

PLANNED FROM THE START

A HEALING DEVOTIONAL

A close-up photograph of a woman's face, focusing on her right eye and a single tear falling from it. Her expression is one of vulnerability and emotional pain. The background is softly blurred, showing her hair and the side of her face.

JOY
FORGIVENESS
GRACE
COMFORT
HOPE

LORRAINE MARIE VARELA

What Others Are Saying

“The pro-life movement is a movement of converts and therefore a movement of hope. There is nothing more unnatural than paying a healer, a doctor, to take the life of a child. Abortion is devastating, and the ‘relief’ it promises is nowhere to be found in the aftermath. This beautiful book is a finger that points to healing, hope, and freedom that is possible through Jesus Christ. He is the Great Healer, and these pages show His power to restore our brokenness.”

—Shawn Carney

CEO and President of 40 Days for Life

Bestselling author of *The Beginning of the End of Abortion*

“Infused with hope and healing on every page. *Planned from the Start* is a beacon of light, love, and restoration for anyone who has experienced the trauma incurred by abortion.”

—Robia Scott

Author of *Counterfeit Comforts*

Actress in *Unplanned*

“Breathtaking. I have never cried while previewing a manuscript for endorsement, but I did with *Planned from the Start*. Tears that quickly turned to hope and freedom. If you need healing from a crisis pregnancy, this book is for you. If you know someone who does, this book is your gift to them.”

—Laura Harris Smith, CNC

Author of *Get Well Soon*, *The Healthy Living Handbook*,
and *The 30-Day Faith Detox*; TV host of *the THREE*

“*Planned from the Start* is an incredibly powerful resource for anyone who has experienced the pain that abortion causes. The testimonies and moments of reflection within are a beautiful reminder that God’s grace is sufficient for us. I believe that this book will bring healing and restoration to millions.”

—Ashley Bratcher
Actress in *Unplanned*

“*Planned from the Start* tackles a very difficult subject with God’s grace and kindness that offers a healing path for anyone who has felt the toxic effects of abortion. Lorraine Varela has beautifully compiled this devotional with Scriptures, meditative reflections, and the compelling stories of many who have not only suffered from the traumas of abortion, but those who have also found forgiveness, comfort, and wholeness—with the hope that through this book, you will find the same too. I believe this book will also be a valuable tool for spiritual counselors, pastors, and anyone who seeks to help others in their healing process. As you read, may your heart be healed and your soul made whole.”

—Joshua Mills
Bestselling author of *Moving in Glory Realms*

“*Unplanned* powerfully removes blinders regarding the truth of abortion and the value of human life. *Planned from the Start* picks up where the movie leaves off, offering the first step toward healing for women and men who have suffered through the trauma of abortion. This vital resource offers hope as it restores identity, destiny, and purpose.”

—Daryl Lefever
Producer of *Unplanned* and *I Can Only Imagine*

“*Planned from the Start* opened up unexpected places in my heart. It beautifully led me through many emotions and brought peace to painful memories. Long-held lies in my mind were replaced with God’s truth and His love for me, and I received so much insight and encouragement from the times of reflection. For any woman who has been through the agonizing experience of abortion, this healing devotional by Lorraine Varela will bring comfort and closure to your heart, soul, mind, and body.”

—Julie True

Julie True Ministries

Singer, Songwriter, Soaking Worship Music Artist

“In the pages of this masterful work, Lorraine takes us on a journey of pain, loss, grief, restoration, and joy as exemplified in the life of Abby Johnson. Through this beautiful devotional you will see the omnipotence of God in taking broken pieces and shattered dreams and using them for His glory and our good. I recommend this book to any person looking for home in their darkest hour and longing to experience the grace of God in ways they have never imagined. God has a plan even for the unplanned!”

