

Living Unbroken

Reclaiming Your
Life and Your Heart
after Divorce

Tracie
Miles



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DAVID  COOK™

transforming lives together

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When Your World Is Shattered

I was with him nearly thirty years. Four of those as a college girlfriend, twenty-five and a half as a wife. On the outside, it looked like we had the perfect life. Beautiful home. Nice cars. Awesome kids, active in sports and excelling in academics. Gorgeous family photos. Great friends. Fun vacations. Special holiday gatherings. But photos and social media feeds can be deceiving. You never know the pain behind someone's smile—until you do.

One day all the turmoil, secrets, and lies that had been causing problems in our marriage erupted like a volcano spewing lava that had been boiling under the surface for decades. Everything was finally out in the open. Proof was in hand. No excuses would suffice. Trust had been broken. Vows had been discarded. Arguments ensued. Tears flowed. Our marriage was instantly broken beyond repair.

My face flushed and my heart disintegrated as my sobbing body collapsed to the floor under the weight of the wrecking ball that had just hit my life. Within a matter of moments, my world was shattered. Never to be the same again. Nor would I be.

That horrible, painful, and unforgettable day marked the first day of a journey I never wanted to embark on. A journey that may look a lot like the one you are now walking. On that day and many

days to follow, I needed someone—anyone—to understand what I was going through.

I am fortunate and blessed to have so many friends and family members who have been there to support and encourage me from the moment my husband walked away to the present day. But, although everyone empathized and many shed tears for my children and me, few could truly relate to the loss I was feeling and my sorrow over the death of my marriage.

And that's exactly what divorce is. A death.

The death of a relationship. The death of an intact family. The death of the life you knew. The death of certain friendships. The death of relationships with beloved in-laws. The death of security. The death of dreams. The death of a future.

Although divorce is the death of a life we once knew, it is not the death of who we are or who we can be.

Divorce evokes intense mourning over the loss of someone who didn't die but instead is still living life—without you. And maybe he seems to be happy, living a great life without a care in the world, maybe even living his best life—without you—and maybe even with someone new.

Yet, it is the type of death people don't share as much sympathy for because there is no funeral to lament the loss. There are no big gatherings of friends and family where everyone brings a casserole or

sends flowers, no sympathetic Hallmark cards in the mail, no lengthy posts on Facebook about how much that person will be missed, no closure. Divorce is the type of death that can make you feel more isolated than being on a deserted island. It is a death that is haunting and devastating and penetrates our hearts to the core.

The journey to accepting and recovering from the actual death of a loved one is excruciatingly long and difficult, and the journey to accepting and recovering from separation and divorce is just as difficult and painful. In fact, to lose someone you love because of death is hard enough, but losing someone you love because that person chose to leave you behind is even more heart wrenching. Even if you played a role in the end of your marriage or the divorce was not necessarily your spouse's fault but yours, the end of a marriage can still feel like a death. Change is hard no matter what the circumstances.

Not everyone realizes this or thinks this way, but I do. And my heart breaks knowing you likely do too. The old cliché that tells us not to judge someone until we've walked a mile in that person's shoes is so true. We can never fully comprehend someone's plight until we are in the same plight, so I understand that not everyone could understand. I had never fully understood this level of devastation until I experienced it firsthand.

But I now know what it's like to mourn the living. I know what it's like to be abandoned and wonder if life could ever feel good again. If I could ever feel good about myself again. If I would ever believe I'm enough. If anyone else would ever want me. If I would ever want anyone else. If I could ever trust someone enough to open my heart to love again. If I would even survive.

These are all valid feelings and questions everyone deals with when facing divorce regardless of how many years that marriage existed or what circumstances destroyed it. Actually, even if you knew the end of your marriage was the best decision for you because of continued patterns of infidelity, dishonesty, addiction, abuse, lovelessness, or neglect, the end of a marriage is still beyond painful and hard, and a flood of emotions and fears ensues.

