corrects its course. Having a plan fail or partially fail builds the need for planning a new kind of endurance, etc.

Evaluation should be reasonable. Having an accountability to others for not only the plan, but the outcome, should be a part of evaluation. Sometimes the enemy can really throw us for a loop here. We might have a plan fail and then we tend to go into a deep funk. Having another review our thinking on the process is helpful and keeps us in victory. Maybe we haven't given the plan enough time to work. We get assistance on timing for evaluation from a group of accountable individuals.

I believe the evaluation process allows us to build series of threefold cords into our lives. Ecclesiastes 5: gives us insight saying that a threefold cord is not easily broken. The relationships we encourage fathers to build become fortresses of renewal, replacing the false and scary fortress of denial in their support systems.

Finally, evaluation should increase courage, boldness, and confidence. For about two decades, our society has been toying with the experiment of trying to live without absolutes. We have been taught to think of things as relative. In 2 Corinthians 10:12 Paul warns: 'To compare ourselves among ourselves is not wise.' Relative reasoning depends upon opinion in circumstance. If opinions differ in circumstances, then so be it. What is true for you, need not be true for me, and so on . . . Our ongoing experiment with abortion should show us this experiment cannot be reliable. Solomon was one of the wisest men that ever lived, and he tells us in Proverbs that solutions leading to death are not wise, even if they seem right! Mankind without wisdom will abandon their vision. That's why this part of the process is so important. Continual evaluation, correction and instruction in the continuing process of healing will lead us back to the reality of absolutes. Absolutes lead us into correct motives, attitudes, thoughts, speech and actions. Without evaluation, we can just simply look at a plan as an experience. When we evaluate objectively under the standards of the time-tested commands and promises of God, we can know with confidence where we are and

how close we are to the target.

Paul encouraged men to judge themselves in the light of God's Word. He said it was the basis of healthy communion with God. When we do this, we can be assured we will be severely tested. That's where the need for an accountability group is necessary so we can stand the test of our right to repent and be healed.

Chapter 10 THE HEALING MODEL

CLOSURE

‘For every end there is a new beginning . . .’

Closure is the last step. It may happen in total or in part. Each man is responsible for ascertaining which it is for himself. There is a time for mourning and a time to dance, but usually not simultaneously. As one ends or closes, the other begins. A good finish is a new beginning, and it should be recognized that being done is enough.

The 12 step AAA program defines a man by his alcoholism. They say he will always be an alcoholic. Many programs for the father who has lost a child by an abortion will define him as forever an aborted father. There is a truth to both of these, in as much as both cases reveal the sinful nature of our fallen world. We are ‘sinners saved by grace’ but we are also ‘new creatures’ and ‘partakers of the divine nature’ once we have Christ in our lives. So how do we know when it’s over, and how do we close it out?

Paul says we can know it is over and find closure when we can ‘forget those things which are behind . . .’ because we have the healing authority, boldness, confidence, faith, and assurance that we can ‘press on toward the mark of the high calling in Christ Jesus.’ I think he is right. We can declare it finished when we are not hindered by it. It is not that we don’t have anymore memories, or feel saddened by the past from time to time, it is that those things drive us toward the mark of the high calling in Jesus, rather than the pit of despair, denial, depression and generally cowardly behavior. We can live in the vicarious victory Christ transferred to us in His resurrection.

God showed the forefathers how to acknowledge closure. Usually it was with a ritual of some sort and a ceremony. We still use this method to symbolize closure.

A funeral service is held for the loss of life. Loved ones and acquaintances acknowledge this as a finality, a closure. With the loss of life by abortion we don’t have a funeral because of the social depravity and political correctness. As facilitators, we can give permission for fathers to have a memorial service and a ritual close to the loss of their child. When we do this, we validate much. We validate fatherhood, manhood and lineage. We proclaim the end of this time of grief over the child, and proclaim the power to continue life until we meet those children in heaven. We proclaim a beginning of life without them here in the flesh, and in congruent behavior we honor their place in our family tree and we honor their creator. We bless their lives, however shortened. We repent in earnest,

receive forgiveness and restitution with God. We fulfill the plan of restitution when we dedicate the child into the hands and capable care of Christ in heaven, and we fully accept our own fatherhood.

