



January, 2017

## Surrendering the Secret

Secrets hold amazing power and control over us. This is especially true in the church of Jesus Christ! We have a hard time embracing the teaching of Jesus that the truth will set us free. Too often we prefer to try to play it safe and wear a mask to church, pretending that we are better than we really are. We are afraid we would experience rejection, judgement, and condemnation from our brothers and sisters in Christ if they really knew the truth about us. Every Sunday in churches across North America, there are a huge number of men and women who are suffering in silence because of abortion decisions they participating in at some time in their past. Many have never told anyone out of fear of rejection and judgment. And when their pastors never talk about it, they often believe the lie that it must be such a terrible sin that God could never forgive them. Honest confession seems too risky and dangerous. So they hold onto their secrets and they suffer in silence.

On November 4, 2016 I had the wonderful privilege of meeting Shawn Petsuch after the Missions lunch at Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, MI. I was fascinated by her story and her willingness to speak candidly about her journey. I was so delighted when she accepted my invitation to share her story with pastors and church members in the PastorCare Newsletter. I pray the Holy Spirit will touch your heart.



**Mrs. Shawn Petsuch**  
**Volunteer and Client Services Coordinator**  
**Alpha Family Center, Greenville, MI**

*'God' is a fairy tale.*

*He's like the Easter Bunny or Santa Claus. This was my belief for as long as I can remember. I learned at a very early age that reality was a far cry from fairy tales and 'happily ever after'. I was not raised in a Christian family, but as far as I know, I am the first person in my family to come to know the Lord; to be 'saved'.*



*My parents divorced when I was 4 and I never saw my father again. Although my mother always held down a steady job, stability disappeared as she went out to 'find' herself. My two older sisters and I were often left to ourselves. We were not close to each other.*

*Looking back, I can see God's constant care over me as a child as I had a few brushes with 'scary men' in my unsupervised, lonely playtime.*

*My mother remarried when I was eight. My sisters and I knew immediately that we were not wanted by her new spouse. Not much attention was paid to us by him, (at least not us two younger ones, but my oldest sister who 15 at that time was not only physically but sexually abused by him). We paid dearly when we crossed an invisible boundary that was never clearly outlined to us. We became very familiar with his belt. It was only when he began to physically abuse her that our mother left him.*

*After her divorce things pretty much stayed the same only mom was more unhappy and distant. She taught us life through punishment. It was the usually the only time she paid attention to us. She was looking for love in all the wrong places. In her defense, during those years, I realize she never meant to hurt us. But as much as she needed love, so did we. We ran the streets of Detroit, knowing little else but her example, so we followed.*

*All three sisters had an unplanned pregnancy: My oldest sister at 18, the middle sister at 16, and I became pregnant at 14 years of age. My oldest sister ran away and married the father of her baby. We lost touch with her as we went our separate ways. We learned she eventually abandoned her son to her husband's family while he was in Vietnam and she disappeared. We didn't see each other again for 30 years.*

*The middle sister married at 17 into a more stable family but she too gave up her daughter to them. She had the good sense to know at that time, that she couldn't love her daughter as she should be loved. (She and her daughter have a very close relationship today).*

*When she learned that I was pregnant, my mother was more than ready to be finished trying to 'raise' her girls. In 1971 abortion was only legal in a few states. My mother halfheartedly suggested I have one but I refused. Because of my age, a juvenile judge had to give permission for me to marry the father of my baby. My mother was happy to give hers' as well.*

*I married that same year, four months before my son was born. I only married the father of my baby to get out of my mother's house. I knew the marriage wouldn't work but I was desperate to get away as my sisters had.*

*My mother wasn't involved at all in my life at that time so I knew I had to take care of myself. I divorced when I was 16, and lived on state aid, food stamps and Medicaid. I was 'flying under the radar', lying to landlords, telling them I was 19 to find a home for myself and my son. I decided that I was going to do a better job at life than my mother had shown me. And started looking for the 'right way' to live. I checked into the drug scene, feminism, socialism, and even group therapy with a psychiatrist. I could only laugh at 'born again holy rollers'.*

*Along the way I tried to raise my son. I was a child raising a baby and I knew only one way. I became my mother; that stern taskmaster and my sweet boy must obey. I didn't know how to love him & resented my life as it was, but continued to try to do the 'right thing'. Guilt was a constant companion. I became so desperate I gave him back to his father when he was 4. I didn't know how bad it was there for my son until he became an adult, but I did know it was a very unhealthy place to place a child in. The guilt and shame continued to pile on. My escape was alcohol and drugs.*

*I continued to 'party' and drift with no direction which led to my second pregnancy in 1978. In complete agreement with the right to abortion and knowing I would not go through another miserable attempt at being a mother, I knew immediately what I had to do.*



