

# TRADING TEARS FOR JOY

MAKING CROSSROAD DECISIONS  
KATE CASE



LIFE IS LIKE A  
BOX OF CHOCOLATES...  
YOU NEVER KNOW  
WHAT YOU'RE  
GONNA GET.

Forrest Gump's Momma

# Trading Tears for Joy

Kate Case

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Also by Kate Case

If you have enjoyed reading this book, why not check out 'God Moments: Direction Downloads for Living', my first book. Copies are available by emailing me at [admin@pathwaychurch.org.au](mailto:admin@pathwaychurch.org.au)

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# INTRODUCTION: ARRIVING AT THE BIG D CROSSROADS



This book is about my journey. A journey through dark times, that took me to the Big D crossroads of despair and then beyond into a future I never imagined possible. I call the crossroads, 'the Big D crossroads' because many of the traumatic events in life seem to begin with the letter D. My own arrival there came as a result of depression and divorce. As a result, I was confronted with many life changing decisions.

Any of the Big D life events such as Death, Disaster, Disease or Divorce, could land any of us there, any time. Perhaps you understand where I am coming from because you are there right now or have even been there yourself. If so, you will be familiar with the intense pain and confusion that infuses the darkness of that place.

Perhaps like me, your arrival there came out of left field. One moment I was travelling down the highway of life enjoying the sunshine, and the next my car was spinning out of control before landing me upside down in a filthy, boggy ditch. When I looked back down the highway it was littered with the debris and wreckage from a marriage that I once thought was till death do us part. On arrival at the Big D crossroads I found myself struggling with a jumbled array of emotions and a battery of decisions about which road to take into the future. But which path to take? It was indeed a very dark time in my life and the way ahead was obscured by a fog of confusion. My world had spun out of kilter and nothing made sense anymore.

My original intention in writing this book was to encourage others struggling through the trauma of divorce. As my writing progressed, I came to realise that it is about much more than that. It is about a relationship journey with God. The real hero of my story is God, who in the midst of my difficulties pulled me out of the slimy ditch where I was languishing, set my feet on solid rock, restored what the locust had eaten and made the roses bloom again in my desert. He came to the dark places I inhabited and brought me His light.

I believe the same issues of self-esteem, broken dreams and confusion about the future confront all those who are grappling with life changing decisions. Regardless of the cause, the spiritual



principles for navigating those dark times are pretty much the same for everyone. The God who pulled me out of the ditch is the same God who will walk with you into the dark times of your life – if you invite Him in and listen to what He has to say.

If you have only just arrived at the Big D crossroads don't feel guilty about it or see yourself as a failure before God, or even lacking in faith. Admitting that you have arrived there is far more important than allowing yourself to drown in remorse, guilt and self-pity. It is important to turn your focus onto finding a pathway that will lead you into a future where the sun will shine again in your life, and not to keep gazing backwards down the road from which you have come.

Arriving at the Big D crossroads, as dark as it was, provided me with an amazing opportunity! An opportunity to begin life anew and make my future into whatever I wanted it to be. In the midst of the pain and confusion there was hope, and although I couldn't see it at the time, there was a new life awaiting me beyond the crossroads.

All great events in life begin with great decisions. So seize the opportunity awaiting you at the Big D crossroads to make some really radical life changing choices. Making decisions can seem overwhelmingly difficult when shrouded in darkness with the future is a distant blip on the horizon, but there is no need for despair.

At the centre of the Big D crossroad is a message billboard. Look up and take in the words:

*God plans to prosper you and not to harm you, He plans to give you hope and a future.  
Jeremiah 29:11*

If you look closer, you'll see there's a comfortable seat right under the billboard. Now that you are here, take some time out and consider your situation from this new vantage point. There are some major decisions to be made about which path to take from here, so don't act hastily. Take time to consider your options as a choice made in haste can be a waste!

Be assured, in the midst of the pain and confusion, God keeps His promises and is true to His Word. Believing and acting on that truth is the essence of our faith, and the embodiment of our hope for the

future. I now have a new life and so can you. I have re-married, and with the benefit of hindsight can truly say that the pain of my experiences was a valuable tool in the hands of a loving God.

Just one more thing. If you are looking for a book that will provide you with the answers to all your questions, you may be disappointed. I cannot tell you what it is you personally need to do next. You will need to work that out for yourself. There is no dot-point formula, no pre-determined GPS path for you to follow. Everyone's journey is different and working it out as you go along is the journey.

Writing this book has been a very cathartic experience for me as I have re-visited some deeply painful events in my life. Ten years on and with the benefit of hindsight I have found a value in those circumstances that was not obvious to me at the time. I am glad to say that my journey forward has been one of healing. While the deep pain has dissipated, a sadness still lingers about some things, especially the relationships that remain broken. There is no going back in order to undo what I could and should have done better. I can only travel forward with the God of the 'empty tomb' who has the power of resurrection in His hands. Where there is death He can breathe life.

At the time of my separation I visited a local Christian bookshop to source some reading material to try and gain some perspective on what I was going through. Certainly there were plenty of books on how to make a marriage work but I found very little available and even less worth reading on how to cope with a marriage that had disintegrated beyond redemption. It seemed to me that Christians weren't meant to contemplate divorce, and I remember lamenting to a friend at the time that I'd heard plenty of sermons on how to have a great marriage but never one on how to have a great divorce!

So here it is - the book that wasn't there when I was looking for it. Even if you are not struggling with the Big Ds, I hope you will find some golden nuggets within these pages that will refresh your perspective and help you navigate your road ahead.

I have also included some of my poetry. So enjoy, but remember the crossroads are not a destination, they are just a staging post on

your journey with God.

# Chocolate Box

*(Light and dark assortment)*

## *First Layer*

### *Elastic Memories*

*Pull me back to our first kiss  
Press of flesh closeness of breath  
Rolled in summer fields*

### *Beach Walk*

*Lacy froth lapped toes  
Footprints crunching rippling sand  
Canines lolling after balls*

### *Frozen*

*Sharing huddled space  
Under your rain stippled umbrella  
Sweet scent steamy breath*

### *Firelight*

*Smoky tendrils entwine  
Fireworks hiss and ember crack  
Radiant faces warm hearts*

### *Shiraz*

*Oaky essence savoured  
Full bodied swirled blackberry plum  
Uncorked love and laughter*

### *Rose Petals*

*Diamond dew adorned  
Sensuous velvet fragrance  
Wedding day confetti*

### *Tiny fingers*

*Pawing at my breast,  
Content consummate miracle  
In you two are one*

### *Laughter*

*Skinned knees racing bikes  
Lime sipped cordial chocolate fingers  
Sticky innocence*

## *Second Layer*

### *Gravel*

*Underfoot crunched  
Marigold edged garden path  
Ivy arbour afternoon tea*

*Grandma's knee  
Place of secret treats  
Stories of life without TV  
One day that will be me*

*Touching  
Shoulders in the train  
Swarm in earphone solitude  
Chasing elusive bait*

*Overheard  
Upturned skateboards  
Boys behind the garden shed  
Secrets drifting on smoke*

*Snowflakes  
Nocturnal offering  
Silent glistening morning shroud  
Fur cupped frosty breath*

*Blue Wren  
Morning delight  
Flash of sapphire fleeting pleasure  
Gone like young love's fire*

*Scratching  
On life's window pane  
Wind whipped trees flailing arms  
Crying leaves broken dreams*

*Leaves  
Golden brown falling  
Succulence of youth a breath  
In time crunch to mulch*

*Curlew  
Mournful nocturne cry  
Harbinger of eternal night  
Goodbye my love, adieu*

# CHAPTER 1: JOURNEYING FORWARD... TIME FRAMES



At the time of my separation, a very kind friend informed me it would probably take about two years for all the initial intense pain to subside, and possibly about five years all up to work through the grief.

I stared back at her in disbelief. "You mean I'm going to keep suffering this intense pain for maybe another two years!"

Two years – that was an eternity from where I was standing, and five years – totally unimaginable. But I did get there – one day at a time.

## **For a season not a lifetime**

When confronted with difficult and dark times, the future can indeed seem an eternity away. The reality is that the majority of people who go through any of the four D's of Divorce, Death, Disease or Disaster will find themselves confused and immersed in intense emotional pain. From experience, I now know that the good news is that the emotional and spiritual pain need only be for a season – not a lifetime. Just as it says in Ecclesiastes:

*There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under heaven:  
time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
A time to kill and a time to heal,  
A time to tear down and a time to build,  
A time to weep and a time to laugh,  
A time to mourn and a time to dance  
Ecclesiastes 3:1-4*

## **The good, the bad and the ugly**

I love my garden but I have learnt not to become too attached to any of my plants as there is a regular cycle of life and death in the garden. Some plants last for only a few months and others for years, but no plant is forever. A garden is a living thing, constantly changing and evolving. New plants are brought in to replace those that have served their season and died. Just as there are seasons for all the living things in my garden, there are seasons in life.

The good and the bad; the sad and the glad; all will have a valid place in our lives. I think our society is somewhat conditioned to expect happiness all of the time. That is just not realistic. All the seasons that come into our lives can positively enhance us as individuals. Even though they may not seem so at the time, sad and painful events should not be viewed as totally futile.

Since we live in a world with expectations of instant gratification for our needs, realising there are seasons in life that can be immensely helpful and give some context to our circumstances. Our modern world is not a very patient one. If something doesn't download from the Internet in seconds we get annoyed. We have become conditioned to expect timeframes of seconds and minutes. Anything longer can be almost unbearable.

When we feel hungry, we want to eat immediately. Snacking is an integral part of culture and a whole industry has emerged to gratify that desire. For me as a child, that way of eating was unheard of. We did not have the snack foods available to us today. If we were hungry close to dinner time we were told to wait. It might have seemed hard and felt like an eternity, but we survived and learnt some self-control.

