



ASK THE  
CHRISTIAN  
COUNSELOR



# MOVING FORWARD AFTER ABORTION

FINDING COMFORT  
IN GOD

CAMILLE CATES

“This book is short but filled with wisdom and insights that only come from someone who has personally traveled this road. It’s filled with God’s Word and the heart and tone of a skilled caregiver who gently unpacks the confusion, guilt, shame, fear, and grief that so often accompany the pain of abortion. Additionally, it’s filled with the grace, truth, and transparency needed to walk others out of the dark and into the light of God’s forgiveness and freedom.”

**Brad Bigney**, Lead Pastor, Grace Fellowship Church,  
Florence, KY; ACBC certified counselor; author of *Gospel  
Treason*

“In *Moving Forward after Abortion*, Camille comes alongside readers as a wise Christian sister—one who knows what it’s like to wade through the tumultuous wake of grief and trauma. As she humbly recounts her own post-abortion journey, readers are graciously invited to embrace the same gospel-centered comfort that brought her aching heart healing and hope.”

**Christine Chappell**, Author of *Midnight*; host, *Hope + Help  
Podcast*, Institute for Biblical Counseling & Discipleship;  
certified biblical counselor

“Saturated in Scripture, Camille’s book offers real biblical solutions for dealing with pain, depression, anxiety, anger, guilt, and grief that accompany abortion. She encourages readers to get to the root of their sin and enjoy the forgiveness and restoration found only in the gospel of Jesus Christ. God’s grace, mercy, and compassion alone offer true healing and hope!”

**Georgia Purdom**, Vice President of Educational Content  
and Director of *Answers for Women* Conferences, Answers  
in Genesis

“*Moving Forward after Abortion* is life-giving water for your parched soul. Camille helps uncover the lies post-abortive women and men believe and then replaces those lies with the truth. Take this little book and let it lead you to the One who is Living Water.”

**Kathleen Shanks**, Executive Director, New Path Pregnancy  
Resource Centers

“Camille has powerfully provided a gospel-saturated, healing resource for anyone carrying the pain of abortion. Her vulnerable story of trauma and choices, combined with a message of compassionate help and scriptural hope, will help readers exchange pain for God’s redemptive love to find freedom and restoration.”

**Lisa Appelo**, Author of *Life Can Be Good Again*

“*Moving Forward after Abortion* is a window into how the Lord forgives, heals, and restores a woman after an abortion. Camille’s writing is clear and raw, and her transparency often led me to tears. This book spills over with Scripture, biblical wisdom, book recommendations, and hope. I have never read a book like this and cannot recommend it highly enough.”

**Rosaria Butterfield**, Former tenured professor of English and Women’s Studies, Syracuse University; author of *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* and *Five Lies of our Anti-Christian Age*

“I broke down crying multiple times as I read this book. It is moving, biblical, informative, tender, kind, and hope-filled. *Moving Forward after Abortion* is a balm to the broken soul and points us to the powerful grace of God in Christ Jesus. God does not want anyone living in the shackles of sin and shame. My heart is bursting with joy and my eyes are filled with tears as I reflect upon the stories and truth that Camille shares. I cannot recommend this book enough. I want everyone to read it.”

**Sean Perron**, Associate Pastor, First Baptist Jacksonville;  
ACBC certified counselor; author

“This book is a great resource for counselors, churches, and pregnancy centers for women and men needing hope and healing after abortion. The author shares her own journey of how she found true healing in Jesus and the Word of God. The reflective questions at the end of each chapter are great. I wholeheartedly recommend this book!”

**MaryAnn Ambroselli**, Former Executive Director and current board of directors chairperson, Ventura County Pregnancy Center; certified biblical counselor, Healing Hearts Ministries International

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**Camille Cates**



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## **Dedication**

*This book is dedicated to Teresa Rinker, who shared her own abortion story with me and showed me through God's Word that Jesus gives us "beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, and festive praise instead of despair" (Isaiah 61:3).*

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## START MOVING FORWARD (READ THIS FIRST)

**W**hat does someone who has had an abortion look like? She looks like a middle-aged mom shopping in the grocery store, a college professor teaching a class on ethics, a young woman taking your order in the drive-through, a pastor's wife, or a woman leading your Bible study. She looks like you and she looks like me. And along with every woman who has had an abortion, there is a man who was the father of her baby. It's important to acknowledge that abortion impacts men too, even if that impact manifests differently.

For the purpose of this book, we will focus on women, but men may also find help from the biblical truths presented. If your husband is the father of your aborted baby, or the father of an aborted baby from another relationship, you may want to read this book at the same time and talk about what you are learning. Many couples have found comfort and healing from God as they revisit an abortion experience together. If you find yourselves stuck or in a conflict that you cannot resolve on your own, see your pastor or a biblical counselor for help.