I take comfort in knowing that David in the Bible understood this type of grief. Although he wasn't enduring the exact scenario of separation and divorce, his emotions and pleas to God were the same as someone who is. He wrote, "I am worn out from sobbing. All night I flood my bed with weeping, drenching it with my tears. My vision is blurred by grief; my eyes are worn out because of all my enemies" (Ps. 6:6–7). Sound familiar? It sure does to me.

Until this situation happened in my life, I didn't even know the eyes could produce as many tears as I cried for months and months on end. I discovered what it meant to be emotionally unstable and to live every minute in an on-your-knees desperation for any type of relief from the hurt. I walked out how David was feeling for many, many months—worn out from weeping, lying on pillows wet with tears, waking with bloodshot eyes, and just flat spent.

You see, divorce brings a suffocating grief that all too often goes unacknowledged by others, but it is a deep, aching grief nonetheless. Maybe you've never had anyone share that perspective, and hearing it from me somehow makes you feel a little better.

A Necessary Season

Grief is a painful season to endure, but it is necessary for the healing process to play out. I once read a quote from English poet and hymnodist William Cowper who said, “Grief is itself a medicine.”¹ It cleanses our souls from anguish and is the process God can use to help us arrive at a place of healing and wholeness.

Grief is natural and necessary.

The Psalms are filled with hope and reassurance for every stage of life, but there are two verses in particular that are critical to remember as we walk this journey of grief together, whether you are enduring the beginning of a separation or living in the aftermath of divorce. I shared these in the introduction, but they are worth mentioning again. The first is Psalm 34:18, one of the most reassuring verses in the Bible when it comes to grief in any form: “The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.” The Lord is with you, my friend. He is closer than you think. He is who will hold you tight during your season of grief. The second is Psalm 147:3: “He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds.”

Let these sweet verses give you hope. God will not only hold you close but, in time, He will also rescue you from your grief and heal your heart. This is His promise to you. He is a God who heals hearts, minds, bodies, and lives. Sometimes immediately and sometimes over time through a process of growth and learning. It’s not a question of *if* He will heal you and bandage your wounds but *when*.

Rest assured, better days are coming. Put your hope in Jesus and let it stay there. As Psalm 39:7 says, “So, Lord, where do I put my hope? My only hope is in you.” Tuck that verse in your heart as well, and let these be ones you hold on to as we walk this path.

Grief is natural and necessary. I believe the first step to recovering from such deep grief is acknowledging what it is and letting yourself experience it without shame. Knowing this, let’s take one chapter to acknowledge and deal with our grief before we step onto this progressive path of finding our smiles again.

The Stages of Grief

It’s been said there are five stages of grief when someone we love dies: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.² The same stages apply when we’re grieving the loss of a spouse who didn’t die but is no longer a part of our life. When we’re mourning the loss of dreams and plans, an unbroken family, a father to our children, the comfort of home, in-laws, friends, financial security, and more. We may grieve who our spouse once was and who we were as a couple. We may even grieve the loss of the person we once were. We may grieve the loss of happiness that has been replaced with a heaviness and a sadness we can’t seem to shake. In fact, it might even seem we’re grieving the death of everything we once knew.

The question is not whether you will go through this five-stage grief process but how you will go through it and how long you will take to navigate each stage. In fact, it’s important to realize that since we are emotional creatures and the grief process is difficult, we will likely all swing back and forth through the five stages of grief as we progress in our healing journeys. We also may not experience the

stages in sequential order and will never experience them exactly like someone else.

There will be days when you feel like every time you take two steps forward, you fall three steps back, which is okay and completely normal. This path is hard. No one should expect you to suddenly be “over it,” so don’t hold yourself to that unattainable standard either. The better you allow yourself to experience each of these stages, understanding that your feelings are normal and valid, the sooner you will begin to get on with your life and discover the happiness waiting for you.

Regardless of how long it takes or the pebbles you trip over on the road to healing, never lose sight of the fact that time heals all wounds. Our hearts will always have scars, but the pain will be less and less as time goes by. Knowing the stages of grief can help you walk out this journey with grace. It’s critical to remember that although divorce is the death of a life we once knew, it is not the death of who we are or who we can be. As I’ve already said, the day will come when you will feel happy and whole again. Free to start a new life. Free to be who you want to be and excited about who you are and what lies ahead. I promise that time will come, and this book can help you get there.