Facilitators should feel the passion I do for this critical link. When you approach a pastor about conducting a memorial service, you do not realize the bond you are creating. Pastors long for the move of God on their people. There is nothing like the completion of reconciliation which occurs in a memorial. When these fathers came to you, they were like a sheep without a shepherd. Now you are present with them as you pass the baton to their Shepherd in memorial of their child, fatherhood and manhood! The rituals differ with different church denominations, but the Holy Spirit is the same. Your reward will not be equaled in any part of the group as it will in this kind of closure. Let this be a monument to the work of God.

APPENDIX A

TECHNIQUES FOR ASKING OPEN QUESTIONS:

The purpose of this section, in addition to making this thing longer, is to give the facilitator guidance on keeping the meetings going, the conversation flowing, and encouraging openness. There are many good books on techniques of communication and group dynamics. If the facilitator has not experienced these, he should take advantage of one or several to understand the techniques of uncovering hidden and destructive past circumstances, so that they may be brought into the light for Jesus to heal.

Most books will feature **open questions** to allow and encourage men to have the freedom to disclose. Most of these questions begin with “W” and are designed to keep communication flowing. Who, where, when, what, which, and how questions **cannot generally be answered with a yes or no**. Consequently, the person questioned feels free and encouraged to answer by telling his story.

Other open question techniques involve phrases such as: “reflect upon . . .”; “tell me about . . .”; “how did that go?”; “I’ll bet that’s right, expand upon it if you can . . .” etc.

Active listening is generally encouraged by most. This technique allows the person who is sharing his story the freedom and confidence to continue, knowing he has made his point clear to the listener. Active listening involves a set of words or phrases which reflect what the group member has just said. They normally occur as: “If I heard you right . . .”; “I hear you saying . . .”; “Did you just tell me?”; “As I was listening you seemed to say . . .”; and other phrases with similar design.

Empathizing with the group member is a technique facilitators use when emotion is very strong and a group member is to be encouraged to allow full emotional expression. Phrases such as: “You must have been very . . .”; “I can tell it . . .”; “That was so (shocking, painful, devastating, hard, meaningful, fearful, brave, compassionate, etc.) . . .”; “I understand how . . .”; “How did you get through...”; will allow trust to be built with the group member.

Correcting in love is another technique used when one member is zealously expressing some kind of judgement or demeaning value with another. This technique is a set of words designed to preserve the respect and dignity of each group member with each other one. The phrases go something like: “_____, how did you feel when _____ said . . .”; “_____, how do you think _____ felt when you said . . .”; “The way you expressed _____ to _____ would have made me

feel _____, would you have felt that way if I’d said it to you?”

Reigning in, is a technique which is designed to stop severe differences between group members. A set of words designed to stop harmful behavior and verbal abuse such as: “If you keep saying what you just said to _____ and he keeps responding the way he just did, we’re going to be locked into battle. “Is this what we want _____?”; “Do we want to continue this line of conversation which will likely result in harm?”; “Is this going to get us what we want from our group session?”; “Time out! , Lets look at what’s going on here. _____ , how are you feeling right now?, How can we change this?”. . . etc.

Closing questions, allow the facilitator to acquire commitment from group members. A closing question is a set of words designed to get a yes or no answer. Such as: “Will you . . .”; “Would you be willing to ...?”; “Can we agree that...?”; “I think ... don’t you?”; “Lets, ..., would that be OK?”; “If I could, ... would you?”; etc.