—Dr. Kynan Bridges

Bestselling author of *90 Days of Power Prayer*

Pastor, Speaker

“I know a number of women who’ve had abortions, and they seem to fall into one of two camps. Either they’re still covered in a thick shadow of shame, or, because they’ve received God’s healing and forgiveness, they’ve found a passion in their souls and have gone on to do brilliant things for God. Oh, I long for every hurting heart to know Christ’s unfathomable mercy and grace amid the ashes and wreckage of abortion. My friend, Lorraine, has crafted a beautifully deep devotional that will minister to your heart and lead you to a place of healing you never thought possible. You may fear that you won’t survive it. But you’ll not only survive it,

you will go on to thrive in life! As you pursue your healing, you'll find a Savior waiting with open arms, ready to restore you. Take your time and work your way through the pages of this treasured resource. You'll be glad you did."

—Susie Larson
Author, Show Host, National Speaker

"*Planned from the Start: A Healing Devotional* is a face-to-face encounter with the Healer Himself. The testimonies of hope and restoration in this book will be inspirational to all who read."

—Fabiano Altamura
Co-Producer of *Unplanned*
Dean, Bethel Conservatory of the Arts

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A H E A L I N G D E V O T I O N A L

JOY
FORGIVENESS
GRACE
COMFORT
HOPE

LORRAINE MARIE VARELA



ROMANS 8:28
B O O K S

AN IMPRINT OF REDEMPTION
P R E S S 

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Foreword

IF YOU ARE READING THESE WORDS, it's because you are numbered among the hundreds of thousands of women who have suffered the trauma of abortion. This book is a love letter to you. You are not alone. God cares deeply about your struggle, your pain, and your fight to get beyond the past and move forward into your future.

More than five years ago, while feeding our caffeine addiction at a local coffee shop, we ran into a friend who handed us a copy of Abby Johnson's book *Unplanned* and said, "You need to make this into a film." Not thinking much of it at the time, we agreed to check it out and took the book home. After reading it, we agreed. Abby's story had to be told. With prayerful conviction, we embarked on this wild adventure.

Along the way, we've met many women who have tearfully told us their abortion stories. We began to realize *Unplanned* isn't just about abortion; it's about the aftermath. It's about the pain of women unable to forgive themselves, the pain of women living with hidden guilt and shame, and their struggle to find healing from their pain.

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A quick search on the Internet uncovers some sobering statistics:

- 60% of post-abortive women stated that they felt “a part of me died”
- 62% couldn’t forgive themselves
- 36% have had thoughts of suicide

Abortion has impacted so many lives. It crosses all socio-economic, racial, and cultural boundaries. The Christian church is no less impacted. More than seventy percent of women electing an abortion claimed a Christian religious preference. Forty-three percent reported attending worship services at their church at least monthly, if not more frequently. In fact, abortion is so widespread that research reveals one in four women will have an abortion by age forty-five.

And yet, no one wants to acknowledge or talk about the emotional pain that comes with abortion.

A few years into this journey, we met Lorraine and Gabriel Varela at a writers’ conference where we were the keynote speakers. It was instantly clear that the Lord had placed them in our path. Lorraine introduced herself as a writer who had just been given a contract from a Christian publisher to write a book of prayer strategies. She also shared that, as we were speaking, the Lord prompted her with inspiration for her first screenplay, which we’ve since purchased for future production. As we were preparing to film *Unplanned*, we invited Lorraine and Gabriel to establish and oversee our on-set ministry team. Lorraine’s dedication to intercession for this project and her heart for women, along with her God-inspired writing gift, made her the obvious choice to pen this devotional. As you read the following pages, we are confident you will agree.

FOREWORD

Abortion is not the “unpardonable sin.” The Lord offers mercy, grace, and forgiveness that leads to the healing and restoration of identity. Our prayer is that this devotional will be the catalyst that begins a personal healing journey for every person who has been affected by abortion. May the Lord use this book to bring healing to you and to those who love you.

—Cary Solomon and Chuck Konzelman
Writers-Directors of *Unplanned*

Introduction

There is no pit so deep that He is not deeper still.