Stage 1: Denial

Avoidance, Confusion, Elation, Shock, Fear

Typically, one of the first things we experience when a marriage ends is absolute shock—especially if it ended abruptly and unexpectedly

due to an affair, pornography, addiction, or abuse, or because your spouse said he was no longer in love with you.

In the first few months of being separated from my husband, I was in shock and denial. My mind was poisoned daily with negative thoughts about myself. *Why did this happen? What did I do wrong? Why wasn't I enough? What's wrong with me?* I couldn't think straight or concentrate on anything. I felt like a robot going through the motions of each day with a freight train resting on my chest.

I struggled to accept that this was the end of our marriage, and I grappled with all the reasons it had ended, most of which were beyond my control. I tried to deny the reality of what had happened that forever altered my future, leaving me clinging to an empty hope that maybe everything would miraculously change. Maybe I would wake up from this nightmare and it would all be over. Maybe my husband's heart would change. Maybe he would choose me, our kids, and our life and we would end up okay. Maybe I could forgive and try to forget and move on.

But in my heart I knew none of that would happen nor could it happen because of all the circumstances at hand. Although my heart wished differently, deep down I knew reconciliation was not possible because of a historical pattern of certain behaviors, so the denial stage didn't last as long for me as it might for others. But it still took many, many months to get through.

As we progress through this chapter, you might find yourself trying to read these words through tears because what I'm describing sounds all too painfully familiar. You may feel pulled back into hard memories of your own situation, reliving those terrible times in your head. But that is not my intent, sweet friend. I want you

to understand we are sisters, we get each other, and we are on this journey toward healing together. And I want you to know you'll get through this because millions of women and men go through it—and survive. Grief is confusing and hard, but eventually we will make it to the other side of the pain.

Look for the Positives

Even though it's hard to imagine when we're in the midst of grief, some benefits are tucked within each of these five stages. Each phase serves a beneficial purpose and propels you into the next, steering you closer to where you want to be—recovered, healed, whole, and embracing your new life with joy.

It's important to know that the stage of denial isn't necessarily a bad thing because it helps us handle the initial realization that the marriage is over. Shock and denial cushion our hearts against trying to deal with all the pain at once. Sometimes the details are too sharp to swallow. Sometimes the loss is too big to understand or fully embrace and we need to allow ourselves time to deal with reality. Denying what's happened or what we fear might happen helps us keep emotions in check rather than becoming completely overwhelmed and paralyzed with grief and fear. It helps keep the freak-out moments to a minimum, at least for a while, and gives our brains time to adjust to the loss.

I learned that if I tried to process every aspect of my life that had changed and tried to figure everything out that needed to be figured out all at once, anxiety would grip my soul like a tourniquet. Our hearts and minds can only handle so much, so taking things slowly during this denial stage allows the healing process

to begin. Nobody wants to accept the unacceptable or believe the unbelievable. So give yourself all the time you need with a huge dose of grace and patience.

Stage 2: Anger

Frustration, Irritation, Anxiety

For at least six months after our separation, I continued to falsely think that maybe, just maybe, some miracle would happen and we could salvage our marriage. Even though our relationship had been on the rocks for quite some time, I still loved my husband and wanted our family to stay together. I held out hope that my prayers for a solid marriage and a devoted, loving husband would be answered. I pleaded with God to work miracles I knew only He could do.

But as more time passed and my husband continued with the same lifestyle choices and relationships that had torn our marriage apart despite countless promises to change, I became frustrated, confused, and angry. I experienced levels of anger I didn't even know existed.

A mixture of hurt, resentment, embarrassment, and disbelief heightened my anger each day. My mental battle raged, and questions fueled my pain-laced bitterness. *How could he do this to me? How could he hurt me this way? How could he throw away the beautiful life we built and the family we created together? How could he betray me like this? How could he lie to me week after week and not feel any remorse? How could I be so naive? Why doesn't he want to spend time with our children? How could he not love them enough to love their*

mother? How could he just walk away from our life? Anger ran rampant—and not just at him.

