



Because of her own experience with abortion before becoming a Christian, Lori Bakker feels a special burden for those who can't admit they killed their babies. Today she's helping hundreds of women find freedom from the guilt associated with post-abortion trauma.

When Mourning Turns to

BY MARY HUTCHINSON

The room is feminine in every way, like an old-fashioned Victorian tea room: round, immaculately set tables, lace tablecloths, antique teapots, vases filled with fresh-cut summer flowers. This, Lori Graham Bakker explains, is her special room—a room for ladies' teas, women's Bible studies and one-on-one private chats, a place surrounded by the things women love.

Only one thing is missing from this sunny, ladylike getaway: dolls. One would expect to find porcelain baby dolls as a finishing touch in such an elegant, Victorian-style setting. But they are absent, a silent and unintentional symbol of Lori's life.

The new bride of former television evangelist Jim Bakker had five abortions before she became a Christian—in fact, before she turned 22. She was left unable to bear children.

There would be no babies for Lori.

Her story should be a wake-up call for every churchgoing family in America. Lori went to church regularly from the time she was seven days old—"Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, prayer meeting and even church camps," she remembers.

"My parents instilled Jesus in me from the day I was born. I was raised in a good Christian environment—that is, until divorce raised its ugly head



LEFT: Lori Bakker with dolls used in a ceremony to represent aborted children **RIGHT:** The tiny casket

The Indescribable Grief of Abortion

The women sitting next to you in church may be suffering in silence. Here's how you can help.

If it's true that 1-in-4 women in America have had an abortion, you can be sure there are women in your church who have suffered this trauma. What should you do if you learn that the woman sitting in the pew next to you has had an abortion?

● **Love her, and hold your judgment.** "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17, NKJV). In the church we all have heard enough sermons on abortion to know it is a sin. She knows what she did was a sin. She lives with it every day of her life. But she can't undo it. You have to love her today, and help her heal and grow. "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins" (Prov. 10:12).

● **Look for some of the signs that are common with women who have had abortions:** eating disorders, including anorexia or significant weight gain; alcohol or other drug dependencies, including abuse of over-the-counter or prescription drugs; hostile outbursts; lack of ability to bond with her firstborn child; overprotective mothering; extremes in appearance—either overly made-up or unkempt and uncaring; and depression or uncontrolled weeping.

● **Be sensitive about the serious physical problems that can follow abortion.** Women who have had an abortion are 200 percent more likely to have an ectopic pregnancy or first trimester miscarriage. They are 500 percent more likely to have a second trimester miscarriage.

● **Find resources that can help.** *Tilly*, both a book and an audio tape by Frank Peretti (Focus on the Family); *I'll Hold You In Heaven* by Jack Hayford (Regal Books); *The Jericho Plan* by David C. Reardon (Acorn Books); *Post Abortion Trauma* by Jeanette Vought (Zondervan). Encourage her to get a free copy of my booklet, *I Forgive You, Mommy...You, Too, Daddy*, by writing to New Covenant Fellowship, 15948 Lancaster Highway, Charlotte, NC 28277.

● **Share God's Word, confirming that the love you are showing her comes from above.** "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight" (Col. 1:21-22).

● **Treat her the same as everyone else.** Her story and her sin may be different from yours, but Christ died for all of us; none of us deserve His grace. Show her the same love and forgiveness that Christ shows you.

—Lori Bakker

WHEN MOURNING TURNS TO JOY

and devastated our family."

Satan used the breakup of her mother and father to give 13-year-old Lori an excuse to rebel. "It started small—just one cigarette, then marijuana," she says. "Before long, I was doing cocaine and every drug imaginable. My mom never suspected a thing. I looked and acted like a good girl. I even went with her to church until I was 17."

That's when she met a young man she thought was her "knight in shining armor." He turned out to be anything but that. "It was actually the beginning of a nightmare," she says. "He beat me the night before our wedding; the bruises show in the wedding pictures. That was just a taste of the abuses and infidelity to come."

By the time Lori walked down the aisle, she had already gone down another path that changed her life forever: the front walk of Planned Parenthood.

"They told me it was just a little bit of tissue that needed to be cleaned out, just a five-minute procedure," she says of her first abortion. "Well, that five minutes was the beginning of a lifetime of unspeakable pain and heartache."

Her voice softens and her eyes moisten as she glances toward the window. "When you go and lay on an abortion table, in the most vulnerable, unladylike position, and literally have the life sucked out of you, you walk out a completely different person. You walk out with a harder heart because you have to 'buck up' and act like nothing happened to you."