Calming questions, are questions designed to gently bring a group member into a comfort zone for further open communication. “Lets pretend it..., then how would you have done ...?”; “What if you’d...?”; “How would it have been different if...?”; “Lets just take a minute and ask for God to help _____ express this very difficult circumstance OK?”; “If you could change anything about what happened when... what would it be?”; etc.

Role playing is a technique used to apply a simi-real dimension to a group member, for increasing their confidence to share, or for planning an encounter outside the group with another which should aid in healing a relationship. The role play is not real, but it is simi-real, so as to give practice to a group member as to how it could be. One or more other group members may assume the role of the one whom the group member must communicate with outside the group. Facilitation of a role play can occur in many ways. The role play can be stopped at any time for feedback about feelings, redirection of a scenario, or when the group member becomes uncomfortable.

Praying allows each group member to regain confidence with their relationship with God, and trust with their fellow group members. By allowing some time for prayer, each member can establish new hope for their plan to continue healing. God can give infinitely more comfort in one second of prayer, than 100 hours of group time. This should be the centerpiece of your group activity.

Members should be encouraged to pray outside the group as well. We believe Jesus Christ ever intercedes before the “Throne of Grace” for each of

us.

This truth allows each member to have confidence that when the abortion event happened, Jesus not only knew about it, He was in some way interceding on behalf of them. Although they may not have been aware of His intercession during that event, they can pray that He will reveal His love and knowledge to them as they pray it through on their own. This “closet time” outside the group setting is invaluable for the process of group health, and individual healing.

Evaluating questions is a set of words which are designed to encourage progress without discouraging the group member who has fallen short of his goal for the week, and designed to reward a member who has accomplished his goal. The words may be as this: “_____ did you make your mile markers this week or did you set new ones?”; “_____ were you able to accomplish _____ this week by yourself or did you go for help?”; “On a scale on one to five, how would you rate your goal and secondly your progress toward it?”; “Out of your experience this week, what new goals if any can we overlay on the old ones?”; etc.

APPENDIX B

SUGGESTED SAMPLE SCREENING QUESTIONS FOR FATHERHOOD LOST SUPPORT GROUPS:

1.) Ask for name, address, phone, marital status, occupation and work phone.

2.) Ask for background.

- How did you hear of this group?
- Why are you interested in joining at this time?
- Explain, if pertinent, your past support/recovery group experience.
- Explain, if pertinent, your current counseling experience with a therapist or counselor.
- If pertinent, is he or she aware of your desire to be in this group.
- Would you feel comfortable with the facilitator contacting and communicating on an ongoing basis with your therapist or counselor.
- If so, ask for the name address and phone number of the therapist.
- Are you currently under medication or using drugs, alcohol, or other substances which may affect your functioning within this group? Explain if pertinent.
- Ask about past treatment center experience, sexual abuse situations, suicidal threats or tendencies, clinical depression, etc. THIS INFORMATION IS PURELY OPTIONAL AND WILL BE HELD IN CONFIDENCE.
- People in the recovery process are not fun to live with. Does your family support your efforts to recover? Are any opposed? Ask who and if they know why.
- Define your support system.
- Since this is a Christian recovery/support group, we will be opening and closing in prayer and often refer to the Bible as we believe it to be our ultimate authority. However, being a Christian is not necessary for membership.

• Optional Questions:

- Do you consider yourself to be a Christian?
- Do you attend Church?
- Where do you attend?

3.) Group setting vs. individual assessment for support.

• Self rating:

On a scale of 1-5 have the applicant rate himself semantically with respect to the following:

- Reserved vs. Outgoing
- Quiet vs. Outspoken
- Passive vs. Aggressive
- Controlled vs. Impulsive
- Meek vs. Angry
- Joyful vs. Subdued
- Loving vs. Selfish
- Decisive vs. Ambivalent
- Punctual vs. Tardy
- Tolerant vs. Prejudice
- Enthusiasm vs. Apathy
- Secure vs. Anxious
- Patient vs. Restless
- Alertness vs. Unaware
- Hospitable vs. Lonely
- Flexible vs. Resistant
- Truthful vs. Deceptive
- Bold vs. Fearful
- Forgiving vs. Resentful
- Accepting vs. Rejecting
- Fair vs. Partial
- Compassion vs. Indifferent
- Gentle vs. Harsh
- Grateful vs. Expectant
- Orderly vs. Confused
- Responsible vs. Unreliable
- Humble vs. Proud

• Warn each prospective group member of the “Now I’m OK” feeling he may have after the initial interview and the need to come to group even though he now feels better.