Since 1999, I have been working with women who have been left with hurt, confusion, and unanswered questions after an abortion. Each of their stories is different, and the problems they have faced afterward vary. Yet the solution for those problems can be found in the same source, the Bible. When I needed healing after my own abortion, what helped me immensely was immersing myself in God's Word. It had a profound impact on me and was truly life-changing. Before studying God's Word, I didn't realize all the areas of my life that had been impacted by my abortion, and I hadn't processed the circumstances leading up to it.

I ended up going through a wonderful Bible study titled *Binding Up the Brokenhearted*, written by Sue Liljenberg. As I did the study, I was paired up with a mature Christian mentor who had also had an abortion and experienced God's healing work in her life afterward. When you finish reading this book, I recommend going through the same Bible study.<sup>1</sup>

I found it incredibly comforting to walk alongside another woman who had been in my shoes. It also helped me to go through a Bible study written by a woman who was well-acquainted with the many emotions that come after an abortion. I hope and pray that you feel comforted as you read this book, not only by my words as a woman who has had an abortion, but by God's Word. The Bible truly has answers for aching hearts and mixed-up minds. When you look to God's inerrant, authoritative, and sufficient Word, you will discover astonishing displays of his grace, mercy, love, and forgiveness and encounter the power to restore that which sin has broken.

Before we explore some common questions people have after an abortion, I want to recognize that readers of this book are in different places spiritually. Some have already turned to Jesus to save them from their sins. Some have not yet turned to him for salvation. Wherever you are, spiritually speaking, I urge you to use this time to search out the God of the Bible. Do you know him as your loving Creator and Heavenly Father? Or does he seem distant and impersonal to you? Consider Psalm 145:18, which says, “The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”

If you know that you are not yet a Christian, you can simply pray, asking God to reveal himself to you through his Word. Tell him, “Lord, I am calling on you in truth right now. I need to know you and to know that you are near.” If you feel like something in your life is keeping you from God, reflect on Isaiah 59:1, which says, “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear.” God’s ears and arms are open. His hand is powerful to save. He will hear you when you call. Indeed, God’s nature is to listen and to save when we call on him (Psalm 50:15, Lamentations 3:55–57). Will you open your heart to him as you read this book?

Perhaps you are a Christian. Christians will also have varying experiences regarding their abortions. Some had an abortion before coming to know Christ. And others, like me, had an abortion as a Christian. After my abortion, one of the biggest questions I had was “How could I be a Christian and choose to have an abortion?” If you too were a Christian at the time of your abortion, it’s important to understand that Christians

are still tempted to sin and give into sin, including some of the most grievous of sins (Romans 7:21–25). But if you have turned to Jesus Christ for salvation, God is faithful to forgive your sins—all of them. He further promises his followers that in heaven, “we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

### **A FEW WORDS ABOUT HOW TO APPROACH THIS BOOK**

First, in the past, you may have had Bible verses thrown at you in unhelpful or even painful ways. Sometimes, well-meaning pastors or Christian counselors can dole out a few verses like a doctor prescribing medicine: “Take two verses and call me in the morning.” As you read this book, you will see that I frequently cite Scripture. My desire is that the profound insights and deep truths of God’s Word will encourage you and strengthen your faith. I have also included real-life stories and practical examples so you can see how the Bible applies to your life.

Second, no single book can address every experience of every woman who has ever had an abortion. So, throughout this book, I’m recommending further readings for those who feel the need for more in-depth help on a particular subject. Most of the recommendations are short, easy reads, but are tremendously helpful and provide much personal application.

Third, reflecting on your own abortion story will not be easy. But it is important if you want to move forward after your abortion and find comfort in God. I invite you to go at your own pace. Take breaks when

you feel overwhelmed. You may want to talk to a pastor, trusted friend, or counselor about what you're reading.

Finally, let me offer you some encouragement. God has led you to pick up this book at just the right time because he wants you to know that he is near (Psalm 119:151). Also, in chapter 1, I have shared my abortion story with you. I hope and pray that it gives you hope as you learn about our loving and merciful Savior, Jesus. If your abortion has weighed you down or left you questioning God's perfect love for you, consider this precious promise in Matthew 11:28–29: “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (NLT). I found rest in Jesus after my abortion experience. You can too.

## Chapter 1

### WHO CAN I TURN TO AFTER MY ABORTION?

A month shy of turning seventeen, I missed my period for the first time. Terrified to tell my parents, I turned to my best friend who went with me to a local women's clinic for a pregnancy test. Anxiously awaiting the results, I couldn't think about anything else. Minutes seemed like hours.