Lori had to "buck up" because she felt she had no choice. The man in her life had made it clear: "The baby or me."

And when the decision to have the first abortion was made, it was easier to make that decision over and over again when she found herself pregnant. She tried birth control. "But all I had to do was miss a pill or two and I'd be pregnant," she recalls. "God wanted to give me children. He tried to give me children. And I should have been the mother of

many because I love children."

The next four abortions are a blur to Lori. "I literally blocked them out of my mind," she says. "With each positive pregnant test, I knew I had a choice—the baby or my husband. So I lay on that abortion table time and time again, thinking that one day, maybe in my mid-20s, I'd have a baby. Never in a million years did I think that when I had that fifth abortion, it was my last chance."

But a few months later, Lori found herself in surgery for what was thought to be a small cyst on her right ovary. "When they went in, they found my reproductive organs were totally mutilated, and I had a raging infection," she remembers. "The doctors believed that after the last abortion, part of the baby had been left inside."

After a complete hysterectomy at 22, Lori went into menopause and then sank into the deepest depression of her life. She turned to drugs and alcohol to numb the pain.

"Since I was a little girl, all I had ever wanted to be was a wife and a mommy," she says. "My dream was shattered, and

I began to hate my husband. I despised him for taking away everything I had ever wanted. I no longer felt like a whole woman, and no matter what I did, nothing could ever change that."

Lori finally reached the point where she could no longer tolerate her husband's emotional and physical abuse or his frequent infidelities. The 10-year marriage ended in divorce. But four years later, when her ex-husband called to ask her for \$1,000 to bail him out of a Mexican prison, "all the pain that I had thought was buried came flooding back," she recalls.

She told him she would not send the money. And the next morning—which happened to be Easter—Lori decided to go to church.

"I had heard about Phoenix First Assembly of God before," she says. "In fact, I had been to several of their Christmas and Easter pageants—always high, though. I'd smoke a joint of

"Lori felt she had no choice. The man in her life had made it clear: 'The baby or me.'"

marijuana in the car on the way in, and light another one leaving the parking lot on the way out. I know it sounds crazy, but even in my most drugged-out time, I felt God's love and sensed His Holy Spirit there."

Motivated by desperation, Lori was apprehensive as she entered the church. "When they steered me to the singles' Sunday School class, my first thought was, *If I walk in and some pencil-necked guy with high-water pants is standing there telling me about Jesus, I am out of here!*

Lori Bakker and Yolanda Benjamin—two women with eight babies aborted between them—led the memorial service for my baby and the babies of seven other women who had had an abortion.

I had never told my story. But now someone was saying it was safe to talk, and as another woman began telling the details of her terrible day, my own came rushing back to my memory. The green paint on the clinic walls. The coldness of the room. The glass jar at the foot of the bed, and the plastic tube that would suck the baby into that jar.

My story spilled out in sobs. As I quieted, the next woman began to speak, but I didn't really hear her. My buried memories were now out in the open, screaming at me.

Then Lori and Yolanda took turns sharing the Word on shame and forgiveness. "You can't just say you forgive," Lori told us, "you have to name the person and name what they did to you—the doctor, the nurse who pressed down on your belly.

"But the first person you have to forgive is you. Jesus already has, you know. Your babies forgive you. They are with Jesus. You have to know they love you. You're their mom!"

Then Lori handed each of us a paper heart and asked us to begin writing down the names of everyone we needed to forgive. The first few names came quickly. Me. The man involved. The doctor. My neighbor who was so sure this was the right thing to do. My aunt who drove me to the clinic. Just when I thought I was through, more names came flooding in. My brother who told me I was too broke to have another child. My Sunday school teacher who I knew would never understand.

I ran out of space to write on as Lori spoke again from the



Confession is good for the soul: Lori Bakker listens to a woman share her abortion story.

No Longer Haunted by Shame

One woman's story of redemption after living for years in abortion's shadow

EDITOR'S NOTE: In a memorial service last fall, Lori Bakker ministered to eight hurting women. One shared her story with the author. Facts have been changed to protect her privacy.

along their sweet faces, and as I prayed, I could almost see their features. I pulled out a photo of my two children on earth, Will and Mandie, now 20 and 16, and started telling the babies about their brother and sister. We had a lot to talk about.

When I walked back into the service, the room was different. The light was dimmed, and the music was low. In the front was a casket, no bigger than...a baby.

One by one we said goodbye to our babies. I waited until last. I almost could not bear it, they had become so real to me—finally. Then the casket was closed. A candle for each baby flickered on the altar. Goodbye, for now goodbye.