—Betsie ten Boom, Ravensbrück concentration camp prisoner, 1944

ABBY JOHNSON BELIEVED IN GOD. She also believed in helping women in crisis. Unplanned pregnancies brought women through her doors at Planned Parenthood, where she worked as a clinic director. “No one grows up wanting to have an abortion,” Abby said. But abortion was legal—and Abby thought legal meant it must be okay.

Abby believed the lies she had been taught about infants in the womb—lies she repeated to women who sought her counsel. “It’s not a baby. It’s just a clump of tissue.” She defended these lies for years, convincing women that the right thing to do was to kill their own children. Then one fateful day, what she saw changed everything—the day she assisted with an ultrasound-guided abortion and watched a thirteen-week-old infant fight for its life. In that moment Abby knew that she had been deceived, too.

Abortion leaves hidden scars that run deep. Both pro-life and pro-choice groups have identified five key areas of common emotional responses that affect women who have undergone one or more abortion procedures: grief, guilt, shame, regret, and depression.

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These abortion scars aren't limited to the women alone—men whose fatherhoods have been denied may also find themselves faced with the same emotional challenges, whether they were complicit with facilitating the abortions or not. And the circle grows larger still—mothers or fathers who forced abortions on their daughters, grandparents who never knew their grandchildren, friends who assisted women to the clinics, siblings who lost nieces and nephews, children who lost siblings, and future children whose parents struggle to bond with them. Although often unaware, many experience the heavy weight of abortion trauma.

If you wonder whether abortion trauma is affecting your life, here are some questions that may bring clarity:

- Do you struggle with forgiving yourself—or others—for your abortion?
- Does it seem impossible that God would forgive you?
- Do you feel like you will never be accepted by others?
- Do you experience unexpected flashes of anger or rage?
- Do you feel the need to punish yourself?
- Do you turn to dependency on alcohol, drugs, or food for comfort? Are there other behaviors you engage in to mask your pain?
- Do you struggle to connect with your emotions or to attach emotionally to others?
- Do you feel broken with regret?
- Do you have difficulty concentrating or sleeping? Do flashbacks or nightmares of your abortion cause you distress?
- Do thoughts of suicide or self-hatred plague your mind?

If you answered *yes* to one or more of these questions, know that you are not alone. For every area of pain, the Lord has His antidote of peace.

Where there is grief, He anoints your head with joy.

Where there is guilt, He offers you forgiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Where there is shame, He covers you in grace.

Where there is regret, He wraps you in comfort.

Where there is depression, He lifts your heart with hope.

Through it all, His love restores your identity and renews the destiny He purposed for you from eternity past.

Each section of this devotional addresses one of these core areas of emotional and spiritual pain. They begin with a testimonial of someone who has walked the path of abortion and found healing through the love of God. There is power in testimony! You may identify with these stories through parallels from your own experience. If so, grab hold of the deliverance and freedom offered as you align your heart to receive from the Lord.

Your healing journey continues with devotions to inspire you, providing questions to consider as you pause in reflection and quiet your heart. This is your time for self-evaluation—an internal check-up of areas that have caused you distress, and an opportunity to refine your perspective as you meditate on God's character and heart.

These questions are followed by an intentional time to pause in His presence and listen for His voice. Don't be in a hurry—allow time for the Holy Spirit to minister to you as He instills a greater awareness of His presence and His love. The Lord may remind you of a promise in Scripture. He may speak a thought directly to your heart or bring to your mind a visual picture of His love for you. He is a creative God who desires to encounter you and make Himself known. You are encouraged to use the pages of this devotional to write down your own thoughts *and* the impressions He places on your heart.

Enter into this time with expectation, and trust that God will speak and minister to you in your place of need. Listening to God's voice may be new or unfamiliar to you. You may need to overcome barriers of doubt, fear, or frustration before you can receive from Him. *Doubt* is a

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barrier of the mind that interferes with your ability to recognize God's voice. *Fear* is a barrier the enemy uses to destroy your faith. *Frustration* is a barrier that threatens to drain your hope and steal your joy.