I was also angry at life. Why me? How is this fair? What did I do to deserve this? Why do other people have happy marriages and I wasn't blessed with that? Why does everyone else seem to be so in love, celebrating milestone anniversaries all over social media, and my own husband can't even love me?

I was angry at myself. Why did I stay in this difficult marriage this long, only to have it blow up anyway? Why did I not stand firm years ago and have enough courage and strength to refuse to tolerate and enable trust-robbing behaviors? Why did I allow myself to be treated like I didn't matter for so long, leaving me feeling like I had little to no value? What is wrong with me? Why was I never enough?

And you know what? I have to admit I was also angry at God. My prayers were filled with questions. Why would You allow this to happen to us, God? How many years have I prayed for my marriage—all prayers You seemed to ignore? Why wouldn't You want my marriage to succeed if the marriage covenant is so important in Your eyes? Why didn't You protect and preserve our family? Why would You let my children suffer with this pain? Why do I have to be so alone?

Angry pity party for one, please.

I'm not saying it's right to be mad at God, but it is all right. He already knows our thoughts, as we're told in Psalm 139:4: "You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD." We can be real with Him. We don't need to act religious and try to hide our anger or assume that as Christians we shouldn't get angry at God, because not only can He handle our anger but He also understands and has compassion for us regardless.

I was angry. Infuriated. Offended. Outraged. Fuming. You get the picture. And it's not pretty.

Truthfully, I had every right to be angry. I had been hurt, betrayed, and treated wrongly. And if you've gone through a similar situation or even if your circumstances are different from mine, it's likely you are angry too. And it is okay, friend. Christians are human, and anger is a natural response to injustice, betrayal, dishonesty, or mean-spiritedness.

It is normal and actually necessary to feel angry and deal with our anger. Suppressing or denying our emotions is not healthy, and they will eventually reach a boiling point if not acknowledged and dealt with. An article about the five stages of grief said this about anger:

When you experience a grief event, you might feel disconnected from reality—that you have no grounding anymore. Your life has shattered and there's nothing solid to hold onto. Think of anger as a strength to bind you to reality... The direction of anger toward something or somebody is what might bridge you back to reality and connect you to people again. It is a “thing.” It's something to grasp onto—a natural step in healing.³

Anger was definitely a “thing” for me. Day after day, the feeling of righteous anger would overpower my heart's desire to forgive. Although I would ask God for the ability to grant mercy and forgiveness to my husband, for my own peace if nothing else, my long

mental list of justifications for being angry would override my hollow prayer. Plus, every time I tried to forgive and offer love, something else would happen to make me feel hurt or betrayed, and my heart would get twisted up all over again.

It was as if voices in my head were arguing with each other, with one trying to convince me I was justified in feeling angry and the other trying to convince me forgiveness and mercy were the best choice. But it's hard to forgive when the one who has done the hurting refuses to repent, which left me constantly thinking, *I have a right to be angry. Anyone would agree.* That's why James 1:19 was not a piece of Scripture I wanted to read during this time, yet God continually brought it to my mind: "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (NIV).

This verse is hard to digest when you've been betrayed and rejected and your heart is broken. It's not what you want to hear when your trust in someone has been violated and your entire future has been altered as a result. Forgiveness doesn't come easily when you're deeply hurt. But it can come eventually.

Notice how the verse above says "everyone" should be slow to speak and slow to anger, leaving no room for excuses or righteous indignation from those who know they have been wronged. James was imploring God's people to understand the damage that negative thoughts and emotions can cause in our hearts. He knew unforgiveness doesn't change an offender's life; it changes ours. It doesn't change the other person's heart; it changes ours. It doesn't change that person's ability to live and love life, but it does change ours.

Forgiveness doesn't come easily when you're deeply hurt. But it can come eventually.