• Be aware that initial sharing may bring a feeling of embarrassment to the potential group member, and he may decide to hide a while or even feel some self-contempt about it. Try to make him feel comfortable and give him permission to feel accepted by everyone. Relate in a totally non-condescending way, on an “I’m your friend and confidant here and now, and down the road as well!”

- Then, ask for a 10-12 week commitment for the group.

SUGGESTED SAMPLE OF GROUP RULES
(Adapted from Serendipity Support/Recovery Group Training Manual by Ross and Kline)

Have each group member read, understand and sign the group rules which you institute.

Suggested to start each with I agree to:

- Anonymity: Which means I will protect the identities of all group members.
- Confidentiality: Nothing that is said or done in the group will be discussed outside of the group without permission of those involved.
- Self focus: Focus on the work needed for oneself not the other men. Each man shares his own experience, insights and feelings.
- Respect others: We do not advise, analyze or 'fix' others. Each man is encouraged to find his own answers.
- Let God work: We do not preach at members of this group.
- Limit sharing: Be considerate that all need to share, so we will limit our sharing time.
- Allow feelings: Ask for permission to hug, touch, or come to the 'rescue' of another first before jumping right in. Avoid minimizing another's hurts by explaining them away or ignoring them.
- Regular attendance: Promise to be there unless there is a dire emergency.
- Avoid graphic details: Share experiences tastefully, avoid triggering hurts in others.
- Listen: Avoid cross-talk and give place to each other when we are sharing.
- Take responsibility: When uncomfortable with anything happening in the group, we deal with it ourselves, instead of expecting others to rescue us.
- Stay on the subject: Avoid discussions about controversial topics and items of interest outside the group.
- Consider others: Guard against offending others. If someone offends us, we work it out directly with him.
- Resolve problems: If we wish to leave the group prematurely, we discuss the reasons with the rest of the group.
- Group authority: The group is not responsible for each member's healing, it is only a place to facilitate discussion in safety.
- Facilitator authority: The facilitator will start and end each meeting, and will have the authority to intervene in all circumstances.
- Dismissal from the group: If a member is asked to leave the group for breaking the rules, he agrees to do so without retaliation, malice, or in any other way disrupting the group.
- Last day to join: A cut-off time must be set by the facilitator.
- Evaluation: Each member agrees to evaluate the group when finished.
- Participation: If a member feels uncomfortable in participating in any group activity, he may excuse himself from that activity.
- Involvement: If for any reason a group member feels like he must leave during a group meeting, he is free to leave without question.
- Agreement: Each member should sign the agreement and date it.

APPENDIX C

CHECKLIST FOR FACILITATORS IN STARTING A GROUP:

Key questions to cover in beginning a fatherhood lost support group.