There are definitely times in our lives when what we have planted needs to die and what we have built needs to be torn down. The crops of disgruntled disease ridden plants and the rickety buildings with shaky foundations laid by unwise decisions all need to go before something of lasting beauty can be planted or built in their place.

Re-construction does not happen overnight. First the old building needs to be removed and new foundations laid out. The harvest of a new crop of dreams comes months after soil preparation and the sowing of good decisions.

## **Going into exile**

If you read through the Old Testament, you will appreciate that the Children of Israel went through many periods of hardship and misery in their journey with God. Surprisingly, I found this to be of great



comfort in the time of my distress at the Big D crossroads. Their periods of distress and exile always had a predetermined time frame which had been revealed beforehand to them by God, often through one of the prophets.

The Israelites were always sent away into exile with hope, and the promise of restoration back to the Promised Land. They entered into Egypt at the time of Joseph knowing it would be for 400 years; the time of wandering in the desert before entering the Promised Land was a pre-determined 40 years; they were sent into Babylon with the promise of restoration after 70 years.

Neither did God abandon them because He promised to go with them into exile and even to prosper them while they were there (See Jeremiah 29). At the end of the prescribed timeframe in exile, God always called His children back home to Jerusalem.

*"When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. Jeremiah 29:10-14*

Although my arrival at the Big D crossroads heralded my time in exile away from the normalcy of life, I came to realise that there was hope for the future. Even though it didn't feel like it at the time, God had promised me just as He did the children of Israel. One day I would leave the darkness and return to a normal life.

## **Beginning the journey**

The pathway into the future is a journey. It may not be an easy journey, but nonetheless it's a journey that needs to be made. The words of Psalm 23 became a source of great comfort to me on my journey into the darkness and beyond.

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,  
And he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil;  
My cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me  
All the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.  
Psalm 23:1-6*

So remember, while the journey may begin in darkness in the valley of the shadow of death, the destination lies in the sunshine surrounded by friends celebrating at a banqueting table. However, you won't arrive there without making a decision to begin the journey.

Every journey, even the journey of a thousand miles, begins with the first footstep. Your journey time frames may be different to mine - but there will be a time frame for the journey away from where you are now that leads to a better place. The future may seem distant and the journey long, but the longest journey is the one never started.

Perhaps you are languishing in 'the valley of the shadow of death?' But as David found, there is comfort in God's promise of a banquet 'in the presence of our enemies.' I found it amazing to realise that God was actually planning a banquet for me at the end of my trials. He was not just planning to hand me a chocolate bar with a bottle of water at the end of my marathon. He was actually planning a full blown banquet with multiple courses – a real big shin dig, just for me!

The preparations were not visible to me while I was struggling in the darkness, but that particular promise for my future was a light in my darkness which I held on to. What's more, God was true to His word – but more about that later.

Fear is the greatest deterrent to beginning the journey. Fearing the things that might bring us harm will freeze us into inaction. Fear is the real enemy, not the darkness or what lies there. Fear is the greatest weapon wielded by the Prince of Darkness and when we give in to it, it dulls our spiritual senses and holds us captive. It was fear that led Adam and Eve to deny the truth of God's love for them and believe the lies of the serpent.

As David writes above, we do not journey into the darkness on our own. The creator of the universe goes with us and wields a power stronger than anything we might face in the darkness. He carries a big stick – his rod and his staff are there to defend us.

## **Embracing pain**

Most people hope and pray for smooth and pain free journeys through life, but the reality is much different. Another interesting observation about Western society is its aversion to suffering pain. We Westerners tend to immediately equate the sensation of pain with destruction and harm and want it removed instantly from our lives. I once underwent surgery for a condition that has caused me quite debilitating pain for a couple of years prior. The surgery itself also caused severe pain, but it was good pain. I knew that the surgeon had to inflict pain so that healing could take place in my body. The post-operative pain lasted a couple of months, but by the time healing was complete all my pain had dissipated and I was cured. At long last I could wake up to a day without pain.

Journeying through the pain and confronting my own anger at the crossroads was a process – and it took time. As a result of the dark times in my life I could have decided to hang on to my emotional pain and anger, not to let go but to live with it. That's the thing about chronic pain – you can learn to live with it. Pain may be controllable but it remains, the sufferer in bondage. Before my surgery I had learned to tolerate the pain every day until I realised I could be free from it. The catch was that in order to be free I had to undergo surgery. I had to suffer more pain, but only for a season.

Alternatively, I could have decided to do nothing and continued to moan on about my pain to my long suffering friends, inviting their sympathy and attention. I would have been not just in pain, but a pain to all those around by refusing to take control of my circumstances, confront my pain and deal with it once and for all.

## **Returning to the Promise Land**

Looking back from where I am now, my friend was spot on with the time frames for the emotional pain resulting from my marital breakdown. With hindsight I can definitely confirm that there needed to be a season for my pain. But pain only needs to be endured for a season. We are not meant to make it our long term home. Babylon, like the wilderness, was not the Promised Land for the Children of Israel. It was just a place of sojourn.

*Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians!  
Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it.  
Send it out to the ends of the earth;  
Say, "The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob."  
They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts;  
He made water flow for them from the rock;  
He split the rock and water gushed out.  
Isaiah 48:20-21*

At the end of the season, when it's time to leave the pain behind, we need to heed God's call to return to normalcy. We need to flee Babylon and its bondage and run back to The Promised Land. That is the time for letting go and no longer looking into the rear vision mirror back at the path you have travelled. You would think that after 70 years of slavery the Israelites would not need to be commanded to leave, but not so. Some made a very comfortable life there in Babylon and did not want to leave. Perverse as it seems, we can make suffering our home and not want to leave it when its allotted time frame has passed.

## **Choosing wellness**

On a journey into Jerusalem (John 5:5-10), Jesus saw a man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years lying near a healing pool at the Sheep Gate and asked him; "Do you want to get well?" Why would Jesus ask the man that question? You would think it would be obvious – the man wanted to be healed. The man's reply is very interesting. "Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in someone else goes down ahead of me."

Does Jesus carry him to the pool or walk over to him and lay hands on him? No he just says: "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."

At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

Living complacently within a broken relationship, with a broken heart or walking burdened down with depression is no different. That is fine if there is absolutely no other choice, but it is still living in bondage. The Spirit of God calls us to live in freedom and to experience life to the max. Making the choice to get better is always ours. Just like the man at the Sheep Gate, we need to take action and get up and walk into our healing, rather than just lying beside pools of hope and waiting for it to happen.

The best thing I have discovered about being in pain is recovering from it, because only when we are finally free from pain do we really appreciate the life which most people take for granted.

God may have promised on the billboard at the Big D crossroads to prosper you and not to harm you, but bear in mind that does not necessarily mean the road ahead will be pain free. Pain is a necessary adjunct to the healing process.

## **The future starts now**

Life can start now and not just be wishful thinking for the future. The future can be an elusive idea but reality is now and that is where we need to begin to focus our thinking – not on the past or tomorrow, but on today. Whatever we make of the now will be our future. The choices we make NOW shape our tomorrows. Dwelling in the past or wishing for the future to arrive in a hurry avoids facing the choices that need to be made NOW!

We arrive every day at the destination of the choices made yesterday. Jesus focused his disciples thinking in exactly the same way when they expressed concerns about their futures:

*Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.  
Each day has enough trouble of its own.  
Matthew 6:34*

## **So let the journey begin**

At the Big D crossroads life may seem hopeless. Unfortunately that will continue to be the case the longer one tarries aimlessly at the crossroads, in the darkness. So make the choices that need to be made today in order to leave the Big D crossroads behind. Take a step forward, and continue to do that every day, and soon enough the Big D crossroads will be a blurry image in the rear vision mirror.

My journey through divorce and depression began in a place of despair and destruction, but this became a voyage of discovery. In the midst of my despair, I could begin to dream again.

I realised I could go to the high places and that I was not alone. God was there.

*Though the fig tree does not bud  
And there are no grapes on the vines,  
Though the olive crop fails  
And the fields produce no food,  
Though there are no sheep in the pen  
And no cattle in the stalls,  
Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,  
I will be joyful in God my Saviour.  
The Sovereign Lord is my strength;  
He makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
He enables me to go on the heights.  
habakkuk 3:17-19*

## Hospital Sojourn - Odious Room 1024

*Pain - sharp, angular and metallic  
Impaled vigil from your crucifix you keep.  
My hindered repose upon this rack  
Torments all pretence of calming sleep.*

*Again - starch light floods the room.  
Nightly apparitions that squeeze,  
Prod and anguished cries provoke. Freeze.  
Retreat. Leave me in my darkling tomb.*

*Morphia - demanded needle prick relief  
Brings all schisms swimming to the dull roar  
Of breakers rasping on a distant shore.  
My shroud shelter swallows all far beneath.*

*Awake - the pulsating maelstrom returns.  
Angel peace has fled, her delinquent child remains.  
Curdled remnants in my knotted stomach churn.  
In time she'll leave, but not before I heave again.*

*Confined - far from heaven in purgatory's hell.  
The sneering scalpel has smiled in sardonic jest,  
Transgressions expiate, purged from this mortal shell.  
Searing comes before healing, so stay at our behest.*

*Noise - erodes struggling solitude, belittles peace, irritates.  
Nurses chatter. Tea cups clatter. Wakeup! It's time to eat.  
Urine seeping, taped infusions constant clogged beeping,  
Metal on bone, relentless pounding inside my head reverberates.*

*A visitor - a friendly face those stern autotrons replace.  
Tender care - It's all lies, hold my hand while I cry.  
Your warmth the steely air a temporary displace.  
Please help me leave this withering room before I die.*

*Escape - three days in the tomb, the cocoon cracks.  
No rest had I - Immense my wickedness must be!  
Time to spread my wounded wings and flee.  
Tell the Inquisition, I'm never coming back!*

*Home - burst with joy through heaven's door,  
Tears of delight effused in this sanctum of light.  
Enfolded into loving arms, all fears shrink and shed the night.  
Embraced by angel peace once more, my wounded wings will restore.*

# CHAPTER 2: CONFRONTING THE TRUTH... REALITY BITES





## **“Your marriage is over”**

Those words stunned me, halted me in my tracks. How could my friend say that? Those words – they were so definite – so final, cutting loose all hope. As harsh as those words seemed at the time, those were the wisest words my friend could have uttered. They were in fact the very words I needed to hear. After separating from my husband, I had floundered emotionally for months and was struggling to come to terms with my new reality. My friend had correctly summed up my situation, and what’s more had the courage to hold it up to my face.