From a worldly perspective, I *did* have every right to be angry and unforgiving, as you might as well. But from a godly perspective, my anger and unforgiveness were holding me hostage to unhappiness. The longer I felt justified in holding on to my anger, the stronger the foothold the devil had in my heart and the tighter the chains became. I wanted to be free, even if it meant forgiving someone who I felt didn't deserve my forgiveness.

As I continued reading, James 1:22 stood out to me: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (NIV). God softened my heart with this passage, making me aware that although I had forgiven my husband with my words and tried to have compassion for him, I had not truly forgiven with my heart. Forgiveness empowered me to stop letting someone who didn't care about me control my mind and emotions.

Anger and unforgiveness are buddies that gang up on our hearts. But forgiveness releases us from the damage they can cause. Forgiveness doesn't condone or accept other people's behavior, nor does it mean we have to allow those people back into our lives, but it does help us open the door to our own happiness. And as Christians, we can always choose to seek God's help in dealing with our anger regardless of who or what it is directed to.

One benefit of the anger stage is that you'll feel energized and motivated to keep going and do whatever needs to be done, even on the hardest of days, especially when all your obligations seem

overwhelming. It's important not to lash out at your spouse or do anything vengeful, rash, or violent, of course, but letting yourself be angry is an important part of the healing process.

Stage 3: Bargaining

Struggling to Find Meaning, Reaching Out to Others, Telling One's Story

One of the hardest parts of separation or divorce is feeling overwhelmingly helpless and vulnerable. When it seems like everything is out of control, we may find ourselves doing some serious bargaining.

This stage is when we tend to have a lot of conversations with ourselves. We question, *Had we done things differently, would the outcome have been different?* Our thoughts engage in a tug of war as we struggle with all the what-ifs and wonder if there is something we could still do to fix the situation we now find ourselves in. *What if I had been prettier, thinner, younger, a better cook or housekeeper, a better lover? What if I had not nagged him about snoring, staying out too late with buddies after golfing, or not spending enough time with the kids? What if I try to change certain things about myself right now to make things better? Then will we be okay?* My what-if list could go on for days, and I'm sure you have your list of what-ifs as well that could easily slip off your tongue. We all do.

We may bargain with our spouse once separation happens, promising to change in some way or asking him to change and convincing ourselves that he will, all to save the marriage even if it's not

good for us in the long run. I found myself doing that for a while; maybe you have done that too.

We may also try to bargain with God, promising that if He'll just fix our problems, change our spouse, or save our marriage, we'll commit to worshipping more, reading our Bible, heading up that church committee, or serving others in selfless ways. We'll promise to stop a bad habit, go on the mission field, do something we feel He's been calling us to do but seemed out of our comfort zone, or simply be more faithful to His Word. We try to think of what we could do that might please God and compel Him to pour favor on us, and we talk to Him as if He doesn't know our true motives.

The problem with bargaining is we might make promises we can't keep because those promises are often fueled by irrational desperation, sadness, and hopelessness. All we want to do is regain control over our circumstances and feel secure, safe, and loved again, so we try to think of what it would take to negotiate with God or others in order to get what we think we want or need.

The real benefits of bargaining come into play if reconciliation is possible. That was not a possibility in my case, but many marriages are saved in this stage when both spouses truly want to work things out. If both are willing to make changes as needed, go to counseling, and put in the hard work, there is a stronger chance of reconciling. However, we have to be careful not to hold on so tightly to false hopes and bargaining tactics that we lose sight of who we are and what's best for us and our lives. Sometimes God removes people from our lives, knowing He has better things in store for us. So it takes a lot of prayer for discernment and guidance to figure out how to navigate this stage.

Bargaining will take place when our emotions are all over the map, our thoughts are shooting in every direction, our minds are trying to make sense of the unthinkable, we can't figure out what to do next, and we're scared. But bargaining is not likely to get us the results we really want. And the weight of this stage of grief can make you think you're going straight-up crazy.