*I had been an activist in the abortion rights movement. I was a member of the National Organization for Women (NOW), promoting the Equal Rights Amendment and the rights of "poor persecuted women". I protested, walking picket lines where I could. I was recruited to speak on the subject at a radio station in Detroit.*

*I celebrated the day when the Supreme Court ruled on Roe v Wade.*



Cleveland, OH



Charlotte, SC

*I found the clinic in the yellow pages and made the appointment. I felt uneasy as I laid on the table, waiting for the Dr. to come in to do the 'procedure'. I literally cried out to God, and sobbed "I'm sorry!" as I allowed the abortion to go forward. I wondered about my reaction as I laid on an army type cot in the 'recovery room' but never thought about that day again until a couple of years later.*

*In 1980 I married and was finally 'ready' when I found myself pregnant. I was filled with great joy, thrilled at the prospect of it all until I was blindsided with the memory of the abortion. It came out of nowhere and took my breath away as it drained all the joy and replace it with shame. I immediately pushed it away and moved on with my life and family.*

*Statistics will tell you a second marriage can turnout much like the first one in that you choose a similar mate. I was one of those numbers. The continued use of drugs and alcohol led to another failed marriage but I had matured enough to love my sons in that I was terrified of my alcoholism. 'Something' spoke to my heart saying, "you're no better than your ex's." The Lord was letting me come to the end of myself and soon enough, I did.*

*I am in awe as I look back and see how gracious and longsuffering God was with me! In 1982 my best friend invited me to her baptism. The Lord spoke to my heart as I took a chance to accept His salvation through His Son. I believed I was forgiven. I also believed there was an asterisk next to my name in the Lamb's Book of Life.*

*I struggled with the fact of my abortion long before I gave my life to Christ. But I kept the secret of my abortion to myself, terrified my new Christian friends would find out who I was: one of those "evil women" that "cold heartedly murderers her baby". I cried each year as Sanctity of Life Sunday was observed in the churches we attended. It was easy to let others think how burdened I was about those 'other' women. During the rest of the year I pushed the atrocity of what I had done back down and locked it away in my heart.*

*I lived that double life for 27 years, sitting in church pews, suffering in silence, constantly condemning myself, and filled with shame. I was also terrified of my husband finding out about the 'real' me. We had met and married 5 years after I was saved but I kept that shameful part of me from him for the first 22 years of our marriage.*

*(During this time, I reached out to my mother and began a healing process which would culminate in the wonderful acceptance and assurance of her salvation in Christ. This happened just before she drifted into Alzheimer's. When she passed, I know she walked out of that terrible fog and into the arms of Jesus! My sisters and I are very close now as well.)*

*Through the years I continued my relationship with God, trying to earn his complete forgiveness, working with my perceived notions of what that would look like. It was never enough!*



Through many trials in the period of one summer the Lord allowed me to come to the end of myself again. I was always trying to work out my issues, not allowing God true reign in my life. I surrendered all to Him, and soon understood, finally, His great love for me! I fell in love with Him! But my abortion continued to stay tightly wrapped in my heart.

We moved to a new home and found a church that supported a pregnancy resource center in our town. Since my salvation, I had often thought of serving in a 'crisis' pregnancy center. I had hoped to help women not make the same mistake I had. I don't know what that would look like since no one would ever know about what I had done. But I knew that was the place for me to serve the Lord; to share His gracious love. As I filled out the application I came to the question, "have you ever had an abortion?" My first instinct was to lie but again the Lord spoke to me, "I want you to give this to Me". I would obey His request but before I would confess that to strangers at the pregnancy center, I had to confess this to my dear husband.

I prayed and cried for the next week. In my fear, I knew I had to trust God and His wisdom in this. Finally, one morning I blurted it out as we stood in the kitchen. I cried again as my husband put his arms around me and reassured me of his constant and continuing love. He was astounded that I had kept it from him and it saddened him to realize the burden I had struggled with over the years. He was a true picture of Jesus to me. God used Alpha Family Center, loving me through those willing people, to reach me in my darkness and isolation.

So, I moved forward, amazed at the newfound freedom I had in just speaking the truth out loud. I was ready to tell the world what happens in the terrible aftermath women face aborting their child. I didn't know how to begin but Alpha Family Center in Greenville, Michigan was the place to start. There, in 2009 I began to give my testimony of God's healing grace in my abortion and every other area of my life to as many people, men and women that came through those doors.



In 2010 The Director of the center asked if I would train to facilitate a bible study called Surrendering the Secret to help heal post abortive women.

My first reaction was "No! That's for more 'spiritual' people." But I knew I would. I knew this would be the means for God to use my testimony for His glory. It was terrifying.