Separation had left me in a kind of no man’s land – still holding onto the past, bogged down in the present and confused about the future. My friend spoke the truth. Even though deep inside I knew it was the truth, I had not really wanted to face the possibility that my marriage was indeed over. Yet I needed to face that truth in order to find a path forward.

## **Breaking point**

Nobody gets married with the hope that one day their marriage will end in separation or divorce, myself included. I was just like any other starry eyed bride who imagined a wonderful and long life together with her new husband – ‘until death do us part’ – that’s what I had been promised, not until the ink dries on the divorce papers.

There is no good time for separation or divorce. Mostly it’s not planned. In fact the timing of a marital separation often takes people by surprise. I know that was the case for me. Interestingly, the fact it occurs comes as no surprise to those who having been standing on the sidelines observing the relationship. Even if we are blind to it, the dysfunction is usually obvious to those close to us.

While driving home one evening a stone thrown up by a passing car chipped the windscreen of my car. The next day, my (current) husband arranged to have the chip repaired. I queried him regarding the necessity of having such a small chip repaired immediately. He

explained that if we had done nothing, delayed the repair and simply ignored the chip, over time fine spidery cracks would have started to radiate from the point of impact. That small stone chip was in fact an accident waiting to happen as eventually the whole windscreen would craze and probably given way quite suddenly.

All relationships throw up stones of conflict which, if not addressed and resolved, can eventually undermine the relationship and bring about dysfunction and disintegration.

While the breaking point may appear to arrive suddenly, for many separating couples I suspect the marriage was in fact over long before one of the partners finally decided to walk out the door or call it quits. The seeds of marital separation and divorce are often sown many years before the actual break point.

Our ends lie in our beginnings, often in things which at the time may seem insignificant. Over time these seemingly insignificant things accumulate. These are the silent contagions poisoning the relationship. The things not said. The things not done. The hurts not discussed but buried down deep and the issues ignored and brushed under the carpet. Whatever they might be, the inciting causes will always be there if we look hard enough.

## **Smashed beyond repair**

One night I was awoken by a loud smashing sound in the hallway downstairs. I thought that someone was trying to break in and furtively went to the top of stairs and turned on the light. To my surprise, there was no break in, but lying on the tiles in the hallway, in a multitude of splintered shards, was our hallway mirror. The hanging string had finally let go of its last fibrous strand at two o'clock in the morning. My husband had treasured that mirror for years but now it was no longer an heirloom – it was trash. I put on my slippers, got the dustpan and broom out of the hallway cupboard and cleaned up the mess.

We subsequently replaced the hallway mirror, but this time secured it with metal hanging wire instead of string.

Just like the crash of that mirror in the middle of the night, the demise of my marriage came as a shock. The string holding it together had finally broken and there was no putting the pieces back together.

Like the mirror that was once a family heirloom, all my hopes and dreams were shattered into shards which refused to be pieced back together.

Mirrors, like broken marriages, cannot always be glued back together. What is smashed beyond repair cannot be pieced back together. It needs replacing with something new. My marriage, as it was, needed to be over before I could find a way forward. I needed to face that fact and stop cutting my hands on the shards of all the years that had been my marriage.

Not all marital separations will culminate in divorce. However, in order to go forward, it is important to realise that there can be no going back. Re-hanging our replacement hallway mirror on string would have eventually led to another crash in the middle of the night!

To return to a marriage after a separation without instigating any changes will only lead to more of the same marital dysfunction. Just as we needed to change our approach to hanging mirrors in order to avert any more disasters in the middle of the night, re-entering a marriage relationship requires a new approach to prevent a re-visit to the Big D crossroads at some stage in the future.

Without embracing change, it's just like a dog returning to its own vomit (*2 Peter 2:22*).

I was grateful to my friend whose words halted me in my tracks with her words. She was right, I needed to embrace change. My marriage was indeed over and I needed to stop wallowing in self-pity and make an attitude adjustment. There was no turning back or even just standing still or stagnating. Even though the way ahead did not seem clear at the time, I knew I needed to travel forward on a different path. I had choices to make on how to hang my future!

## **Reality bites**

*"For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."  
Matthew 12:34*

It is in our hearts and minds where our motives are grounded, and that's where the seeds of our dysfunction take root. Just like an apple with a rotten core, things can appear normal to those around us who look only on the outside. We may hide our dysfunction and warped motives from others and put on a good face in order to keep up the pretence with our church and social circles, but God is not fooled.

Our inner dysfunction is always obvious to God. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at.

*Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.  
1 Sam 16:7*

We do well to remember that God is never content to allow the unresolved dark and twisted things in our lives to remain hidden and festering. There inevitably comes a time of reckoning somewhere and at some time down the track, often unexpectedly. He will cause us to stare them in the face and be accountable for our life choices. That will not be our best day. Just as lancing an abscess is a painful necessity, so is dealing with unresolved anger and bitterness. Without the pain of the scalpel slash, health does not return to the body.

Reality might bite with sharp teeth but the bite from the monster under the carpet where we have swept the things too hard to face is ultimately more destructive. It is like comparing a mosquito bite to a shark bite. One might itch and hurt for a few days but the other can kill you.

## **Facing my own reality**

I needed to face the fact my marriage was over and deal with the consequences instead of hiding in a hole of self-pity. The spidery cracks of dysfunction had been unaddressed for years before the windscreen through which I viewed reality finally smashed.

Couples can flounder within a failing marriage for years, continually hurting one another with neither partner actually willing to make the decision to address the reality of the situation. Continually afraid to call it for what it is - a failing and dysfunctional marriage. Ignoring the issues just causes more pain in the long run for everyone and it is surprising just how much pain people are willing to tolerate before deciding to leave a relationship, even an abusive marriage.

In such a situation, partners can disengage emotionally and spiritually from one another and leave their relationship long before physically leaving. In a sense, divorce initially happens on an emotional and spiritual level long before physical divorce actually occurs.

There was a time, when my own children were young, I did consider the possibility of leaving my marriage. Things had become very strained between myself and my husband. I was immensely unhappy and frustrated. He worked long hours, was hardly ever home and veered away from discussing any of my concerns. I felt like I was wandering alone in a desert.

I remember thinking, "Where on earth would I go?" There was nowhere at the time that seemed reasonable to me. We lived on a very strict budget so I eventually considered that being on my own with young children was too hard. I virtually considered myself a single parent anyway, as my husband was rarely home. So inwardly I put aside all thoughts of leaving and re-committed myself to enduring my marriage for better or for worse. That's what I had pledged on my wedding day and deep down I believed it was the godly thing to do. Besides, I believed Christians shouldn't get divorced!

Looking back, I believe my own marriage began to stagnate a long time before the break point came. In a way I suspect my former husband had actually left our marriage long before he walked out the door for the last time. There was a time when our initial problems surfaced, many years before, when I believe we should have confronted the issues between us and not buried them in order for them to re-surface years down the track.

It is this type of silent divorce situation that Paul may have been addressing within the Ephesian church when he wrote to them:

*Husbands love your wives ... Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*  
*Ephesians 5:27, 33*

Even though the decision that the marriage is over has been reached, leaving the family home for one partner can be difficult, especially if there are financial constraints. This is often the case where there are young children in the family and neither partner has the financial support to live elsewhere. I know of couples in this position who have separated but continued to live in the same house. Not an easy solution if there is ongoing tension.

Staying together for the sake of the children is often voiced as a reason for couples delaying divorce but I can't helping thinking couples are better off sometimes by making a clean break for the sake of the children. Speaking from personal experience from my own childhood, children do tune into the tension between their parents. Continual fighting between parents is disturbing and does not create pleasant memories. My own parents' marriage deteriorated after my father became bedridden through a permanent debilitating illness. As a result of his illness, he became extremely demanding of my mother and emotionally abusive of both her and myself as the eldest child. It is sad, but true, that my life at home became peaceful once he was finally moved to a nursing home for full-time care.

## **Confronting abuse**

If one marriage partner is constantly inflicting spiritual, emotional and physical harm on the other, that is a dysfunctional marriage. Essentially, it is a form of spousal abuse or bullying.

Unfortunately, bullying is not confined to marriages but can occur in the workplace or school, within churches, between neighbours and anywhere people interact. A person who is a victim of spousal abuse is probably being bullied within their other relationships as well. Many might blame the bully or abuser entirely for the situation

but the victim is just as much at fault by refusing to confront the bullying and not making a decision to change the situation. Victims may continue to choose to remain as victims for many reasons. Being seen as a victim often invites attention from others. Such attention seeking behaviour is in itself abnormal. Both the bully and the victim need help as both are dysfunctional.

Living or working with a bully is living in bondage to a monster. Ending the relationship can seem hard but staying can be even harder, if not fatal. The sad thing is that the abused person often does and says nothing in spite of the abuse and permits the abuse to continue unabated, sometimes for years. Bullies or abusers seldom change in spite of their continual promises to do so. Such promises are part of the manipulation techniques employed to control their victims and keep them captive. It can take tremendous courage and willpower for the abused person to break free.

Leaving an abusive spouse or situation is ultimately helpful for all involved, the abuser and the abused person. Leaving does not deny love for the other, it just sets up boundaries of safety for everyone. Love can still survive at a distance. It may not be the intimate love of marriage or of close friendship but it can still be a love that respects the other person. Sometimes the act of leaving might even shock the other into facing the reality of their behaviour.