1. Do I have permission from my sponsoring authority?
2. Do I have proper and appropriate insurance coverage for my sponsor?
3. Where will we hold our meetings?
4. Is there appropriate insurance coverage for the owners of the building where we are meeting?
5. Whom has the key? Is there a security system, etc.? Who locks up?
6. Do I have some emergency numbers for contacting persons when an emergency arises?
7. Have I established intent, expectations and goals for the group and the members?
8. How will I recruit members? (Church referral, significant others of women in similar support groups, print media, speaking at church or other functions, radio, T.V., word of mouth, other . . . ?)
9. What materials will we use as study guides?
10. How will I procure the materials, who will order, etc.? What is the lead time for procurement?
11. How will I pay for the materials? By the group members or in some other way?
12. What kind of screening will I use? What questions would I ask to determine group or one-on-one?
13. What will the group membership profile look like? (i.e., fathers, grandfathers, etc.)
14. When will the group start and end?
15. Will I be working with a co-leader?
16. What will the structure of the meeting be? (Open in prayer; victory minutes over last week's trials; homework discussion; special prayer time; closing rounds; dismissal after closing prayer; etc.) Will we have special speakers?
17. What will the joining the group cut-off date be?
18. Will I have a support team of prayers backing me up?
19. Do I have a referral network of professionals which I can call upon outside the group as needed?
20. Will there be a memorial service?
21. Will I have an after-care accountability system offered?
22. Will I have group end/exit evaluations?
23. What material will I have to study to prepare myself for the group?

APPENDIX D

THE MEMORIAL SERVICE

As a facilitator you will need several things to accomplish a memorial service. In addition you will have several responsibilities to accomplish.

1. Place:

Each father may want to have his own memorial, or they may choose to have it together. My suggestion is to let the fathers(s) choose a place they want for the memorial. It may be in a church, or on a mountainside, in a parking lot, or by a stream. The place is not as important as the fact that they chose where it is to be.

2. People:

Each father should make a list of those he wants to be present when he has the memorial service. If he chooses to do it alone, suggest that you would like to be there with him. I think it is important for at least someone to be with fathers when they close.

I highly encourage you to strongly suggest that a pastor be present with a father when he closes, as I stated in the last chapter. It is a perfect time for him to bond with his pastor in renewal. If the pastor is with him, he can always feel accepted in the church, and he can feel the permission to boldly proclaim his freedom from the tyranny of fatherhood lost.

3. Things:

A father may want to make some item which he will offer as a memento for the lost child, and he may not. This too should be at the bidding of the group or as individual fathers desire. I suggest each father, at a minimum, choose a name for the lost child, and write a note about how he feels about the abortion and subsequent forgiveness and healing he has received. He may want to offer this at the ceremony, or he may want to keep it. In addition, I suggest each father allow others who will be there to share similarly.

A father should also have something he can take from the memorial as his memento as well. I suggest a printed memorial hand out be prepared for him and others in attendance.

Sometimes you may want the father to simply write the baby's name on a helium filled balloon and have each release the balloons at an appropriate time. Or, as the father who carved the little boat, there may be an appropriate time for each to do this kind of thing as well.

You will need to provide some kind of altar,

some kind of podium for speakers, and several boxes of tissue! You should bring water and a first aid kit, just in case.

4. Format:

There is no set format, but I suggest a time at the beginning for a prayer; then a scripture reading; then a time for the pastor to speak of closure; then a time for fathers to speak of their closure; then a time for gifts to be laid at the altar; then a time of song; then a time of prayer to close. I think it is appropriate for the people who pray to be the facilitator at the beginning, then the pastor to close.

5. Protocol:

As facilitator, you will either have to do all of these things, or have to decide who will. It is my suggestion again that you involve pastors as much as possible in the service, and that you let the fathers bring as much or as little as they want. After the service, you should have someone to take the items down and do the agreed upon cleaning and putting away of items.

APPENDIX E

DISCERNING SIGNS WHEN FATHERS ARE SEARCHING FOR HELP:

The symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder, induced by the stressor event of an abortion loss, are referred to as Post Abortion Stress Syndrome. They are as follows:

SYMPTOMS

Guilt, depression, regret, nightmares, sadness, anger/rage, anxiety, helplessness, frequent change in relationships, inferiority feelings, ideas of suicide, frequent headaches, dizziness, use of sedatives, sleeplessness, eating disorders, panic attacks, abuse of substances, inability to relax, can't make or keep friendships, loneliness, sexual problems, avoidance behaviors, fatigue, fear of failure, taking inordinate risks, marital stress, frequent change in jobs, work-aholism, fear of women and or children, intolerance with women and or children, poor bonding with subsequent children, taking up a cause such as becoming a fervent pro-lifer, or pro-choicer, a deep drive to have another child to make up for the lost one, defensive and combative, vengeful, loss or lack of respect for authority figures, sever rejection, alienation from God/church, etc.