It's interesting how those same two little lines that appear on a positive pregnancy test are viewed very differently depending on a person's desires. For the woman who is eagerly trying to start a family, those two lines bring sheer joy. But that same positive test result provokes panic in a woman who wasn't expecting to become pregnant.

When the woman at the clinic stepped into the room and told me, "It's positive," my heart dropped into my stomach. Suddenly, my mind went racing, wondering how my parents would react. Eventually, I had to confess to them that I was pregnant. My mother's immediate response was to ask me if I wanted to

have an abortion. I was shocked. Both of my parents professed to be Christians. I too professed faith in Christ, even though I was sexually promiscuous. I told my mom, “No. I want to keep my baby.” Thankfully, my parents supported my decision.

Six months later, I graduated from high school, and three months after that I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl and named her Lauren. After she was born, I tried getting my life together. I started college, worked a couple of part-time jobs, began attending church regularly, and took care of Lauren the best I could. But I was still looking for a romantic relationship.

### **HERE WE GO AGAIN**

Eventually, I became involved in a relationship with another man. He seemed like a nice guy from a decent family with similar values to mine. We became sexually active, and I became pregnant again. Lauren wasn't even a year old yet. My mom and dad soon found out. This time, they really put pressure on us to have an abortion. They slammed me with questions, “How are you going to take care of two babies? You are working two jobs while going to school. Does he even have a job? How are you going to make this work? It's not fair to Lauren.”

My parents' skepticism created doubt in my mind. I started contemplating what the future might look like if we kept the baby. Feeling unsettled, my boyfriend and I began tossing around the idea of an abortion. However, we never had the chance to make that decision together. He did something that turned my world upside down and altered the course of our lives.

One evening, I left Lauren in his care while I went to work. During my shift, my mom came into my workplace and told me, “We have to go to the hospital. Something has happened to Lauren.” When I arrived at the hospital, the staff wouldn’t let me back to see Lauren. As I sat in the waiting room of the ER, I listened to the details of my boyfriend’s account of what happened. Later on, he and I were both interviewed by Child Protective Services. Something wasn’t adding up. But I couldn’t figure out what was going on. I spent the night laying on the waiting room floor, floating in and out of sleep, exhausted from worry, yet eagerly anticipating news about Lauren’s condition. I was hopeful that the hospital staff would come out any moment and let me go back to her room to see her.

The next morning, Lauren’s pediatrician arrived at the hospital to examine her. She brought me into Lauren’s hospital room for a consultation. I saw Lauren lying there unconscious in the hospital bed, her little body and head showed signs of bruising. It was then that her doctor informed me that Lauren had been sexually assaulted and shaken to death. My little girl was gone. Eventually, my boyfriend turned himself in to the police. I had to face the fact that I was still pregnant with his baby, and now I was alone.

I found myself wondering how I could possibly carry the baby of the man who had killed my child. Many women who have been raped ask themselves a similar question: “How can I carry the baby of the man who assaulted me?” In that moment, my greatest fear was having to someday tell this child what his father had done and why he was no longer in our lives.



Trying to justify having an abortion, I began questioning God, then pleading with him, and ultimately bargaining with him. I prayed, “God, I know abortion is wrong, but you know how hard all of this is for me. I can’t go through with this pregnancy. My situation is unique. God, this one time, having an abortion has to be okay with you.”

Only four days after burying Lauren, I had the abortion. In the days that followed, darkness overtook me. I felt so lost and alone. Every night I went to bed begging God not to let me wake up. Then, the next day would dawn.

### **IN NEED OF MY SAVIOR**

For the following two years, I ambled along, barely functioning. I lived for partying with my friends—sleeping all day and staying up all night—drinking, doing drugs, and having sex with anyone who was willing. The daytime repulsed me, leaving me no place to hide and no way to cover up what I was going through. Completely shattered, I turned to anything and anyone to numb my pain.

Until God brought me to the end of myself.

One night, I went out with a guy I had dated back in high school. He wanted to have sex. But something in my heart simply snapped. I was done with that lifestyle. I realized that if I kept making the same wrong choices, I was going to get the same miserable results. So, I told him no and goodbye, and I left.

When I got home, I hurried inside to my bedroom and flung myself on the bed. I cried out, “God, I am finished! All this time, I have been chasing after every

single relationship but the one I have with you. I want you and you alone.”

The next day, I began living differently, seeking after the Lord, and longing to be close to him every moment. Eventually, God brought a young man into my life who had just graduated from seminary and was headed into youth ministry. He knew about my past and didn't care. This man genuinely loved me, even after finding out about my abortion. I married him and began serving alongside him in ministry.