All dysfunctional marriages will involve some degree of abuse of one partner by the other. Sometimes it is subtle and not readily obvious to those observing the marriage. If the marriage is to survive both partners need help. Both of the partners, the abuser and the abused, have allowed the dysfunctional relationship to continue in a manner contrary to the will of God for each of them. The blame for the breakdown lies not with one individual but with each of them.

Where there is true love, there is freedom, not bondage. If the love offered by your partner is not a safe place in which to live, you are in bondage.

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.  
2 Corinthians 3:17*

Choosing to leave an abusive marriage or situation should not be difficult. Yet many do struggle with that decision, especially believers who are encouraged to 'turn the other cheek'. Yet how is it an expression of love to your partner to continue to remain in a situation where they can freely inflict harm on you? That is neither loving to yourself nor the other person. Staying actually encourages the abuse, not deters it.

It is not love, but guilt and fear that are the chains that hold people in bondage to each other. Fear is always the basis of the power which a bully has over their victim.

When an abused person confronts their own inner fears they neutralise the power of the bully or the abuser. For myself, my fear lay in being afraid of God and the fear of doing the wrong thing; of being disobedient; of being not loved if I made a mistake. The root of my own fear lay in my poor self-esteem and inability to see any worth in myself regardless of what I did or what people thought of me. I longed for the approval of others, especially my former husband. So when my former husband said jump, I jumped. When he was no longer there to say jump anymore or give me approval for jumping, I was lost and confused.

## **Conflict of faith**

In some church circles believers are actively encouraged from the pulpit not to leave their spouses but to stay on and fight for the marriage at all costs. The mantra proclaimed is that believers are not meant to divorce and that their faith in God will prevail, ultimately restoring their erring spouse back to them. I have heard such sermons myself and read books encouraging the same attitude. As a consequence of buying into that way of thinking, guilt is heaped on the shoulders of those who dare to think differently.

I struggled with giving up on reconciliation for own marriage for many months but as a consequence found myself weighed down by immense emotional and spiritual distress. My own reality was not meshing with what I had heard preached. My husband did not come back and did not want to come back. The pieces were not coming



back together as they were supposed to and in fact I was the one falling to pieces!

I believe the teaching to stay on in a dysfunctional marriage at all costs to be misguided and ultimately harmful. My own marriage had for many years been an emotional desert, devoid of any warmth or affection. I had struggled for years to live in it and almost ended up dying in it.

By all means do your utmost to seek reconciliation, but if the other person refuses to discuss anything with you or even embrace change, where are you left to go? I have come to understand that God is full of compassion for those struggling with relational dysfunction and I firmly believe there comes a time when we are free to shake the dust off our sandals and move on to wherever that may be! Consider these words spoken by Jesus to His disciples.

*And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you  
shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them.  
Mark 6:11*

I do not believe we earn any spiritual brownie points with God for choosing to be a victim and suffer in an abusive relationship without making decisions to contain or confront the abuse. I believe God gives us permission to find a way out. We are encouraged again and again in the Bible to be warriors and to stand against evil. We are to stand firm and uphold the truth.

*Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes you may be able to  
stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm ...  
Ephesians 6:13-14*

## **The point of no return**

If the break point has come for your marriage, don't shy away from it. As painful as it is, it is not necessarily the end. Stand firm and embrace the truth of it. It will bring peace of mind and release from some of the tension that comes from living in a strained relationship. If the relationship really is over, then set about working towards the

terms of the separation or divorce. The longer it is put off, the harder it becomes for everyone, especially if children are involved.

Alternatively, for some, the break point may lead into a period of separation and a realisation that reconciliation is potentially possible down the track. These are not issues I intend to address in this book as there are plenty of good books available to offer guidance to those wishing to improve or restore their marriage relationship.

Making the decision to finally leave or to reach the conclusion that the marriage is definitely over is never easy. It is probably easier if one partner just walks out the door announcing that they are never coming back, or if your partner has already left the marriage emotionally long before physically leaving.

However, it is important to make the break clean and decisive, leaving your partner in no doubt what is happening between you. Some partners might be able to sit down and have a frank discussion, but for others it can be very messy. That is where the support of loving friends who can give us wise counsel is invaluable.

Part of the reason I initially struggled with accepting the finality of my marriage, and that reconciliation was not going to be possible, was because the indicators were not clear to me. After my relationship with my former husband broke down, he just moved on with his life and refused to discuss anything about our relationship with me. In fact he practically refused to talk to me at all, even though we were still living in the same house.

My internal struggle took a great toll on me and sent me over the emotional precipice down into suicidal depression. The way my own marriage disintegrated left me feeling very confused about the future and the way ahead was unclear. I clung onto the fading hope we could sort things out. Looking back now, I should have realised that my former husband's actions were shouting out loud and clear to me that he considered it was over between us. His actions and silence verbalised what his words could not. I should have picked up on the signals but didn't. It took the courage of a close friend to knock some sense into me by re-focusing my reality.

## **Get yourself free**

In the words of a song by Paul Simon, "There may be sixty ways to leave your lover, Jack may hop out the back, Lee might drop off the keys in order to get free", but unless the move is clearly announced, the signals for the final break may not be recognised by the other partner.

As hard as it was at the time, finally establishing a clean break between the past and the future - being married versus a marriage that was clearly over - was liberating. Once it was established, I could begin to face the other truths about my new reality.

If you are struggling with the decision of how to make the final break clear to your spouse, seek the counsel of friends and then do what you need to do, sooner rather than later. Ultimately it will be for the best of all involved. Dragging it out only drags out the pain. Whatever method you chose to inform your partner of your intentions, try to do it in ways that are respectful to you both. If you need to have someone present at the time of discussions choose someone you can both trust.

If open discussion with your partner is not possible or not safe, then choose someone to relay the message on your behalf. Whatever you choose to do, leave your partner without any doubt that as far as you are concerned, the marriage is over and there is no going back.

## **Accepting it's over**

Accepting the truth about your marriage and that it is over is not an easy thing to do. For me, after twenty years of marriage, two children and forging a career together with my former husband it was exceptionally hard. I had given it my all, but it was over. It was finished.

It was an immensely painful realisation. Painful, because all points of reference on my emotional landscape were ripped out and all the navigation lights had been turned off. Guilt followed by a crushing sense of failure rushed in.

I personally find it hard to accept failure. When I commit to something, I give it my all. I believe if you give of your best you should expect the best in return. So when my marriage ended, I fell hard.

Accepting the failure of a relationship does not deny the possibility of reconciliation, but owns the reality that the marriage was dysfunctional and not the marriage that God had intended for you. In order to move on it is necessary to be realistic about where you have arrived and why you are there. Embracing the truth and not running from it is a powerful tool for releasing God's healing power into your life.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. As much as we might cry out to God for help and freedom from pain, while we deny the truth about our circumstances healing will elude us – not because God is mean but because He is allowing us to feed off the fruits of our own choices. We hold the key to our own healing. Owning the truth about who and where we are, is the master key that opens the door to a new life.

*The truth will set you free.  
John 8:32*

Owning the truth is liberating because it turns dead ends into new beginnings. Moving on means allowing reality to bite rather than avoiding it. Each bite of truth will remove the past from your future. Your past life and its pain has no place in your future if you want to the sun to shine again. How do you eat an elephant? One spoonful at time!

How do you deal with the pain of the past? One reality bite at time! These were my reality bites of truth:

1. My marriage was indeed over. There was no going back. My ex-husband definitely was not coming back.
2. I needed to let go of the past. Accept that the shattered pieces of the life I had known could not be reunited and I needed to toss them aside and forget them.

3. I needed to change. More of the same way of behaving would only lead to the same outcomes.
4. My future could not be based on the dreams of my past. I had to dream new dreams.
5. The separation and divorce was not all my spouses fault. I had to face my role. Look at the defects in my character.
6. I needed to acknowledge my own poor choices and learn from them in order to make better choices for the future.
7. My choices were my choices. I needed to take responsibility for the consequences of my decisions. I needed to embrace the freedom I had to make my own decisions and make different choices.
8. There was hope for a better future. In fact, an amazing opportunity was opening up before me.
9. I felt overwhelmed by my circumstances. Facing change is a daunting task. Yet, in spite of the pain, I knew God was wanting to bring about change in my life and it was a good thing.
10. I felt lonely but I was not alone. God was there – right beside me.

*If the Lord delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm;  
though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand.  
Psalm 37:23-24*

## Sideways into Silence

*That's right - walk away!  
Leave me here, in my arbour of gnarled and strangling tears  
where the stinging rain will only barb the pain.  
That's right - just another repeat performance!  
Leave in cowardly retreat, slide through that door.  
Closed - slamming, slinking sideways into silence.*

*Its bang resounds again in hollowed torment  
Cored out by gushing fears that come from knowing  
Perhaps this time you're really going.  
I'll be left hanging here - before falling crumpled to the floor  
sinking slowly in a soulless trance  
drowning in the silence swirling round.*

*Pause - don't let hope wane! Don't blight it with remorse!  
Take time to recall how across the years our passions refrain  
So keenly keyed in delight, left us sated and replete.  
How after ecstasies' repast in arms entwined we laid  
Enraptured, reeling, rolling  
Completely content in our post coital bliss.*

*Consider this - if we attend to loves arrears, wasted moments can be reclaimed.  
We can mend the rift and stem the drift.  
Hope is not suspended if once again to loves cause  
we're surrendered - the world restores.  
Come - take my hand and remembrance of this strident fracture forever cease  
Let it be encased in silence and sealed with my caress.*

*We'll stroll through breeze thrilled groves  
Plush with verdant velvet and dripping petals dappled in vermillion.  
Under lofty bough pavilions, we'll lie down – embrace  
and in the enchantment of that place attuned in perfect counterpoint,  
Discordant tears will be rephrased -  
Calando Diminuendo!*

*With our ardour flames rekindled, splash splendour into evening's passion.  
Under the luminescence of a harvest moon  
we'll be two soul mates swooning to the thunderous applause  
crashing down on amore's shores.  
All pretence of dissonance will be firmly thrust asunder  
and silence will be no more.*

CHAPTER 3:  
LAYING DOWN  
THE STONES...  
COMPASSION NOT  
CONDEMNATION



## **God hates divorce**

*Malachi 2:16*

Yes - It's true, God really does hate divorce. But before you moan and curl up into a foetal ball, let me explain. It's not as it might first appear. While I fervently believe this quote from the Old Testament is the truth, I also believe in reading passages in context of the whole biblical message. I certainly haven't seen any small print attached to that verse that says, "Gods hates divorce so if you do divorce He is going to strike you dead with a lightning bolt from heaven!"