There were many times in the early stages of my marriage breakup that I thought I *was* losing my mind—and it was scary. I could be laughing one moment and break into an epic meltdown the next. I would try hard to focus on doing something and then get so distracted I couldn't get anything done. I felt forgetful, dazed, and confused all the time. Anxiety levels were off the chart, which made it hard to focus on anything. Once, I even passed my exit on the interstate and didn't realize it for thirty minutes because of the haze clouding my thoughts. I would go to a room to get something and forget what I was doing, and my kids would have to tell me things over and over before the information finally stuck. I couldn't seem to stop obsessing about what had happened and feeling buried in worry about all the unknowns. I kept trying to figure out how to fix everything, so I bargained with God, my husband, and myself, all to no avail, which gradually led me to the next stage of grief.

Stage 4: Depression

Overwhelmed, Helpless, Hostile, Wanting to Flee

Deep into this painful journey, I found myself sinking into depression. I was emotionally drained and mentally overwhelmed by the

magnitude of problems I was facing. Crying, often unconsolably, was an everyday occurrence. Sometimes multiple times a day. The smallest trigger could send me into an emotional tailspin. My poor children became constant witnesses to my emotional instability, which broke their hearts and in turn broke mine even further. But I was tired to the deepest depths of my soul. I felt helpless to manage my reality. I felt hopeless about my future, and I wanted to run away from the wake of destruction I was living in. But as a mother of three trying to hold my family together and keep a roof over our heads, I had no choice but to fight instead of take flight.

I finally went to the doctor for antidepressants. I also needed an inhaler after being diagnosed with stress-induced asthma. But as the months passed, the time eventually came when I felt I could maybe wean myself off these things. I felt stronger and more confident in my journey, but that time frame will be different for everyone.

Antidepressants or other forms of medication can be a lifesaver for many. I encourage anyone who needs help coping with life to seek out a doctor's advice as well as consult professional Christian counselors. Although finances prevented me from having too many visits with counselors, the few I did have did my heart good. Talking out our problems in a safe place and letting someone speak into our deepest hurts can be the best gift we ever give ourselves. Don't be too proud to seek help when you need it. If you can't afford counseling, find a trusted friend or pastor and push past the fear of being transparent. We all need help from time to time no matter how strong we think we are. Sharing from the heart is good for the soul.

As I moved forward, I poured all my energy into my faith. Praying daily. Reading God's Word. Writing even when I didn't feel

like it. Journaling. Reading encouraging books. Trying to think positive thoughts and control my woe-is-me, doom-and-gloom thought patterns.

We all need help from time to time no
matter how strong we think we are.
Sharing from the heart is good for the soul.

In the midst of this hurricane I couldn't escape, I had to write a new book—*Unsinkable Faith: God-Filled Strategies to Transform the Way You Think, Feel, and Live*. I had received the book contract a few months prior to the abrupt separation from my husband, and although my life was in shambles, the looming publishing deadline remained.

At first I thought it would be impossible to write that book, considering the circumstances of my life and my unstable mental and emotional state. Who wants to write about learning to live a life of positive thinking when everything in life seems negative? Without God it *would* have been impossible. But God always has a purpose for what we're going through and can do beyond what we can imagine.

It was no surprise to Him that I had to write an uplifting, encouraging, optimism-focused book in the most painful season of my life, and His plan was good. The foundational verse for *Unsinkable Faith?* Hebrews 6:19: "This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls." Anchoring my hope in Him is what kept me afloat, especially

on those days when I was losing my grip and drowning in my problems and tears.

No matter how difficult it was to keep writing and honor my commitment to my publishing deadline, I now realize writing that book is what kept me sane and helped me truly begin to heal. I studied God's Word every day, researched the power of positive thinking, and focused on practicing what I was writing about, which was capturing and reshaping thought patterns, learning how to live a life of positive thinking, clinging to joy, and trusting God for the future. I was writing about His goodness, even on those days when I doubted it. I uncovered incredible scientific facts about the physical and mental implications that habitual negative thinking has on our bodies and hearts, which in turn helped me be more aware of my own mental, emotional, and physical health. My faith soared when I realized how much science supported exactly what Scripture says about the importance of taking our thoughts captive: "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5 NIV).