That night I had a dream. I was holding the same photo of my children. But it was different: complete. There beside Will and Mandy was a 17-year-old beauty named Alisa, with blonde hair and bright blue eyes. There was Scottie, a tall and stocky 16-year-old. And there was my youngest, Lee, 7 years old with a buzz cut and a silly grin.

I hold that mental photo close to my heart. One day we'll be together as a family. I know it. Praise God, I know we will. □

Instead she found Jack Wallace, a big, handsome guy who spoke a message on forgiveness that penetrated Lori's heart. Afterward, during the morning worship service pastor Tommy Barnett gave an invitation for people to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior—and Lori was one of the first ones to walk down the aisle.

"From that moment on that church took me under its wing, especially the women of the church," Lori remembers. "Instead of saying, 'There goes that girl who has been

back of the room. Pointing to some faceless baby dolls, she said, "I want you to pick up one doll for each baby you aborted, and one for every miscarriage you had. Most of us have had at least one miscarriage, right?" Many of us nodded.

"Then find a corner all to yourself. As you do, remember how Christ offered us the bread and the wine as a symbol of His body and blood. These dolls are symbols of our babies. Spend time with them. Share with them as you would at a grave site. Tell them everything."

I walked out the side door and up the steps. Hiding behind an overstuffed couch in another room, I rocked my babies and held them against my breast. I ran my finger

through it all ... they just loved me. I never heard a negative, condemning word.

"All I received was love and acceptance. I became a sponge, wanting everything the Lord wanted for me. I was at church Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night. I went to singles on Tuesdays and ministered on the streets of

the inner city on Saturday nights.

"I mean, I gave it everything," she says cheerfully. "This was my life now."

And indeed it was. A year and a half later, feeling the call of God on her life, she made a decision to enter an intense, full-time ministry and discipleship training program called Master's Com-

mission at Phoenix First Assembly, led by pastor Lloyd Ziegler and his wife, Chris. The Zeiglers not only mentored Lori for the next seven years but also became like family, guiding her out of the patterns of her former life and helping to mold her in the ways of Christ.

Master's Commission is not a traditional classroom-based curriculum. Lori found herself knocking on doors in the inner city and running a bus route to pick up lice-infested, barefooted, runny-nosed children of all sizes, shapes and colors. Her greatest delight was telling the children—and anyone else who would listen how Jesus put the broken pieces of her life back together, and how He would do the same for them.

As Lori studied and reached out to others, an amazing thing began to take place: She found that God was healing the hurts of her past. For the next seven years, she devoted her life to learning all she could about Christ. She chose not to date; instead, she poured herself into serving others and spending hours alone with God daily.

One night, after Lori had been with Master's Commission for four years, God began to prepare her for a new dimension of her own ministry. She attended a women's Bible study and was cut to the heart by the testimony of the elegant woman who was speaking.

"She'd had three abortions," Lori explains. "And though God had done tremendous healing in me in many areas of my life, I had not yet begun to deal with the abortions. I was so surprised to hear a 'church lady' talking about having an abortion. It never occurred to me that there were people in the church who had had abortions.

"But if 1-in-4 women in America have had an abortion, you better believe they are all over every church."

Sometime later, Lori turned on the radio in her car and heard a woman being interviewed who had left her job as an

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Abortions—and the Men Involved

Lori Bakker's husband, Jim, is calling men to take responsibility for the damage abortion causes.

Jim Bakker was in midsentence, speaking to a huge audience in one of the largest charismatic churches in Northern California. Suddenly he stopped, and the church grew silent. Jim stood almost frozen in place. Finally he whispered into the microphone: "How many of you men have had abortions?"

No one moved. He spoke louder, almost alarmed.

"You know what I mean. How many of you men have had your baby aborted?"

As Jim looked out over the crowd, the stunned audience began to react. "It was like they were being hit upside the head with a two-by-four," Jim remembers. "In waves, all across the audience, the hands went up."

The Holy Spirit moved, and Jim began to speak on shame, guilt and receiving the inner healing that the men who've experienced abortion so desperately need. The floor between the front pew and the pulpit began to fill with men weeping uncontrollably.

"These men were literally making puddles on the floor with their tears. They were wailing from somewhere deep in their soul," Jim says.

It's no surprise that if many women in the church have experienced the nightmare of abortion, many men in the church have, too. In fact, more than 30 million men in America have lost children to abortion.