On the contrary, I know a God who is full of compassion and who stood right next me in the middle of my pain and confusion. I see no grounds in the Bible for using this verse as a basis for the harsh judgement and criticism that can be meted out by the church and others against those who are going through separation or divorce. If anything, I believe this verse to be the starting place for God's everlasting love for humanity. All relational breakdown is painful. Even for God.

## **God is a divorced person**

Consider Genesis chapter 3 in the Old Testament and the events that unfolded in the Garden of Eden. Perhaps you haven't realised it yet, but the entire Gospel message is centred on God's solution for the greatest divorce that has ever happened in the history of mankind. Right there, on centre stage in the Garden of Eden, the breakdown of the relationship between God and His ultimate creation – Man. Adam and Eve believed the words of the serpent, squandered God's love for them and played the harlot with the truth.

Consider the pain in God's heart when He called for them that fateful evening in the Garden and no response came. Adam and Eve were created for intimacy with each other and with God. Every day they walked together in the cool of the evenings, openly sharing of themselves and their dreams and desires. Theirs was a perfect relationship until one day it was destroyed with the bite of a lie. Just



as lightning splits the sky asunder, so they were torn apart from one another. Intimacy was transformed by fear and guilt into estrangement.

Adam and Eve were sent into exile, out into the world of thistles and thorns, as a direct consequence of their actions. God remained behind in the Garden. All relational breakdown has consequences; painful consequences - prickles and thistles! Thankfully that is not where the story for humanity ended. God's ultimate desire for his relationship with man was for reconciliation and restoration, not condemnation. The same applies to us. We do not have to be afraid of standing in the light of God's condemnation because our marriage has failed. We only draw God's condemnation upon ourselves when we refuse His offer of reconciliation.

## **Facing the condemnation of others**

Sadly, when a relationship fails it often has a domino effect on our other relationships well. Families and friends can tend to take sides, blaming others for what has occurred. Children might side one parent against the other parent. Unfortunately this is a fact of life and compounds the pain one is already experiencing. This was certainly the case for me when my own marriage failed, and at the time of writing some of those once close family relationships still remain fractured.

In truth, rarely is one person totally blameless for what has transpired. Continually blaming someone else distracts us from addressing an important cause of our own dysfunctional circumstances. That cause of course would be ourselves.

It is not easy to look at the faults within ourselves. For most of us, facing those issues can generate overwhelming self-condemnation, accompanied by guilt and a heightened sense of failure. Those emotions can be very crushing and debilitating. Self-condemnation can be more destructive than the condemnation we face from others. The good news is that we do not need to stand condemned before God for the wrong we have done.

*"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."*

*John 3:17-18*

## **Accountable but not condemned**

We may be free from condemnation but we are still accountable for our choices. There are still consequences for actions. Consider this encounter with Jesus in the New Testament:

*"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery and made her stand before the group and said to Jesus: "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"*

*The Pharisees were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.*

*At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."*

*John 8:3-11.*

Unfortunately there is a catch to our freedom from condemnation by God! While we are not condemned we are expected to take responsibility for our actions and decisions.

By choosing not to condemn the woman Jesus did not condone her actions. He was actually in agreement with the Pharisees that her behaviour was sinful and deserved condemnation – "Has no-one condemned you?"

Instead of casting a stone at her he gave her a chance of a new beginning. He let her go free. However, it was freedom with a difference – "Go now and leave your life of sin"! To truly own her freedom from condemnation she had to acknowledge her sin and make a decision to lead a different life.

Divorce is always wrong. Relational breakdown is always wrong. Recognising that is the first step to owning the freedom we have been given by God to make better choices for our lives. We need not

live under self condemnation or the condemnation of others. There is no place for guilt in our relationship with God, once we have worked through repentance. Once we have faced our wrongful actions, made restitution and made a decision to change, the slate is wiped clean.

## **Biblical divorce**

While divorced people might be among some of the most hurting people, in my experience, non-divorced believers can be amongst some of the most judgemental.

When I was seeking to engage a pastor to conduct my marriage to my second husband I was confronted with the requirement of having to establish that I had been biblically divorced before permission would be granted. Such a request stunned and horrified me.

The exact interpretation of a biblical divorce may depend on which denomination you belong to but basically it occurs where one spouse is deserted by the other which includes unfaithfulness by the offending partner. The deserted partner is then presumed the innocent party and only that partner is then free to marry again within the church.

Trying to view all cases of divorce from such a simplistic standpoint is just not realistic. Nor do I believe it is just. From where I stand, divorce for whatever the reason or cause is always wrong, but rarely is it a one sided affair with one party totally innocent and the other totally at fault. I acknowledge that pastors still reserve the right to choose which couples for whom they are willing to conduct marriages ceremonies, but still, I think there does need to be a more compassionate approach because divorced people are hurting people.

Rather than trying to apportion blame before making a decision to marry someone, it is probably more constructive for all concerned if pastors seek to ascertain whether or not couples who seek re-marriage have addressed and repented of the issues that led to their former dysfunctional marriage in the first place.

Disintegration of a relationship can happen over years. Apportioning blame gets hard because over the years both parties have said and done things that contributed to the dysfunction. Adultery and desertion do not necessarily occur in a vacuum, but can be symptomatic of a dysfunctional marriage. The partner who finally leaves may have been left with no other option. Adultery can be a result of temptation after one partner has lived for years in a loveless marriage.

It's true my former husband did not want to continue our marriage and left without giving reconciliation a second thought, but that did not necessarily absolve me of my role in the breakdown of the marriage. The need to apportion blame springs from a legalistic mindset and demonstrates a lack of compassion and understanding of divorcing couples, and the issues they are struggling through. Apportioning blame is counterproductive as it further intensifies the immense feelings of guilt which already exist because of the failure of the marriage in the first place. Consequently I was totally unwilling to comply with the request to have my divorce put under the biblical divorce microscope.

The repugnant thing about legalism is that it takes the freedoms we have in Christ and turns them into a rule book. That is the very attitude that Jesus criticised the Pharisees for having with regards to the Laws of Moses. The Pharisees added their legalistic interpretation to the Law, which brought bondage instead of freedom to the lives of the Jewish people. Every aspect of their lives, including the grounds for divorce were covered by the law. Because of their legalistic mindset, the Pharisees were constantly trying to trip up Jesus on His interpretation of the law.

*Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' ? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"*

*Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his*

*wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”*  
*Matthew 19:3-9*

As you can see, Jesus was not in favour of divorce, but he did willingly acknowledge it was an unfortunate reality of life. Was Jesus advocating the concept of biblical divorce? Jesus does seem to be saying here that marital unfaithfulness is the only basis of divorce, so what is the definition of marital unfaithfulness? Jesus had something interesting to say about this which went far beyond the definition arrived at by the Pharisees!

*You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*  
*Matthew 5:27-29*

Jesus essentially rebuffed the Pharisees challenge here with the same argument he used when they brought to him the woman caught in adultery;

*"Let him who is without sin cast the first stone!"*  
*John 8:2-11*

My understanding here is that Jesus was taking a holistic approach to the breakdown of relationships and pin-pointed the root of the cause of relational dysfunction. We stray in our hearts and minds before we stray with our mouths and our feet. Anything that breaks the marital contract, including sinful thoughts, can be classed as marital unfaithfulness. On that basis then, it is likely no-one is innocent of ever breaking their marriage contract at some time during their married life.

It is not always easy to look on the inside of someone's heart and judge their motives and reasons. Rules are good at dealing with actions but seldom helpful when it comes to discerning motives.

*The Lord does not look at the things people look at.*  
*People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*  
*1 Samuel 16:7*

As mentioned previously, when Jesus was confronted with the woman caught in adultery, he didn't disagree with the Pharisees that

she was being sinful. He just didn't condemn her like they did and was willing to give her a second chance if she truly repented and turned from her sinful life. He had an attitude of forgiveness and that is the attitude I believe the church needs to have when confronted with people who are struggling with not just divorce but any overtly sinful behaviour.