SIGNS FATHERS SHOW

When the disorder becomes apparent to a father, such that it has affected his "success" as a **protector, provider, preserver, performer, or a praiser**, to render some awareness to him that he has utterly failed in one or all of them, he will likely start to search for help.

When we look at the symptoms and listen to fathers talk about latent losses, which we can associate with the particular symptoms, we know he is not satisfied. When he makes statements such as "I don't know what I'll do if...", that's a call for help. Other statements such as "If he/she/they do that I'll exact vengeance of some kind", or statements which indicate a distress of not being able to control, or statements of planned inordinate control, these are signs of a father calling for help. Discernment of which area of affect can be made if a facilitator will take the time to listen and probe.

When a facilitator notices these signs, he can offer to take the guy to lunch, or have a cup and "talk". He can decide to ask himself the question: If I were feeling this way myself, would this be an indicator of

my failure in providing, protecting, preserving, performing, or praising (worshiping)? A group leader may not always be right in this discernment, but it will certainly be a starting point to begin praying to see if this would be a point of entry to help the father.

TAKING ACTION

Once you notice a symptom, what do you do with it?

Follow the model. You have just become **AWARE** of his call for help. Next, you pray for a **SAFE** way to approach him. Pray for a way he can receive you. Next, you pray for God to grant you favor in **BUILDING TRUST** with this father. Next, you watch to see if he wants to change. If he does, you and he pray for a **PLAN** of accountability and a way to change. Next, you assess his **SUPPORT SYSTEMS**, to help him see if they are helping or harming his recovery. Next, you help him see if his plan is working, and **ASSESS AND EVALUATE** its success. If it worked, help him find **CLOSURE** and a way to provide some restitution for his dilemma.

APPENDIX F

AFTERCARE

At the final group meeting each group member should list the new support structures he has begun to develop. He must feel free to call periodically when he discovers an impasse. The group can facilitate tools for the man to use down the road. When something happens in the present, which trigger's feelings of past failures, loss, pain etc. the man must feel free to call for help. Some men may wish to continue meeting in the group and continue to have some bible study times together without the facilitator. This is acceptable and can be encouraged.

The caveat is to recognize that other support structure is needed in his life after the group, and his reliance upon the group must stop at some point.

Often men will want to become facilitators of groups themselves. This should be encouraged and an opportunity should be given for them to become coleaders in the next group which can be further training for them.

Some men have experienced more than one abortion event themselves, or have been affected by another abortion event which has occurred with someone close to them such as a relative or a friend. In these cases men may choose to deal with separate abortion events in attendance in another group.

As you experience new findings with this new area of healing, feel free to modify your group settings to fit the need.

GOD BLESS YOU!!!

APPENDIX G

HELPING ORGANIZATIONS FOR MEN WHO HAVE BEEN DISTRESSED BY FATHERHOOD LOST:

CARE NET (PACE)
(703) 478-5661
109 Carpenter Dr. Ste. 100
Sterling, VA 20164
“Turning a Father’s Heart”
A Bible study by Cochren/Jones

Open Arms
(314)449-7672
P.O. Box 1056
Colombia, MO 65205
“In His Image”

National Organization of Post Abortion Healing And
Reconciliation (NOPAHR)
(414) 483-4141
P.O. Box 07477
Milwaukee, WI 53207-2203

Wayne F. Brauning
Men’s Abortion Recovery Ministries
5021 Newhall St
Philadelphia, PA 19144
“Men & The Big Picture”

New Life Family Services
(612) 920-8117
3361 Republic Ave.
St. Louis Park, MN 55426
“Conquerors”
A Bible Study

Fathers & Brothers Ministries
(303) 494-3282
350 Broadway Suite 40
Boulder, CO 80303
“Missing Arrows”
A Bible Study

THE GROUP MEMBERSHIP AGREEMENT

I _____,
understand that every attempt will be made to guard my anonymity and confidentiality in this group, but it cannot be absolutely guaranteed in a group setting.