Recognize the barriers that hold you back. Ask the Lord to show you what He wants you to know. Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice" (John 10:27 NKJV). You can trust that He will speak to you, and you *will* hear Him. His voice is gentle and kind. You will be able to discern His voice from the accuser who wants to keep you bound in guilt and shame—the accuser who says that forgiveness applies to everyone else, *but not you*. The accuser is a liar. You've listened to the enemy's lies long enough. It's time for a change.

Healing is a process that the Lord walks with you in love. His heart is for you. His love surrounds you. May this devotional help your healing journey to begin, leading you into renewed identity, destiny, and purpose God planned for you before He laid the foundation of the world. He rejoices over *you*. His joy will be your strength.



SECTION I



From
Grief
to Joy



FROM GRIEF TO JOY



Lord, you know all my desires and deepest longings. My tears are liquid words and you can read them all. My heart beats wildly, my strength is sapped, and the light of my eyes is going out.

—PSALM 38:9–11

FROM THE START OF HER LIFE, Annette felt her voice did not matter. The pain of molestation, and her molester's threats that she couldn't tell a soul, overshadowed the joy of carefree childhood days. Inner turmoil led her to the conclusion that she was unlovable, a person without worth. Because she didn't believe she could be loved for who she was, she detached from feeling love for herself or for others. Instead, Annette sought to earn love through performance. The truth of her identity was crushed.

As Annette grew older, the need to achieve significance continued to be a driving force in her life. If she could impress others, she would prove she was a lovable person, so she set her sights on becoming an architect. At nineteen years old, Annette was pursuing her dream and in a stable, happy relationship with her boyfriend—a relationship that could one day lead to marriage. Her boyfriend was thoughtful and kind, and he often brought roses to express his affection for her. When Annette learned she was pregnant, the future she envisioned was forever altered. She couldn't fathom how she'd be able to love her baby when she couldn't

even love herself. Her emotions toward her baby were completely numb. Embarrassed and ashamed, she wanted to hide. She had been raised in a good Christian home but had turned away from her faith. If her parents found out about her pregnancy, it would demonstrate she was unworthy and unlovable, so she kept her secret hidden from them. She felt she had nowhere to turn. No one stood by her side to encourage her or tell her, “You can do this. I believe in you!”

Friends steered her to an abortion clinic, where the doctor and the nurses offered their counsel. “You should abort. That’s the best decision for you.” Naïve, scared, and vulnerable, Annette trusted their advice, as they seemed to know what they were talking about. But the clinic was unable to perform her abortion. An ultrasound revealed Annette was sixteen weeks pregnant, much farther along than she’d thought. “Your tissue is larger than allowed in Indiana,” the technician told her bluntly. Annette felt the stinging chill of coldness emanate from this worker. It took her by surprise, and she wondered if the technician’s job had contributed to the deadness of spirit that hardened her soul.

To have an abortion, Annette would have to cross state lines to Kentucky, where the abortion laws were more lenient. The following day, Annette’s boyfriend drove her to Kentucky to an abortion clinic. He also felt pressure to live up to high moral standards set by his parents, but had fallen short. Out of desperation to hide his failure from them, he became complicit in the decision to end his baby’s life.

Before she had her abortion, Annette didn’t know what she was stepping into. However, the *moment* her abortion was complete, she had a spiritual awakening. “I knew I had taken the life of an innocent person,” she recalled. When she experienced the drastic sting of death, her emotions roared to life, awakening her senses to feelings that had been buried. “For the first time I felt deep, deep sorrow for the loss of a person,” Annette said. The weight of guilt and shame washed over her.

She could no longer look at babies or listen to their cries. These sights and sounds haunted her, and she ended the relationship with her boyfriend.