## **Living in peace**

Although God hates relational breakdown of any kind, he calls us to repentance, not to condemnation. He calls us to put down the stones of judgement and instead extend a hand of compassion to those in trouble. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*

*Romans 12:17-19*

## Remembrance Day

*Come on boys - Turn back the years, knock back the tears and down the beers.  
It's time to raise our glasses to the memories of fallen mates.  
It's time to remember when we crossed the Rubicon.  
Of how there was no going back, the die it was cast.  
Under Caesar's banner of 'No Surrender' we marched down the Via Aemilia  
in convoy across the desolate sandy dunes to Tobruk.  
It was there where we Rats chased Rommel and his Afrikakorp back to the Vaterland*

*Now boys, raise your glasses again  
for today we must remember El Alamein - but here's cheers for tomorrow,  
for the day we Rats strived and died to save,  
for the day when we can choose to forget ...*

*Me mate Stuey's face blown half way to hell,  
his guts a maggots repast,  
and my nostrils foaming at the choking stench of burning oil and rubber and rotting flesh  
and all the while at home, sweet June, my wife, knows nothing of this,  
all she wants is her beloved Harry back in her life.  
Nor does she know of that young blue eyed kraut,  
his life blood soaking into the scorching sand  
or of his liebbling, who'll wait an eternity, never knowing it was me or him.*

*No time for sentiment when you're crawling for miles on your knees through the freezing  
night,  
that night of the long knives when we banshees unleashed a steely mayhem  
that cut short youthful dreams and ended  
with the call for the Valkeries to ride and gather their dead.  
For Siegmund had breathed his last -  
His korpse lay broken, grotesque and twisted in death.*

*All our ends lie in our beginnings,  
our hallowed cause was just and the Hun, he got his just desserts.  
So cheers mates, it's time to remember to the victor goes the spoils  
Sweet June, she got her Harry back -  
But what of me mate Stuey's Rose, empty arms and empty bed  
All she has are memories and medals and letters,  
not even final words from his dying breath - all obliterated when the mortar hit.  
Alone at night when she calls out his name does his noble sacrifice obscure her pain?*

*We fought the war of all against all, marched to a righteous beat,  
paid the victory price in blood and damaged minds and lifeless limbs,  
but listen boys, as we raise our beers for our final cheers,  
Odin's laugh, it reverberates through Valhalla.  
Without war there would be no glory for the slain in the Asgard feasting halls  
and for Rose,*

*no need for Remembrance Day.*



# CHAPTER 4: REMOVING THE PRICKLES... DEFUSING ANGER



## **"I don't want to be married to you anymore."**

We were supposed to be resolving our differences, finding a way forward. Or so I thought. My former husband had nothing more to say. No explanation was offered. He just got up and left. Just walked out the door as he had more important things to attend to at work.

I remained behind, deflated, staring blankly at the counsellor. The words had shocked me but confirmed what I had long suspected. The whole focus of my world had just departed out the door and was never coming back. Like wet cardboard, the walls of my world collapsed into a sodden mess on the floor.

This man, to whom I had pledged 'until death do us part' stood beside and supported in the ups and downs of his career; faithfully cooked and cleaned for; bore and raised children for; jumped to attention for - had just discarded me and left forever.

Feelings of rejection cut with serrated edges deep into the core of my being. The blood of my self-worth flowed freely into dismal pools on the floor. I was nothing without my world - or so I thought at the time!

People marry expecting to be happy, not to get divorced. That's a perfectly normal expectation and I was no different when I married my first husband in my early twenties. I was a starry eyed bride who took with her the biggest pair of rose coloured glasses you could possibly buy. I had visions of a fantastic life together with my new husband - doing everything together, discussing and planning everything together and walking off into the sunset holding hands. Unfortunately, ideals don't always mesh with reality and pretty soon cracks and scratches appeared on the lens of my glasses.

I just wanted to be happy - happy with the man of my dreams. Sadly those dreams eventually transformed into a nightmare and it all ended in tears. I eventually threw away the rose coloured glasses. By then it was all too late and I found myself holding black bags full of prickles. All the petals had fallen off my roses!

As I found out, the pain of rejection or abandonment can be immensely debilitating and destructive. Most people who go through

relational breakdown will experience it to some degree.

Rejection has a twin sister; her name is Anger and I developed an intimate relationship with both sisters. In fact, when my husband moved out, I invited them to both move in and live with me. After a while I realised they were not easy house guests to have around and eventually I found myself looking for ways to make them leave before they completely demolished me and my life.

I know that not all separating partners might feel rejection as deeply as I did. In fact, when there has been years of marital tension, the leaving of one partner can generate an immense sense of a relief. I only found relief once I was able to deal with intense barbs of rejection.

### **Don't ignore the prickles - they only fester**

Hearing from your spouse as they walk out the door, "Life is better without you and it's a relief to be away from you," does burn large holes into one's self esteem. In order to move on, I needed to find solutions for my damaged self-esteem. A person with wounded self-esteem is like a deflated party balloon. You can pump as much air of praise and kind words into it but unless the holes in the fabric of the balloon are mended, it will never hold the air and reach its full inflation potential. It will remain a soggy, rubbery mass and never bring joy to anyone. Dealing with the holes caused by rejection and anger is a process but it begins with facing the reality of our circumstances and identifying the core issues that caused the damage.

Working through the issues will take time, so don't be in a hurry. The root causes have usually been ignored for years. Initially they may have been just tiny seeds of dissatisfaction but through years of neglect have grown into monstrous prickly weeds with thick tap roots. Uprooting them requires patience and determination. You may even require assistance from helpful friends with the muscles of insight and wisdom.

As mentioned previously, gardening is my passion and I strive to make my garden a place full of smiles. Consequently, I have come to

hate the weeds that seem to spring up from nowhere and overshadow my blooms with their prickles and nasty thorns. It is a frustrating fact but prickles and weeds flourish with neglect but a garden of fragrant blooms takes immense effort.

Nutgrass is one of the worst weeds in the garden and I make great efforts to deal with this pest as soon as I come across it. If ignored and left to grow unchecked it develops an insidious network of underground roots which undermines the whole garden bed. When that happens, the only way to deal with it is to remove the whole garden bed and start over. Believe me - that is back breaking and tiring work - but it has to be done if a garden of lasting value is to be established. The hard effort required is rewarded with abundance of radiant blooms without the nutgrass. A great garden needs great soil free from the seeds of weeds!

Like nutgrass, digging out the prickles of blame, anger, hate and revenge requires determination as they have roots that can penetrate down into the clay of our being. Seeds can be left behind which can produce a whole new crop of weeds when conditions are right.

## **Digging deep**

However, while feeling such strong emotions may be normal given the circumstances, having them dominate your life to the point of debilitating depression or uncontrollable anger is not. Such immensity of feeling may point to a deeper problem with a history longer than the current point of stimulus. That was certainly true in my case.

Unresolved anger from past issues can be re-directed to others within our current relationships. My anger was to a degree also directed at my father and deeply rooted in the sense of abandonment I felt as a child when he became very ill. I was about six years of age when his chronic debilitating illness changed his personality and turned our close and loving relationship into an endless nightmare of pain and emotional abuse.

Throughout my school years, after the onset of his illness, I longed to have my father standing there beside me at my various school and social events - supporting me, praising me and taking me to various functions. Before his illness he used to take me everywhere with him, but what could he do when he was confined to his wheelchair with a mind deranged by disease. I remember feeling so ashamed of my home life, and embarrassed by the need to continually rely on friends and the fathers of other children to take me places.

My heart ached so much I remember one night getting down on my knees and begging God to heal my father and make my life normal again. I then got up and walked in the dark to where he was lying in his bed and laid my hands on him and begged God again to make him whole.

But it was not to be. My father's condition deteriorated to the point where it was physically impossible for my mother to look after him at home. He was finally moved to a nursing home where he languished for the next twenty years before dying of a stroke at age 62.

I now harbour a distinct aversion to nursing homes as a result of those years of visiting my father in such places. The smells, the sounds, the food and the depressive sights of people wasting away without dignity. All have taken deep root in my psyche and repulse me. I am determined to remain in my own home for as long as possible before departing this life. It must have been hell for my father but I did not really appreciate that when I was just a child full of anger and emotional pain.

## **From little things, big things grow**

Issues that are ignored and left in the darkness will grow into hideous and monstrous proportions before forcing themselves into our faces. Facing them then can be terrifying. Now you are at the crossroads of opportunity - why wait?

*Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.*

*Hebrews 12:14-15(NKJV)*

## Be real

Acknowledge how you feel, and don't be too harsh on yourself. Feeling angry or rejected is neither right nor wrong. It's a normal emotional response to relational breakdown or unpleasant circumstances. It hurts, and at times it really hurts. It's also not going to go away overnight. What is important here, is how we process our emotional responses. How we do that is crucial to our long term emotional wellbeing.

Emotions are emotions. They will be what they will be. But they are not meant to rule our lives - they are meant to be subject to the control of our minds. A hard ask at times when dealing with the intensity of emotions that arise in the midst of marital conflict.

Feeling angry and hurt is normal, but in order to move beyond the pain it is necessary to learn to become objective about our emotional responses in order to channel them positively and not destructively. I was angry at being abandoned by my former husband but that anger was compounded by the pain of my sense of abandonment by my own father. Life becomes unstable and erratic when we live and react purely on our emotional responses. In the heat of the moment, it is possible to make decisions and respond in ways, that we can regret down the track.

Road rage is a terrifying example of emotions out of control. I'm sure at some stage you have witnessed such out of control escalation of anger. A driver cuts off another and at the next set of red lights the offended driver gets out, walks over to the other car, opens the car, then yells and even punches the other driver in the face.

*An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins.  
Proverbs 29:22*

When emotions get out of control we begin the slide down a slippery slope. Yelling at those who have wronged us can turn into throwing things and then escalate to physical violence and even murder. In the heat of the moment it might feel good, but it is totally irrational and out of control.

## Pointing the finger

It's hard to stare in a mirror and point the finger. Try it for yourself. I'm sure you will find it confronting and instinctively want to turn away. It is human nature to want to apportion blame, often in an arbitrary black and white fashion. It's the easy way out to blame others, including God, for the difficulties we face in life. Jesus encouraged his disciples to have another perspective about passing blame onto others;

*Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye  
and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?  
Matthew 7:3*

As mentioned previously, one of the difficulties I faced when I wanted to re-marry was coming under the judgement of others. Some pastors I approached required me to prove that I was biblically divorced before they would agree to re-marry me. Essentially, I was supposed to satisfy them that I was the deserted partner and that it was my husband who had refused to continue with the marriage.

While there is some truth in that perception of my former marriage, I refused to submit my failed marriage to such scrutiny and instead found a pastor with a more realistic attitude. I was not prepared to lay the blame of my failed marriage fully at the feet of my former husband. We had both contributed to the failure of the marriage and I believe neither of us to be innocent. Both of us could and should have done things differently. Before God I considered us to be both guilty of failing.

Without resolution of the issues causing the dysfunction in a relationship it is inevitable that one person will probably end up leaving. It is not really appropriate to apportion all the blame onto the person who walks away. This is where I think the lines get very blurry and trying to apportion blame onto one partner can prove to be totally counterproductive for both partners. It just places road blocks on the way ahead.