- I realize that the group leader cannot control the actions of the others in the group.
- I realize that confidentiality is sometimes broken accidentally and without malice.
- I understand that the group leader is morally or ethically obligated to break confidentiality when:
 - I communicate an intention to kill myself.
 - I communicate an intention to harm another person.
 - I reveal ongoing sexual or physical abuse.
- I have been warned about the consequences for communicating the above types of information; that reports will be made to the proper authorities, including the police, suicide units and Child Protective Services, as well as any potential victims.
- I understand that the leader will make a good faith effort to find additional help if my needs prove to be outside the scope of the resources of this group.
- I understand that this is a Christ-centered group, which integrates recovery tools with the Bible and prayer, and that all members may not be of my particular church background. I realize that the Bible may be discussed more (or less) than I would prefer.
- I realize that this is a self-help group, and not a therapy group. I understand the leader may or may not be qualified by "life experience," and that he or she has not been professionally trained as a therapist. The leader's role in this group is to create a climate where healing might occur; to support my personal work toward healing; and to share his or her own experience, strength, and hope. Further, I understand that the group in and of itself is not individually nor corporately responsible for any degree of success or failure toward my goals and expectations of healing. I am participating by my own agreement and with full knowledge that I have not been manipulated, coerced, or forced to participate, and I have the right to leave at any time.

- I agree to hold harmless and indemnify the _____ its officers employees and volunteers, and _____ (Group Facilitator) and _____ (Owner of the facility where the group is meeting, and all other group members from any claims which may arise as a result of this group or the group activities which I have participated or failed to participate in.

Member Signature

Date

SELF RATING EXERCISE:

On a scale of 1-5 have the applicant rate himself semantically with respect to the following:

Reserved vs. Outgoing

Quiet vs. Outspoken

Passive vs. Aggressive

Controlled vs. Impulsive

Meek vs. Angry

Joyful vs. Subdued

Loving vs. Selfish

Decisive vs. Ambivalent

Punctual vs. Tardy

Tolerant vs. Prejudice

Enthusiasm vs. Apathy

Secure vs. Anxious

Patient vs. Restless

Alertness vs. Unaware

Hospitable vs. Lonely

Flexible vs. Resistant

Truthful vs. Deceptive

Bold vs. Fearful

Forgiving vs. Resentful

Accepting vs. Rejecting

Fair vs. Partial

Compassion vs. Indifferent

Gentle vs. Harsh

Grateful vs. Expectant

Orderly vs. Confused

Responsible vs. Unreliable

Humble vs. Proud

We tend to look at life through our own lens. God, however, sees us through the lens of Jesus Christ. In each area of accountability we have opportunity to view ourselves through our own lens and through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:1-2:19 with special emphasis on verse 1:18).

Our own sin is like a grinding stone, changing the focus or the lens of our view of God as well. Often we see God as a reflection of our own sin. Sin makes us act in fear and shame. From our "sin lens" we may think God is vengeful and harsh. How we see Him and believe that He sees us can position us in behavior. Our orientation to life can be from three major vantage points.

Fear, anxiety, duty, justice or love/trust. Our objective in the exercise is to ID our self-vision compared to God's vision for us. With His vision as our focus we flourish, without it we do not.

As we conform into the image of Christ, we experience the outcome of worship as the unique living sacrifice we each are created to be.

With His vision and knowledge, we have the confidence to take up the responsibility of His usefulness through us. Past failures and losses become opportunity for relationship with Christ. Relationship with Him reveals and restores His vision for our lives as He reconciles us to Himself.

GOD BLESS YOU!!!