During the training, I learned about Post Abortion Trauma. Many women don't realize they are suffering the aftereffects of an abortion which can range from abusing drugs and alcohol to forms of depression and family relationship issues. This helped me understand a lot of the issues that troubled me as I interacted with my husband and children. One ongoing problem was that I was very overprotective of my kids. I always worried that something could happen to them if I didn't care properly for them. I thought it would be a just punishment from God for what I'd done to my second child. The medical community doesn't recognize PAT as an issue because so many women don't admit to having an abortion on their medical history. Every woman that I have walked this healing journey with has admitted to doing this very thing, including myself.

I opened my bible the morning after I returned from the training. Feeling so unworthy and fearing I was not qualified to do this ministry, my eyes fell upon Psalm 34: 4-6a: **"I prayed to the LORD and He answered me. He freed me from all my fears. Those who look to Him for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will darken their faces."** In my desperation, I prayed, and the LORD listened... I would trust my awesome Father!

Since that time God has enabled me to reach out to pastors in our area, who are willing to listen, with this healing message for so many hurting women in our churches and community. My pastor, Mark Shaw of Calvary Baptist Church here in Greenville was the first. He allowed me to give my testimony and present Surrendering the Secret to our congregation. He continues to speak out about this problem more than just on Sanctity of Life Sundays. It is actively promoted in our church.

The first person to approach me after the presentation was a man who quietly and cautiously told me his story of taking his girlfriend to an abortion clinic. With tears in his eyes he shared that he never had any

*more children - that he had no children. I could tell him that God held his child. He realized that he did indeed have a child. One waiting for him in heaven! This was healing for him.*

*It is hard to be able to further this study and others like it because pastors are understandably protective of the people in their churches. But more than 48% of women in America have had at least one abortion. Of those women, 70% say they are Christians. That's approximately 40% of the women who fill the seats in our churches across the country. Women like me.*

*These women and men sit in fearful silence. The people in your congregations who are not living the flourishing lives that our loving Father desires they have! They need to be told that healing is out there. That they are truly loved and won't be judged by anyone. It is a silent epidemic. But these are people that can be healed by The Great Physician.*

*Would you be willing to help reach these people? Can you search out the pregnancy centers in your area to support and find a healing study for these people and offer it to them? They need your love, understanding, and grace. Help them find their way out of the darkness and lies that keep them in the enemy's isolation. Please help them walk in Light.*

***Below are testimonies of a few women that have taken the healing journey.***

*"God used Surrendering the Secret in my life to help shed the final pain that I didn't know I still held. I thought I had forgiven the father of my baby, but as I spoke my story out loud, I realized I had a lot of hatred toward him still. Working through this study helped bring me freedom. I am free in Christ and in an understanding of God's unconditional love for me. I have mourned the loss of my child and I look forward to seeing him in Heaven someday. A Calvary sister"*

*"I no longer carry the burden and weight of my sin. I know that through Christ's blood I am forgiven and I accept that forgiveness. I am a daughter in Christ and with His love and grace, forever will be. Surrendering the Secret allowed me to get to this point; letting go of the burdens while building a true relationship with Christ. I am forever grateful. Another Calvary sister"*

*"I didn't think I needed Surrendering the Secret. I thought I was healed. What I didn't realize was that deep down I was still unable to forgive myself for the decision I made 18 yrs. prior. Through STS I was able to look back and see the enemy's hand in the deception of a young, desperate, teenage girl who had very little upbringing in the church. I was also able to recognize God's hand in several people who stepped in to try and help point me in His direction. I was able to finally grasp the TRUTH that if God forgives me, then I can and MUST forgive myself." (She has given permission to use her name) Jennifer Lynn Millard."*

*My prayer is for the Pastors across this country to see the need to help reach those in need. Thank you for allowing me to share my story along with these sweet sisters who have found the help and healing to know who they truly are in Christ.*

*Eternity will not be long enough for me to praise my Lord and glorify Him!*

*Shawn Petsuch*

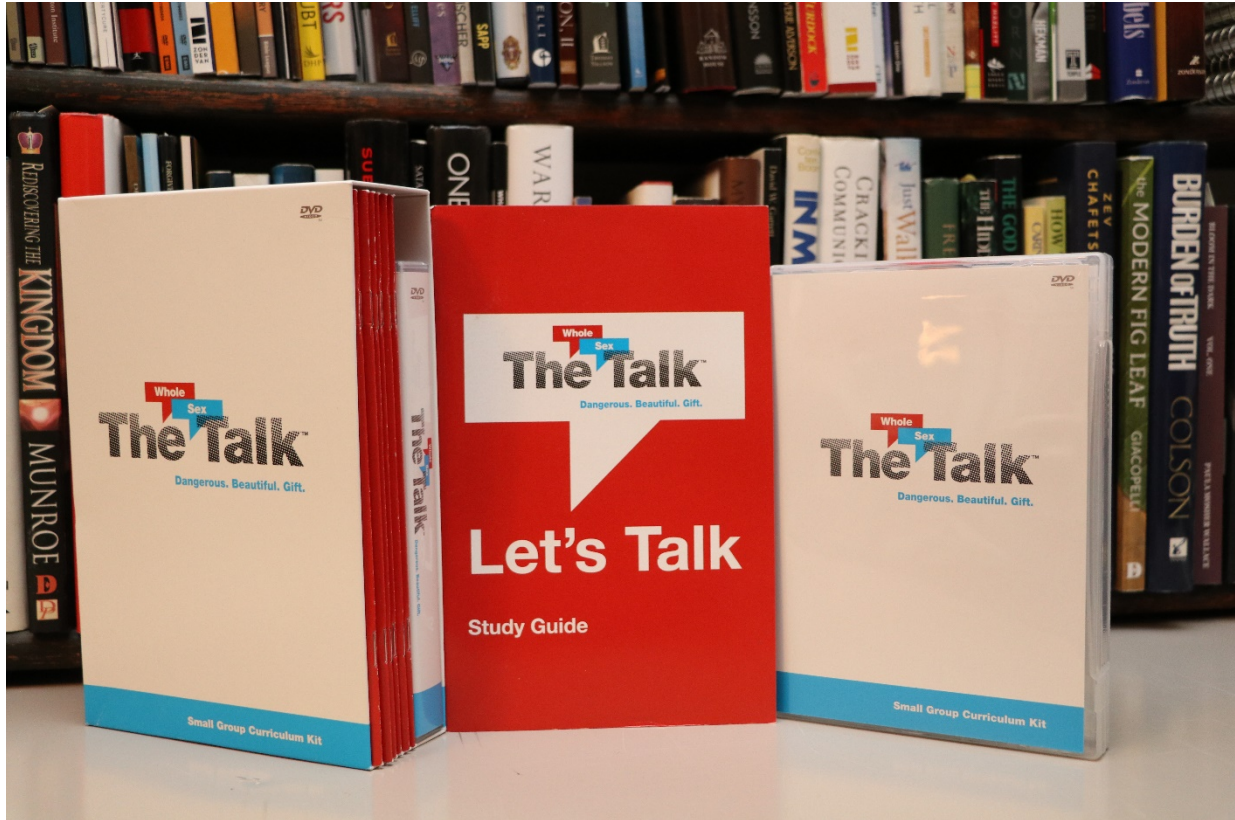
### **Three Questions every Pastor and Church Leader must address:**

- 1. What are you doing to prepare for the unplanned pregnancy that is coming to your church?**
- 2. What are you doing to bring healing, forgiveness, and freedom to the walking wounded in your church who are suffering in silence because they are carrying the secret of participating in abortion decisions in their past?**
- 3. What are you doing to help and equip parents to have ongoing conversations with their children to teach them to enjoy love, sex, and relationships God's way — and prepare them to avoid the first two situations?**


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**MARY VERWYS**  
Director of Garden of Hope Ministry  
and Sidewalk Counselor

"No, you don't want them sleeping around, but you really don't want them covering it up because of their great love for you."

**KEY MESSAGES**

- **MOTIVATIONS** - Three types of women Mary has observed seeking abortions
- **AFTER EFFECTS** - When reality hits



**ABBY JOHNSON**  
Former Planned Parenthood Director,  
Founder of And Then There Were None Ministry


"I'm a good Christian girl on birth control. I'm not supposed to get caught in my sin."

**KEY MESSAGES**

- **VISUAL DEATH** - Seeing an ultrasound-guided abortion
- **SELLING** - Selling abortions and meeting quotas
- **PRAYING PARENTS** - Never give up on your kids

**SPIRITUAL CONSEQUENCES**

Two pastors talk about God's design for sex – one that is great and rewarding. Any other design is empty and damaging.




**REV. STEPHEN RAEMISCH**  
Pastor

"When we are isolated with a sin of that magnitude, the guilt can be overwhelming."

**KEY MESSAGES**

- **KILLJOY** - God is NOT a killjoy but wants us to truly enjoy sex ... His way
- **DECEPTION** - Sin will take you further than you want to go



**REV. GEORGE DAVIS**  
Pastor

"They don't tell you that although you believe in God's forgiveness, you'll go over [the abortion] time and time again."

**KEY MESSAGES**

- **PERMANENCE** - The lasting effects of abortion
- **HEALING** - God turning tragedy into triumph



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