Giving in to abortion scarred Annette in more ways than she realized. She was terrified of becoming a mother. She was afraid she would hate her future children and abuse them. Because of her abortion, she felt she had partnered with the supreme child abuser, the devil. “Abortion is the worst form of child abuse there is,” Annette said. “Because I partnered with him, I opened myself up to his voice in that area of abuse.” The voice said she would be a bad mother—the voice that came from the father of lies.

Within a few years, Annette found herself pregnant again. This time she was married to a good man she loved, and it should have been the happiest time in her life—but she wasn’t looking forward to bringing their child into the world. All her fears came flooding back. Yet the day she gave birth to their son, a miracle took place in Annette’s heart. It was love at first sight. A new spiritual awakening overwhelmed her spirit—the revelation that she had bought into a dirty lie. She didn’t hate her son. He didn’t repulse her. The love she had for her newborn baby affected her profoundly. “This was the most amazing and joyful experience of my life,” Annette said. In an instant, her mind understood a truth her spirit had known all along: *Abortion is wrong*. It wasn’t just a piece of tissue that had been removed from her body. It was a baby.

Now the years following her abortion made sense. When she’d been feeling sad about her loss, her friends had deemed her baby insignificant and unlovable, invalidating Annette’s feelings. They had told her, “You just had an abortion. There’s nothing wrong with that.” So she’d stuffed down her emotions, pretending the abortion hadn’t bothered her. But in her spirit, she knew she had done something *really* wrong. She knew she had taken a life. With the permission to grieve denied, she’d had no place or space to mourn this loss of life. She’d *needed* to mourn her

first baby's loss. It was the most natural thing to do. "And I couldn't," Annette said.

Grief over an abortion is rarely spoken aloud. Many who have aborted their children feel pressure to hide their emotions of grief and act like everything is okay. They don't realize that grief affects their entire being, whether they acknowledge their grief or hold it in. It is impossible to grieve and heal when you're worried about what other people think. Suppressing emotions is unhealthy, and to enter into healing and wholeness, you must be allowed to grieve.

Grief has a purpose. You wouldn't grieve if you didn't love.

After her son's birth, Annette continued to carry the heaviness of guilt and shame, unaware that the same antilife spirit behind abortion affected every area of her life. "One abuse leads to another," she said. Child abuse, self-abuse, and thoughts of suicide afflict many women who have experienced an abortion. Annette was distressed when she discovered that her own mothering instincts were compromised. Whispered lies continued to assault her mind—lies that said she would be a horrible mother, unable to love her son or feel connected to him. The temptation to agree with these lies was ever present, and she fought to preserve the truth.

Annette returned to the roots of her faith and started walking closely with the Lord. Then the pieces of her past fell into place, as she understood a spirit against humanity had attacked her identity from her youngest days, but those thoughts had not originated in her heart. The spirit was a liar. As she learned how to distinguish her own internal voice from the voice of her enemy, she would positively affirm the truth. "I am a good mother," she'd say. "I'm a *loving* mother. I love my child. I love him more than myself." With each affirmation, her mothering instincts were strengthened as the lies fell away. She continued to fight against this spirit by standing fast on the truth of God's word and

FROM GRIEF TO JOY

wrapping herself in His love. During one of her times of worship and contemplation, Jesus gave her permission to mourn the loss of her first child. He promised to wipe her tears away. “That is when I received spiritual and soul healing,” she said. “When I had permission to mourn, I sought Jesus for forgiveness. Then I had to forgive myself.”

Annette shares wise counsel to anyone who is tormented by the trauma of abortion and needs to walk through mourning and forgiveness. She says, “Acknowledge there was a life, a purpose, and a destiny for your child. One of the most wonderful things you can do is give your child a name. Once you have named your child, acknowledge that God designed your child and that they were a person. God will then take you on a journey of forgiveness, love, and compassion you can’t study for or know how to do on your own.” Annette followed this advice herself. She asked the Lord to reveal to her the sex of her baby and named her daughter Rose to honor her child’s birth father, even though he was no longer a part of her life. With her voice strengthened by love, Annette chose to bring value to Rose’s life as she shared her testimony publicly, speaking out about her past and giving hope to others for their future.