Writing that book changed my mind, then my heart, then my life. I stopped letting my thoughts run my life and chose to try to think positive even in the midst of negative circumstances and to depend on God's peace to get me through. I realized that living in a perpetual pity party was not doing me or my children any good. In fact, in God's perfect timing, I came across this devotional in *Jesus Calling*, which opened my eyes to the damage I was doing to myself. It reminded me of God's sovereign power to help us get through the most difficult of times.

Self-pity is a slimy, bottomless pit. Once you fall in, you tend to go deeper and deeper into the mire. As you slide down those slippery walls, you are well on your way to depression, and the darkness is profound.

Your only hope is to look up and see the Light of My Presence shining down on you. Though the Light looks dim from your perspective, deep in the pit, those rays of hope can reach you at any depth.... Psalm 40:2–3⁴

I no longer wanted to be stuck in a pit of sadness and self-pity, so I began looking for the rays of hope each day even when storm clouds threatened to block my view. Transformation didn't happen overnight. In fact, it took nearly two years for me to stop waking up every day with a feeling of dread and sadness. Pulling out of depression seemed like a long journey, but it did happen. And it can happen for you too.

If you're feeling anxious or depressed, invest in yourself by seeking out the best ways to cope until you can handle things better. Lean on friends and family like never before, and don't be too proud to let people know what you're going through and what you need most. Accept their offers of help. Then allow yourself to believe there is a light at the end of the tunnel and that overcoming your grief and your fears—and actually enjoying life again—is right around the bend. With Jesus by your side, you will not stay in the pit forever.

God always has a purpose for what we're going through and can do beyond what we can imagine.

Nobody wants to feel depressed, but it's a stage most of us will endure in our grief journey. It would be abnormal not to feel intense, heavy sadness at times. If depression is not something you've dealt with in the past, it may be hard to recognize or understand how you are feeling. Or maybe your depression feels so heavy, you find yourself wondering if it would be easier if you just didn't wake up tomorrow. These are critically dangerous thoughts and should be a red flag signifying you need to seek professional or pastoral counseling immediately, surround yourself with friends and family, take care of yourself, and start changing your thought patterns. These thoughts might be a sign that medication is needed for a while to help you cope. Don't ignore these warning signs, and don't be embarrassed to seek help and support. Allow yourself to be sad, but stay acutely aware of your thoughts and where they are taking you. **Remember, your life is still worth living, you are a woman of great worth in God's eyes, and you are loved by many.**

Dealing with sadness and your current reality is healthy and necessary for equipping you to accept what has happened and to learn to deal with it. As sadness subsides, acceptance opens the door for you to stop thinking about what no longer is and start thinking about how to move forward. In the next chapter, I'll

show you how acceptance can help you discover how to enjoy the life you now have and feel happy and whole again.



Happiness Prompters

- Look outside your window and find something beautiful to gaze on. Thank God for that little blessing in your day. If you're up to it, look for many blessings and let a smile cross your face each time you see one.
- Treat yourself to something special today. What do you enjoy doing? What makes you feel pampered and refreshed? Choose something and do it.

Healing Steps

1. What stage of grief do you feel you're in today? Write out a summary of where you are now and how you feel you've progressed or stayed stuck in a particular stage. Think about benefits you could experience by trying to move on to the next stage and progress in your healing.
2. List any obstacles preventing you from moving forward, and pray about how to overcome them. Acknowledging what is standing in the way of your happiness is a key factor in overcoming grief.
3. If you haven't already, start a journal either on your computer or in a handheld notebook. Each time you are feeling overwhelmed

with grief, record your thoughts and feelings, prayers, important Scripture verses or devotions you read, and evidence of God working in your life. Include the date for each journal entry.

Caring for You

Do some online research about the stages of grief after divorce. This will help you not only to understand the grieving process better but also to understand you are not alone—and not weird or weak or crazy for feeling the way you do. Search for stories of other women who have gone through these stages already and are now thriving and enjoying their lives. Let their stories give you hope and comfort.