After my father became ill and was committed to living the rest of his life in a series of nursing homes, my mother re-married. Looking

back now I tend to think it was more a marriage of convenience rather than one of love. My mother was destitute with five young daughters to raise and had no income. Unfortunately, my step father brought his own dysfunction to our already dysfunctional family. Home life stumbled on and was far from happy. Life was so claustrophobic that each of us five sisters longed for the day when we could leave home permanently.

And leave, I eventually did - on the day I married for the first time. I thought I was getting free but in reality I was just exchanging one place of bondage for another. It would be many years before I would face that reality. From the time my mother brought my step-father into our lives, I harboured a deep anger and resentment towards her. I spent the next thirty years emotionally estranged from her and struggling with the anger I felt towards her. I knew my continued anger was wrong but I did not know how to resolve it. It is easy to say, just forgive, but forgiveness needs to take root and I did not know how to plant it. The answer to my dilemma came with my own divorce as I was finally able to see the world through her eyes and reach a place of understanding.

Getting caught in the blame game is always a distraction and is ultimately self-destructive. The pathway from the place of anger is paved with forgiveness, not blame. When we blame others we become the victim of our circumstances. By taking responsibility for our own actions and feelings we assume a position of power from which we can begin to make real change in our own lives.

Change begins when we see problems as challenges and set about finding solutions instead of complaining.

Change is then set in motion by making better choices and then acting upon them instead of procrastinating.

## **Self-control**

Living with an angry person is like living in a war zone. An explosive ordinance lurks behind every hurt feeling. Navigating relational conflict with such a person is like tip toeing through a field of landmines.



Acquiring self-control is about learning when to take a big breath and walk away in order to get a calmer perspective, or if you decide to stay, how to speak the truth in love!

Self-control in the face of apparent injustice can be the hardest thing especially when we feel unjustly treated and want retribution – now!

It's important to first realise that the rightness or wrongness of another's actions and responses is not relevant. Instead, it is the rightness and wrongness of our own actions that is important. Our actions and responses determine our future. We are not accountable for the choices of those who have wronged us but we are accountable for our own choices, and responses.

As believers we are called to handle our emotions responsibly - not to throw them like hand grenades, causing a lot of collateral damage every time someone threatens our position.

As believers we have the power of the Holy Spirit, which is the well spring of life within us and we should draw on His strength in difficult times. He will not fail us.

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.  
Galatians 5:22-24*

## **Take evasive action**

Learn to take a step back from your emotions. Learn to see your emotions as waves washing up onto a beach. When strong emotions wash over us we need to leave the surf. Jesus is our life guard on the beach, who throws the ring of life out for us to cling onto so we are not dragged out to sea by a treacherous rip of emotions! When the emotions surge – don't even enter the surf. The jaws of death are lurking beneath the waves!

It's not easy. I know. Words of anger come easily to my lips, often before I've had time to engage my brain. I am learning to recognise the swell of intense emotions within me. That's when I need to take a deep breath and take evasive action before my tongue smashes me down on the rocks!

Evasive action for me means either saying nothing or leaving the room or both. It is hard for me, because at the time of the inciting incident my emotions become so intense that my entire focus is on expressing my anger. I feel inwardly compelled to do so. Thankfully, for those around me, I have learnt from bitter experience and my own immense regret that expressing my anger is not usually a profitable exercise!

I was extremely angry with my ex-husband for rejecting me, but looking back without judgement or justification, I can understand his response, and it was not without cause. We had both treated one another badly. However, the choice to be continually angry about his actions was always going to remain my choice.

If you want a garden of smiling blooms in your future, then the past and its crop of anger prickles and rejection nettles needs uprooting.

Simple really – so make a choice to uproot them. Don't be fazed by the enormity of the task, just get out the spade of determination and begin.

*Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;  
do not fret – it leads only to evil.  
Psalm 37:8*

Rather than expressing your anger uncontrollably, channel it constructively. Punch open a bag of potting mix and start planting some flowers! Your future – your choice.

## Bitter Shreds

*Marmalade and butter scratched across toast –  
Cut and clinging in the sweetened agar  
are those bitters shreds that set my teeth on edge.  
Once more with each mouthful we crunch the years  
and shed again the bitter tears of times when  
as children the comfort of loving arms sheared  
and spun out in such discordant frenzy.*

*Our father's towering strength sapped and crumpled  
resting limply on the metal frame of a wheelchair.  
Our mother's shrilled anguish shout of – I can't take it anymore!  
Echoes inside my head as pills are flung and dashed against the kitchen walls.  
We withering children are whimpering, cowering in corners on the floor,  
our childhood innocence shattered into shards  
like my precious china tea set that I dropped while playing,  
I cried that day - Oh Mum look what I have done! – and could not be comforted.*

*Your cup is nearly empty – shall I empty out the dregs – pour you another?  
What we choose to remember – I wish we could forget –  
these leavings of our childhood fears that cling like bitter shreds.  
In the Children's Home angry fingers curl through the metal mesh of the fence  
that divides your face from mine - you were only two.  
You are yelling - you do not understand why our mother has cast us there.  
Down the hallways of the years the memories run - I hear their voices calling - decreeing  
my fate:  
You're different to the others now, they taunt, now you're a child of the state!*

*Watching you so determinedly dislocate the crusts from the wedges of your toast  
reminds me how quickly the edges of our childhood world crumbled and fell away.  
The electricity is about to be cut off and St Vincent de Paul is at the door  
bearing boxes of tins and vouchers for our daily bread.  
These serrated memories that spin around inside my head  
like the mirrored ball above the high school dance floor  
where I'm standing clothed in shame and laddered tights - we are too poor to afford more  
–  
I have to wear another's cast offs instead.*

*These shredded memories, the bitter and the sweet, where they collide and meet  
there am I – beguiled by things I cannot change nor want to keep!  
Those hollow years have scoured my soul and lined my face with bitter remorse  
In anger I yell at God: Why couldn't life have taken a different course?  
Would you like another slice - surely you have time for just one more cup of tea?  
I have enjoyed our discourse but I see by the way you are brushing the crumbs from your  
finger tips  
and with your napkin dislodging the debris clinging to your lips,*

*that you are planning to leave. Why so soon?  
Linger awhile, there's so more to crunch in these layers of our years  
Like the time when in disgrace I was shuttered in my room  
and the Pooka, those hellish black hounds with fire in their eyes came to terrorise my  
dreams ...*

*But what's that you say - You've no more time for tea and toast  
You're beckoning me to follow suit!  
Forget my childish fears, Dust away the crippling years,  
Dry the teary cheeks of that youthful wraith mourning what will never be,  
and simply swallow all those bitter shreds - those bitter shreds that set my teeth on edge!*

# CHAPTER 5: LETTING GO... LEARNING TO FORGIVE



After separating from my former husband and struggling emotionally for many months, I was finally able to let go and face the realisation that he wasn't coming back. It suddenly dawned on me that God was saying it was okay to move on and to let go of the past. Moving on began with honouring the choice my former husband had made. I didn't like the choice and I didn't agree with the choice but it was his choice and there was nothing I could do about it. Just realising that simple fact brought so much freedom to my life.

My expectations for my life were not God's expectations. To keep hanging onto false hope was foolishness and contrary to God's will for my life.

I needed to let go.

Even though I didn't understand it at the time, letting go of my anger and unrealistic expectations were the first steps on the road to restoration and healing.

## **Making peace**

The annoying problem with reconciliation is that it takes two to achieve it. While one person may desire reconciliation, the other may not. While there is disagreement of this magnitude, full reconciliation is not really possible. There can be no relational restoration if two people will not agree to walk in the same direction together. The relationship, as it was, is effectively over. Paul in his letter to the Romans re-iterates God's desire that we live in peace with others.

*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.  
Romans 12:18*

Yet how do we mesh God's expectations of peace with a broken relationship? How do you reconcile with the irreconcilable? How do we make peace with someone who wants to be at war? Here are some pointers I found useful and that have enabled me to find peace with my relationships and move forward into the future without guilt or regret.

### **1. Do what you can do**

Complete reconciliation and agreement is not possible or practical for everyone and every relationship. You can only do what you can do – it takes two. Over the years I have learnt that with some people you can only have the relationship you can have. We have to find a peace and contentment in that. We need to enjoy what we can have in a relationship and not moan on about what we can't have. Continually striving after what we can't have is not healthy and will drive us nuts.

## **2. Learn to let go**

I know of a woman who became estranged from her daughter after her marriage broke down. She became so obsessed with re-establishing a relationship with her daughter to the point of harassing her daughter and turning up uninvited on her doorstep. It is no surprise that her daughter has remained estranged. We can only take responsibility for our own actions. Where possible we can apologise, seek and offer forgiveness and make restitution, if necessary. It does not mean the other person will respond or even accept our advances or offers. What is important is that we have made the effort as far as possible – that we have done all we can to address our own wrongdoing and its consequences. Once we have done what we can do there is no need to endlessly keep trying to make the other person accept our offers if they continually refuse to do so. At some point we have to draw a line in the sand, having done all within our power or understanding to reconcile. We need to shake the dust off our sandals and move on.

For me it has meant mentally confining my broken relationships and unresolvable issues into a box in a distant room in my mind and closing the door. They are always there in my life, but not always in my face. I have learnt to live with them. The pain is there when I choose to pick the broken pieces up out of the box, but I have determined that they will not interfere with my life. So it is my choice to be miserable if I want to be. I am at peace with the efforts I have made to bridge the gap of brokenness. The ball is now in someone else's court. I am here waiting. There is a peace in my life.

The pain and anger I felt towards my father subsided when I learnt to look beyond it and focus on what was important between us. I needed to accept he was not going to change and it was I who needed to change. By the time my father died, I had inwardly made my peace with him.

