

Men, Abortion and Healing: The Hidden Struggle

by Gigi Duncan

For Nyles Pinckney, grief was not something he could easily show. In 2019, while playing college football, he faced an experience many men silently carry: abortion. “For a long time, I wasn’t comfortable sharing my story at all,” Pinckney told the Register. “I grew up Christian, surrounded by Christians — I live in the Bible Belt of South Carolina — and I was afraid of being judged. I worried people would hear my story and respond with, ‘You’re a man. Get over it.’”

Pinckney’s Christian upbringing shaped both his initial silence and his path to healing. “I grew up in a two-parent Christian household, and my parents taught me to respect women — to respect their voices and their decisions. That was instilled in me deeply,” he said. So, when his girlfriend asked what he thought about the abortion, he responded as many men do: “I’m here for you. I’ll support whatever you decide. It’s your body.”

Looking back, he recognized that his silence contributed to his grief. “I held my feelings back. I thought respecting her meant staying silent; but afterward, I realized my voice might have mattered more than I knew,” he said. “That silence became part of the grief I carried.”

Like many men, he downplayed his struggle in the very activity that demanded toughness and resilience: football. “I could take hit after hit on the field, but I started noticing I was unpredictably angry and sad,” he said. “I hid my emotions even from myself by hitting the gym or watching extra game film. My teammates thought I’d hit another gear in my preparation, but I was masking my pain.”

This affliction, Pinckney explained, stemmed not only from societal expectations but from a deep-rooted belief about his role as a man. “All of that was going through my mind during the abortion decision and afterward. The emotions I felt didn’t fit with that ‘gladiator’ image or with what I thought a Christian man was supposed to feel. I felt like something was missing — like I was broken.”

Faith and Fatherhood

Eventually, his silence over his abortion experience caught up with him, and the emotional strain became impossible to hide. Pinckney recalled one moment that fully encapsulated the need for change. “A coach made a simple comment. It was nothing harsh, but when he asked, ‘What’s wrong with you?’ I completely broke down. I said I was done and wanted to quit,” he said. “What surprised me was how quickly my coaches stepped in. They didn’t let me walk away.”

This moment was pivotal. It revealed to Pinckney that being vulnerable was not a weakness but a form of authentic strength. “That’s when I realized I needed to break the cycle of silence and the facade of ‘I’m overly strong; I’m Superman.’ At the end of the day, we’re regular people with emotions, and we should be able to express them,” he wrote in a recent op-ed for The Christian Post.

The abortion experience also challenged his understanding of being a man and fatherhood. “My view of masculinity changed completely,” Pinckney told the Register. He cited Bruce Lee’s quote “Be water” as a guiding principle in being adaptable and peaceful, yet strong. His role as a father, protector and provider became central to both his identity and his healing.

Permission to Feel

Pinckney's path led him to Support After Abortion, where he has served as the men's healing coordinator since 2024. "I didn't even know resources like this existed, especially for men. Something clicked," he said. "I felt like I was meant to find this site. ... It's been a calling more than a job. I've lived this story, and now I get to help other men through it."

Michele Mazelin, the organization's communications manager, explained that Support After Abortion exists to assist both men and women who have experienced abortion through direct care and provider training. Through its After Abortion Line, individuals can reach out anonymously and be connected to healing options that fit them — faith-based or secular, group or individual, in-person or virtual. "Healing isn't one-size-fits-all," Mazelin said. In addition to equipping pastors, therapists, pregnancy center staff, and other support outlets with training and resources, the organization also serves family members who carry abortion-related grief.

For men, Pinckney said, the struggle often revolves around permission to feel. "Many men have never allowed themselves to sit with sadness, guilt or disappointment. They acknowledge it briefly and then push it down," he noted. "Another common theme is feeling like they had no role, or that they failed in their role as fathers."

According to internal research conducted by Support After Abortion, those patterns are widespread. Its 2023 study found that 71% of men reported experiencing an adverse change after abortion, and 83% said they wished they had someone to talk to — but only 18% knew where to go for help. "We often talk about four roles men may have had," Mazelin added, citing "not knowing until afterward, being part of the decision, advocating against abortion, or advocating for it. All of them experience grief."

Why Men Go Silent

Sean Corcoran lost his first child to abortion when he was only 19. Now the CEO of the pro-life initiative Men for Life, he believes the silence surrounding men and abortion is not accidental; it is cultural. "I fought against it, but I lost," he told the Register. "What stayed with me was being told explicitly that it didn't affect me because I was a man." After the abortion, Corcoran sought help from a college counselor and was dismissed. "She told me, 'This doesn't affect you because you're a man.' That was the message I was left with."

In the years that followed, Corcoran failed out of school multiple times and spiraled into drug addiction, eventually becoming homeless. "By the grace of God," he shared, "I survived an overdose and entered treatment." It was there, he said, that counselors helped him connect his destructive behavior to unresolved grief from the abortion. "Every time I speak about this at events today, men come up after and say, 'I've never told anyone this in over 20 years, but I lost a child to abortion,'" Corcoran said. "When society frames abortion solely as a women's issue, men are left believing they're alone." Abortion, Corcoran noted, wounds men at the core of their identity: "Men are created to protect, provide, lead and serve. When a man believes he failed to protect his child, that wound doesn't disappear."

Healing Ministries in Action

Corcoran's experience mirrors what Kevin Burke, co-founder of Rachel's Vineyard, says he has witnessed for decades in abortion-healing work with men. According to Burke, one of the greatest misconceptions surrounding abortion is that men are largely unaffected. "Because men don't undergo the physical procedure, people assume they don't experience emotional or spiritual wounds," he said. "But many men carry a deep sense of shame rooted in the belief that they failed to protect their child."

That unresolved grief, he explained, often surfaces in destructive ways. When those feelings aren't brought to "a healing process," they can come out through "anger, addiction, pornography, gambling or broken relationships." Founded with his wife, Theresa Burke, Rachel's Vineyard offers weekend retreats rooted in Scripture, therapeutic exercises and the sacraments, particularly reconciliation. While some men benefit from male-only spaces such as Project Joseph (a separate initiative developed by staff and alumni from the organization's Dallas site), Burke noted

that most retreats include both men and women. "Abortion is a relational experience," he said. "Its repercussions often show up in relationships. When men and women hear each other's grief, healing can begin."

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Gigi Duncan is a staff writer for the National Catholic Register based in Washington, D.C.

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