But my past abortion haunted me. Ultimately, God led me to find biblical healing and renewal through the Scriptures. One summer, about three years into our marriage, I attended a women's conference with several ladies from my church. It was at that event that I came across a ministry specifically focused on helping women struggling with post-abortion trauma. I went through an in-depth Bible study and God used it to powerfully transform my life! Dealing with the events leading up to my abortion, processing the abortion itself, and working through the many thoughts and emotions that came afterward allowed me to apply God's truth to my heart. This brought me tremendous healing. When I had finished the study, my husband even told me, “You are a completely different woman.”

Yet something was holding me back from living in total freedom. While I had come to believe that Jesus had forgiven all my sins—including my abortion—I was concerned about what other people would think about me if they knew. Still, the love of Christ compelled me, and I could no longer stay silent about what he had done for me. I recognized that other women

were hurting and brokenhearted over their abortions. They too needed healing as I once did. I was excited about being able to freely share this good news with them.

My husband and I prayed about sharing my story with our pastor and his wife first—even though we feared that it could cost my husband his job. I was anxious about what our pastor, his wife, and others at church would think. Perhaps you can relate. Have you gone to a pastor or counselor to talk? Or have you been trying to work up the nerve to speak to someone (anyone) about your abortion? Maybe those you trusted with your secret didn't know how to truly help, and you've been left with even more hurt and confusion.

Thankfully, my pastor, his wife, and our church lovingly embraced me and encouraged me to share my testimony with other people who were hurting after abortion. But you may be in a place where you are not sure you can ever tell anyone about what happened. Simply having this book in your possession might induce a little panic. Have you hidden it under the bed or in the back of a drawer, or placed it under lock and key so that no one will find it? Do you feel nauseous at the thought of even saying the word *abortion*? I get it. I was once terribly afraid of what others would think if they knew that I had an abortion.

## **FOLLOW IN HER FOOTSTEPS**

Your secrecy about your abortion is understandable. Our culture constantly fights over the issue. Women and men who have been involved in an abortion can feel caught in the fray as social media bullets fly and

news brief bombs explode between the political left and right. Jesus wants you to know that you can find refuge and safety from the culture war by coming to him (Psalm 46:1–3).

One particular woman in Scripture boldly believed she could find healing in Jesus—a healing she so desperately needed. If she could just get through the crowd unnoticed and touch the hem of his garment, she knew she could be healed. So, she snuck up on the Savior in the middle of a pressing crowd and reached out her hand.

We learn more of the story in Mark 5. It says, “And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, ‘If I touch even his garments, I will be made well’” (Mark 5:25–28).

This woman had suffered for more than a decade, buried under a heap of societal shame and isolated from others because of the law regarding her bloody discharge. For all that she had tried to do to alleviate her ailments—physical, emotional, and perhaps, even spiritual—she had grown worse, not better. Her condition—which violated the hygienic practices under the Jewish law—had made her “unclean” to everyone around her (Leviticus 15:25–30). That is, everyone but Jesus.

She needed a Savior, so she dared to come to Jesus and reach out to him. This time, her efforts to seek help bore fruit. She pressed in close to Jesus, and his power went out. She was finally healed.

The Scriptures tell us, “And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched my garments?’” (Mark 5:29–30).

The woman probably thought Jesus was summoning her to condemn her for touching him, not to comfort her and give her peace. We read, “But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. And he said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease’” (Mark 5:33–34).

After she had been healed, Jesus called her out in the middle of a huge crowd. Consider for a moment that he is all-knowing. Christ wasn’t clueless about who had touched him. He was drawing her out, not to shame her, but to bring her closer, acknowledge her pain and suffering, and provide her with peace.

Right now, you may feel like this woman did initially. Take some time to think about her story. Then, think about your own. How long have you been suffering from shame, isolation, or other emotional torments from your abortion? What lengths have you taken to be rid of the pain and guilt of your past? Are you afraid of what others in the church will think about you? Are you fearful that God has already condemned you, or is somehow punishing you for your abortion?

Be encouraged that the only one in the crowd of people who had the right to condemn her didn’t. Jesus didn’t call her forward to shame her, but to change her.

She recognized him as her only hope for healing, and she risked everything to receive it. What about you? Are you willing to boldly approach God for the healing you need? Will you come to him?

### FOR REFLECTION

1. How long have you been suffering from shame, isolation, or other mental and emotional torments from your abortion?
2. What lengths have you taken to be rid of the pain and guilt of your past?

Read through these passages and reflect on the benefits of seeking God in vulnerability and humility. Write out one or two truths and how you will apply them to your life.

- John 3:16–18
- Romans 8:1–6

### FURTHER READING

- Edward T. Welch, *Shame Interrupted: How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2012).
- Edward T. Welch, *A Small Book about Why We Hide: How Jesus Rescues Us from Insecurity, Regret, Failure, and Shame* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021).