At his funeral I spoke about the tremendous inheritance he had left me. It was not measured in dollars or cents but by the most precious thing in his life next to his family. As a small child I used to go every Sunday morning with him to church and chant the liturgy of Morning Prayer at our local Anglican church. I was not forced to go with but went willingly because I loved being with my Dad and he loved spending time with his Heavenly Father. His legacy to me was his faith in God.

So, do all that you can to address the issues where there is brokenness and then let go. Make peace possible should the other person come to the place where they also long for peace.

### **3. You can only change you**

While we can potentially influence and encourage another person to see things differently, we can never make another person truly change their mind. That is the nature of freewill. The only person's point of view we can change is our own. That generally is the best place to start. In fact by changing our own point of view it may facilitate a change in the person we are trying to influence.

If your friends or family have turned their back on you and refuse to be reconciled, the healthy response is to allow them the freedom to make and own that choice. Setting them free also sets yourself free. Just because someone condemns or criticises you for your actions doesn't mean you have to own those accusations as the truth for your life. Certainly evaluate their point view for any worth that it may have, but then make your own choices according to what you know to be the truth. Have the confidence to move on in a different direction if necessary. Remember we are accountable for the choices we make, not the choices others make.

Accepting another person's right to make their own choices is a positive. You don't have to agree with the person's choice or even



condone their actions but neither do you have let someone else's choices determine the course of your life, or even determine who you are.

*The Serenity Prayer*

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.  
Reinhold Niebuhr*

#### **4. Making choices**

We are free to make our own choices. Mostly we just need to have the confidence to make them and then act upon them. Making an independent choice is a sign of maturity, but it can be scary, especially if you are the sort of person that has been continually wanting others, including God, to tell you what to do.

Believe it or not, God does not want to be telling us what to do all the time. There comes a time when, like any parent, He wants His children to figure it out for themselves. Those are the times when we think God is ignoring us and not answering – but that is not the case. He is actually waiting for us to make a decision. When we have made a decision you will find Him more than happy to discuss it with you. Adult to Adult.

*When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child,  
I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.  
1 Corinthians 13:11*

Perhaps you have been in a co-dependent relationship, never feeling truly free to make your own choices or never wanting to make a choice. Always scared of what someone else might think. Scared of doing the wrong thing. Never free to think for yourself. Perhaps not even knowing how to think for yourself!

My own failed marriage was one of co-dependency, which in retrospect is why it was so difficult for me when it disintegrated. It was a bondage of my own making. I had allowed myself to be chained to the desires of others and had allowed others to determine my self-image. I lacked the self-confidence to do it for

myself, but looking back I did not even really know who I was. Without others to give me direction, I was adrift.

Released from my marriage, I was confronted with the overwhelming freedom to make my own choices. As terrifying as it seemed at first, I eventually realised it was a positive. The freedom to make unhindered choices was exhilarating. No longer did I have to consider everyone else before myself. There was just me. It was liberating, but also scary. Succeeding or failing was also down to me.

Choosing to live a life based on decisions dictated by someone else is not freedom, it is bondage. People who choose to live completely dominated by the choices of others will remain emotionally immature and weak minded. Such a choice is usually made out of fear, the fear of making bad choices or being violated in some way. The price of that choice is personal freedom.

## **5. Mistakes are the tutors of good decisions**

The fear of failing is a powerful fear, probably instilled in many of us as children and re-enforced by harsh discipline. Overcoming that fear requires a paradigm shift in thinking about ourselves and our actions. Mistakes are only failures if we learn nothing from them.

It is having to confront our mistakes that develops our character and promotes spiritual and emotional growth. It helps us grow up and have a mature adult attitude to life and not to be like a frightened child wanting to run away and hide all the time.

Unfortunately human parents do not always get the discipline just right and can be overbearing on their children, but we should not fear discipline from our Heavenly Father. Discipline at the hand of God is not meant to demoralise us but to encourage us to walk on a safe path where we can experience blessing, not harm.

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

*James 1:2-4*

## **6. Leave the gate open**

Never say never. Being estranged or ostracised does not mean that reconciliation is never possible. It just might not be possible in the short term. In the meantime don't put your life on hold waiting for it to happen either. As I have mentioned above, I have left my broken relationships from my former marriage in their boxes. In spite of my attempts at reconciliation, they remain there gathering dust. However, you never know what can happen down the track. I know of a couple whose marriage broke down and they each married someone else. After a number of years through various events the couple became friends again, putting aside their differences and the anger they once had for one another. They have remained friends but still married to their new partners.

## **7. Children and divorce**

Divorce is never just about two people. When partners separate and divorce the fracture lines spider out between all family members. Mine was no exception. I know custody issues can become very contentious so I do not intend to delve into them in any detail as there are many organisations and books that can offer parents help and guidance with these matters.

My children were of an age where before the law they were permitted to choose the parent with which they wished to remain. In my case, for various reasons, that was my former husband. They also choose not to make contact with me and up to the time of writing that has remained the case. While I have some understanding of their reasons, I do not fully understand why and have never had the opportunity to discuss it with them.

I know from my own experience with my own parents' marital break down, that children can harbour anger for a long time. My mother divorced my father when I was fifteen. I harboured anger towards her for thirty years and only finally came to understand her position when I experienced marital breakdown for myself in my mid-forties. Experience is a great teacher, and sadly it took my own misfortune to comprehend my mother's pain and distress.

In the midst of my pain, my anger towards her lost its fire and I found common ground with her. It was a meeting place for

restoration of our mother-daughter relationship.

Anger does not have to be rational, it is just there and can be overwhelming and all consuming. All the while I was angry I knew it was wrong, but struggled with how to resolve it. In the end I realised that regardless of how right or justified my anger felt, it was causing me more problems than it was worth. I was never going to be able to turn the clock back. I was never going to have the relationship that I believed I was entitled to have with my parents and neither were they going to see things from my perspective, no matter how much I ranted and raved and stood on the high moral ground. I finally let go of my anger and forgave my parents. It was no longer necessary for them to apologise to me. I realised that life was short and my parents were not getting any younger. I needed to find contentment and enjoy the relationship I could have with them, and not yearn for what I would never have.

A child is always at the centre of his or her own world. I suspect both my children were angry with what happened to their world and the way their mother and father behaved. Initially I tried to make contact with them but after repeated attempts without any response I just let it be. They are adults now and have the freedom to live according to their own choices, which I respect.

Estranged children sometimes do seek out their parents unexpectedly many after years of no contact. Well meaning people continually tell me that, however I am resigned to accepting things either way. Sometimes other people do need to make their own life journey before they are ready for reconciliation with us. We need to allow them to have that space and time. We need to be patient, especially with estranged children who perhaps need time to grow up and see their parents' failures through adult eyes instead of the self-focused eyes of a child.

I hope that one day the broken relationships with my own children will mend. In the meantime I am living my life without remorse, having done all that I can to open the way for reconciliation. Unable to do anything about the situation I have resolved to make peace with the worst case scenario; that I will never see them again. Yes, I have a peace with that scenario. It is not what I would hope for and

it causes me sadness, but I have had to reach a point of letting go what I cannot control.

Perhaps as it did for me, some of the turbulent water of life has to travel under the bridges of my children lives before they are able to appreciate life from another perspective. Perhaps they never will. I don't know, but from a distance I wish them well in life.

*In acceptance lies peace.  
Amy Carmichael*

Until reconciliation comes, we have to accommodate the brokenness within our own lives. The danger is that it will persist and smoulder and seed bitterness into our hearts. Chronic unresolved anger and pain is debilitating and actually impedes the reconciliation process. While our anger may be directed at the person who has wronged us, the person most hurt by it, if it remains unresolved, is generally ourselves. Depression can be a manifestation of chronic internalised anger. Anger has a domino effect on all our relationships and will single us out as embittered lonely people. Nobody likes to be around an angry person. It's a dangerous place to be!

## **8. Let the anger fire go out**

The anger that I had held onto from childhood, in later life, manifested into depression and was a factor in my own marital breakdown.

*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander,  
along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another,  
forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.  
Ephesians 4:31-32*

When you are in the midst of the pain, choosing to put away that anger and to forgive the person who has wronged you can be a very tall ask.

Anger is a normal emotional response to the pain that comes with relational breakdown. It comes with that lifesaving adrenaline surge we get when faced with danger or a threat to our well-being; the fear-flight-fight response. How we deal with the threat determines

whether or not we will return to emotional health after the incident. Constructive anger is meant to focus our attentions on the issues at hand and spur us on to find a resolution in order to preserve life. Chronic unresolved anger that persists long after the initiating event has subsided, debilitates and destroys life.

Anger burns out when you stop adding fuel to the fire. Engaging the process of forgiveness cuts off the fuel supply. This is a process that takes time so don't be too hard on yourself. It has taken me a number of years to reach the point that if my ex-husband walked into the room I would be willing to sit at peace with him and not want to hit him over the head with something. I have not excused his actions, but I have forgiven him.

## **9. Apply forgiveness**

Forgiveness does not absolve someone of their responsibilities or even the consequences of their actions. If you have been in a relationship with someone who has abused you, physically or mentally, forgiving does not mean giving them permission to abuse you again. On the contrary it calls them, the abuser, to recognise and account for his or her actions and face the reality of how it has affected you. In return you show them love by demonstrating you are not going to hold it against them.

Forgiveness holds the gates of friendship open and gives the other person a chance to live in peace with you if they turn away from their destructive behaviour. Of course if they decide not to change their attitude towards you then you have every right to walk away and leave them in peace. Dust off your sandals and move on.

It is also worth considering, that people may not wish to reconcile with you until you have addressed issues in your own life that are perceived to be harming them. There are always two sides to a breakdown and generally both parties have their own issues to deal with. Blaming others diverts our attention away from our own shortcomings and bad behaviour. I'm sure you know the passage in the Bible about removing the stake from our own eye before removing the splinter from our neighbours' eye! (Matt 7:5)

## **10. Turn the other cheek**

Contrary to what some teach or believe, turning the other cheek should not be interpreted as God requiring you to stick around and be at the receiving end of ongoing abusive behaviour. