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# Why I'm not allowed to experience healing

By Theresa Burke and Leslie Graves

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*And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,  
and shall come to Zion with singing,  
with everlasting joy on their heads.  
They shall obtain joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

--Isaiah 35

When men and women who are in pain following an abortion experience hear about the Rachel's Vineyard retreat, an initial reaction is to think of all the many reasons why they couldn't possibly come to one.

*How could I explain to everyone where I'll be that weekend?*

*I hate groups.*

*I'll meet someone I know there and then everyone will find out.*

*I've already done some healing and what if that retreat just re-opens those wounds and leaves them exposed? I'd be worse off than I am now.*

*Got to lose 30 pounds before going to something like that (or 10 or 50 or 250).*

*I could never get a babysitter.*

*I'll be the only one there who had more than one abortion or a late term abortion or an abortion when I was married or ... or ... or ....*

*It'll be too religious.*

*It won't be religious enough.*

*I'm too shy.*

*I'm different from everyone else who will be there.*

*Nothing else worked and neither will this, so what's the point?*

*I've healed a lot already. It would be tempting God to ask for more.*

*It'll be run by church ladies who will try to get me to say the rosary.*

*They won't like me.*

*If I call the person whose name is listed, I'll start crying as soon as she answers.*

These are very common reactions. Many people who now serve with retreat teams once had these reactions. As people start to talk to their local retreat team, or communicate with a Rachel's Vineyard [e-mail contact](#), obstacles are overcome and anxieties fade.

In this article, we'd like to explore some more painful and paradoxical reasons for feeling unable to attend a retreat.

Abortion causes grief. Without healing, this can cause a reality that negatively affects our future relationships and dictates fearful choices in the future. Incomplete grief can create hypervigilant self-protection from further emotional pain. This excess of caution limits the ability to be open, loving and trusting. Many areas of our life can become limited. So, why would someone decide to permanently live like this?

There are several reasons that can make someone seriously hesitate, or even make the decision to never seek healing.

One deterrent that can make a person decide to never seek healing is the fear of judgment by others.

A second reason is seen in the person who says to herself, "if I feel better, my life will probably change. And that is scary and unpredictable and my feeling better isn't important enough to justify that risk."

We see a third reason in the person who thinks, "Because of what I did, I do not deserve to ever feel good. If I go to that retreat, it'll be like saying that maybe it is okay for me to start to feel better. But it isn't okay for me to ever feel better, so I'm not going."

We will take some time to consider each of these reasons.

Fear of judgment from others. This will impact women afraid to tell husbands, husbands afraid to tell wives, and sons and daughters who no longer trust parents enough to reveal their broken hearts. Men and women who have suffered the loss of a child through abortion may also be in positions of leadership, in the church, in post-abortion ministry or in crisis pregnancy outreach.

Such a person can feel uncomfortable on a daily basis, perhaps abusing themselves with the thought, "I'm supposed to minister to others but I've never let anyone minister to me. I have my own bleeding wound. Do I even really know how to apply bandages to others?" Just as there is fear of exposure within a family and to our loved ones, there can be fear of exposure within ministry circles. One might fear the loss of credibility, or perhaps you once heard someone say that post-abortive women are too fragile and too troubled to be in positions of ministry leadership. Naturally, therefore, you would fear making yourself vulnerable or letting anyone know your secret.

We are both familiar with church and ministry leaders who have revealed that because of the feared judgments of others within their church, they could never open up about their own abortion losses. It would not feel safe, even on a completely confidential retreat weekend such as Rachel's Vineyard. These men and women strive every day in their ministry to create an environment of complete safety for those they help, yet they are working in an unsafe environment filled with ignorant attitudes about "what post-abortive people are like". Lack of safety in their ministry environment can corrode their soul and cause lingering resentments.

You might also be a political activist in the abortion debate. Political activism may be the only way you have known to stay connected to the memory of your child. This memory, one that you have scratched into your heart with pain, guilt, and self-hatred, may drive your activism. You may fear that if you accept the touch of Jesus on your wound that you will lose your drive, your edge and most of all lose your connection to your child.

Or, consider the person who says to herself, "That retreat sounds pretty good. It sounds like it really helps people. If I go to that retreat, it would probably help me, too. I'd probably feel much better. So, I better not go. I don't deserve to feel better."

Some of us have a block against recovery and healing. Our early environment might have made us all too familiar and comfortable with failure, depression, chaos, relational discord, broken dreams, panic and fear. Sometimes, we are afraid of genuine healing because it will mean change and charting a new path into the unknown. It may sound unusual, but those of us who were victimized in childhood or as young adults grow used to being victims. It is all we know.