Men feel the pain differently, however, and they react differently. The particular pain comes from the fact that men are not the final decision makers in the abortion process. And even though they may have agreed or even insisted on the abortion, the scars from that decision are burned deeply on their souls.

Men who have not received healing from the Lord may choose to cover their guilt and shame with drugs or alcohol. Others may turn to homosexuality because of their hostility toward women.

For both women and men who are hurting from a past abortion, God's love and forgiveness is available. The following steps are crucial:

- Confess your sin. Find someone you trust, and acknowledge and accept that you have sinned.
- Forgive those who were a part of the abortion—including yourself. Make a list, pray over it, and give those names and those histories to God.
- Mourn. Cry. Grieve. When you accept that this was your baby, you must mourn this terrible loss. Let the tears flow. Allow yourself to let it out.
- Let God heal you. It's OK to let Him take the pain away. Open your heart to the healing God wants to give you. Jesus said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted" (Luke 4:18-19, NKJV). □



abortion nurse. The woman explained that during a typical suction-type abortion, her role was to lay her hands on the belly of the pregnant woman and press down so the doctor's instruments could more easily suck the baby out. Afterwards she had to go to a back room and try to piece the baby back together to be sure the doctor had gotten all of it.

"I almost lost control of my car when I heard that," Lori recalls. "They put the baby back together! The words of Jeremiah welled up from my soul, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.'

"I guess until that moment I wanted to believe it was only tissue. I desperately wanted to believe I hadn't killed my five babies! That was a day of total devastation for me."

Before long the "elegant lady" from the Bible study approached Lori, wanting to minister to her. "She said she wanted to give my babies a memorial service, similar to a funeral," she explains.

"At first, it seemed really odd. But that service turned out to be the most precious, priceless moment in my life. It gave me the closure I needed because it both forced and allowed me to recognize that my babies existed and died, and now they are with Jesus. I know that they forgive me for aborting them, and that I will be with them in heaven.

"Ever since then, helping women who have had abortions has become a major part of my ministry."

In addition to ministering in similar memorial services, Lori began speaking to large and small groups of women. "One day I might go out and talk to women in the streets....The next day I might be in Beverly Hills, and the message would be the same." Lori has seen as many as 700 women stream forward to accept Christ after she has shared her testimony.

In 1998, before one of these meetings at the Los Angeles International Church, an inner-city work founded by Tommy Barnett and his son, Matthew, Lori recognized a young man she had first met

four years earlier at Master's Commission. Jay looked like a "street kid" with his tattoos, earrings and punk hairstyle.

But he had also been raised in the church—the son of former television evangelists Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. He had responded to the fall of their television empire, PTL, and his father's prison sentence by drowning his pain in

love for hurting people.

"I fell in love with her heart first," remembers Jim. He became the first man Lori seriously dated in the nine years since she had accepted the Lord.

Lori and Jim Bakker were married in September 1998. Since then, the Bakkers have blended their lives and their ministries.

"Jim had no idea how deeply abortion has affected people in the church," Lori says. "Each time he would speak to a crowd, he would ask me to share a little of my story. He would be amazed as preachers' wives, choir members and deacons' wives would come up to us and share that they had had one abortion, or three abortions. One woman in the church had had 11 abortions!"

"I was stunned," Jim admits. "Everywhere we went, there would literally be a throng of women at the altar in tears. Most had never told anyone in the church about their abortions. They were afraid they would be judged, so they hid this terrible thing in their heart, and it was destroying their lives."

Today, from their base near Charlotte, North Carolina, Lori and Jim conduct ministry seminars in churches across America. They are also making plans to bring a fresh new approach to Christian television—a concept that is born out of a decade of training on the back side of the desert.

"We're like Humpty Dumpty," Jim quips. "We both fell off the wall, and all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put us back together again. But God did."

Now they believe they can reach more people together than they ever did apart. "At one time Lori's life revolved around sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll," Jim says. "I was a total square, but five years in prison opened my eyes. God has given us compassion and a vision to reach hurting people as never before." □

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Don't throw stones at sinners: Jim and Lori Bakker stand in front of an original painting titled *You Without Sin Cast the First Stone*.

alcohol and drugs and joining punk rockers, skateboarders and other kids rebelling against society.

But like Lori, Jay could not resist the love of God forever. He eventually gave his life to Christ, and the two became friends at Master's Commission.

"Jay-Jay Bakker!" Lori cried out.

"Hi, Lori!" he said with a hug. Then he turned toward the man standing next to him. "I want to introduce you to my dad, Jim Bakker."

Lori and Jim hit it off right away. Within days, the two became a couple, talking for hours and hours about their