The road of grief has provided Annette with insights she might never have known otherwise. “When your identity is suffering—and you don’t love yourself—it’s easy to throw another person’s life away,” she said. She is now acutely aware of the need each person has for understanding and valuing their own purpose in life, and offers these words of hope. “Life is precious. Your life has meaning,” she says. “It’s not because of what you do, but because of who you are. You were created highly valuable and highly loved.” This is the truth of *your* identity—the truth that will set you free.

A woman with blonde hair is sitting on a beach at night, wrapped in a dark, patterned blanket. She is looking towards the right. In the foreground, a campfire is burning brightly on the sand. The background shows the ocean and a dark sky. The entire image has a blue tint.

Joy

He has **TORN THE VEIL**

A
N
D

lifted

from me the sad

HEAVINESS of mourning.

He *wrapped*

me in the glory

garments of **GLADNESS.**

PSALM 30:11



DAY 1



In Times of Grief

*My life's strength melts away with grief and sadness;
come strengthen me and encourage me with your words.*

—PSALM 119:28

IN TIMES OF GRIEF, I surround you with My love.

My compassion reaches out and reaches in to touch those places left vulnerable and exposed. I will heal every wound of your soul.

PAUSE IN REFLECTION

Quiet your heart

It's easy to believe God loves others, but it might not be as easy to believe God truly loves you. You may believe in His love with your mind, even though you haven't experienced this truth in your heart.

Let your healing journey begin with this simple question: Jesus, why do You love me?

The Lord may give you a picture, or specific thoughts and impressions may come to mind. Record these thoughts now. Don't be afraid to receive. Open your heart and let His healing love flow.

PAUSE IN GOD'S PRESENCE

Listen for His voice



*Until now you've not been bold enough to ask the Father for a single thing in my name, but now you can ask, and keep on asking him!
And you can be sure that you'll receive what you ask for,
and your joy will have no limits!*
—JOHN 16:24



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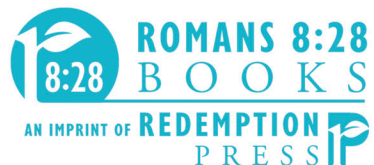
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—From the foreword by Cary Solomon and Chuck Konzelman,
Writers-Directors of *Unplanned*

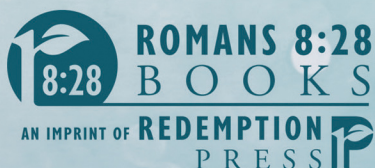
The major feature film *Unplanned* explores Abby Johnson’s journey from Planned Parenthood clinic director to pro-life advocate. Her compelling story is an emotional roller coaster for many women and men whose lives have been touched by abortion. Post-abortion trauma crosses all socio-economic, racial, cultural, and religious boundaries. Many women who chose abortion suffer silently in the aftermath, unaware of the far-reaching effects this decision has triggered in their lives, struggling to believe God could ever forgive them.

As a companion devotional to the movie, *Planned from the Start* reveals five core areas of emotional turmoil often faced following abortion—emotions that trap women and men in the prison of pain that abortion has brought into their lives and into the lives of those who love them.

But where trauma inflicts devastating pain, God extends abundant grace. Filled with moments for reflection and personal stories from those who have experienced their own journeys of trauma and redemption, this interactive devotional invites readers to begin healing from the pain of post-abortion trauma to freedom and wholeness.



Lorraine Marie Varela is the author of *Powerful Moments in the Presence of God* and *Love in the Face of ISIS*. She and her husband, Gabriel, co-founded Inspiring Faith International, a ministry to help people from all walks of life draw closer to God. Together they co-lead a prayer and ministry team on the film set of *Unplanned*. Lorraine and Gabriel live in the Los Angeles area and can be found online at www.inspiringfaith.us.



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