If that applies to you, you may find the prospect of not being a victim very frightening. You can come to believe that this is the only reality there is. If you were to suddenly wake up one day and be freed from self-punishing, shame-laden mindsets, what would happen to your marriage, which has grown comfortable in re-enforcing the familiar feelings of denigration and disrespect? What will the others think who have viewed you as weak, pathetic, disturbed and dependent, with an investment in keeping you down so they can feel superior?

This personal dynamic is ancient. Jesus himself encountered it when he healed people of blindness and physical deformities. The hypocrites attacked him as well as those who had been healed, spreading mistrust, focusing on the laws he had broken rather than being able to rejoice with the healer and the individual whose dignity had been restored and whose ailment had been removed. Their contempt covered their own trepidation about losing their power.

There are also those who criticize the concept of healing because of their own need to be "above it all." In order to move into the place of blessing that God has for you, recognize that you may have some strongholds where you want to control. This holds true not only for those who have experienced the loss of a child through an abortion, but for all of us who have been broken by sin.

Control is a defense where we try to protect ourselves from further harm. Controlling people are prevented from feeling fulfillment, happiness, success and peace. They are always comparing themselves and competing with others, projecting the anger and bitterness they have about their own self-perceived inadequacies onto others. A critical and perfectionistic worldview takes hold as resentment encircles the heart like barbed wire. Everyone around that person can feel the sharp, thorny pricks. Control and condemnation allow us to feel superior, to cover our own weaknesses, failures and humiliations.

As long as we can be pointing out what's wrong with everything around us, we never break through to humility, a place where God's blessing takes root because we surrender our control and allow the master painter to work on the canvas of our lives. The more we trust this master artist, the more He creates a picture that is magnificent and priceless. In addition, God actually transforms the negative images and colors into things of great beauty.

Our self-important assurances, professional airs, authority and pomp cuts off the possibilities promised to the humble heart which opens the door to unimaginable blessings, miracles and

beauty. Christ states it clearly, unless you are like a child, you cannot inherit the kingdom. Sinners discover this reality by embracing their own inner poverty and grief. What a paradox!

This is what God truly desires to do in our lives, when we let go of our control and take the great risk to trust him -- to make ourselves vulnerable, to share the secret, dark and ominous portraits that were painted on the canvas of our lives after destructive experiences, like abortion, sexual abuse and other deep personal violations.

Rachel's Vineyard is a unique process through which the very Glory of God moves into our pain and sin, transforming us in spirit and truth. The exercises involve our whole being, body, soul, and intellect. Rachel's Vineyard is a place where pain is emptied, and God's Holy Spirit is released as our souls are filled with grace and a fresh, unmistakable breath of new life. His presence brings peace, joy, abundance, healing, wisdom, guidance, and the opening for a path of freedom and peace in the ongoing challenges of life.

Maximum and abundant life is not found by hiding ourselves from the presence of God, but by inviting him into the buried feelings of guilt, grief, pain, anger, isolation and fear -- by taking a risk to imagine what eye has not seen, and what ears have not heard.

Rachel's Vineyard has been called a hidden treasure, a taste of heaven, a banquet of love, because in this place we face God and confront our fears and grief directly with the support of a loving Christian Community. Rachel's Vineyard is a place where His glory descends, breaking the self imposed prison walls where hell seeks to confine and shame our spirit.... setting the captives free!

As Jesus stood before the cave of Lazarus, he called Lazarus forth and commanded: "Come out!"

The Lord invites each of us to that same powerful resurrection. The Lord came that we might have life, and have it to the full. He desires our wholeness and healing. He beckons us with gentleness and loving affection. There is nothing -- not infidelity, not abortion, not addiction, not cowardice -- nothing can separate us from the love of God except our own pride and fears, and placing our limited expectations on his ability to touch our hearts and heal our deepest wounds.

God has given us the power to take on new modes of thinking through the word of God, prayer, grieving, thanksgiving, in the midst of own paschal mystery as it is opened to the power of the Holy Spirit. God's Living word begins to regenerate and recreate your inner being so that old things pass away, and all things become new. It's not magic; it's mystery! The critical mind will miss the very essence of what lies beyond our own imaginations and intellectual power. As Ron Rolheier wrote, "the heart knows things that the mind cannot picture and our experience is full of a richness for which we cannot find adequate words. That's the heart of faith!"

*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword. It cuts all the way through to where soul and spirit meet, to where joints and marrow come together. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

--Hebrews 4:12

*Let us be brave then, and approach God's throne, where there is grace. There we will receive mercy and find grace to help us just when we need it.*

--Hebrews 4:16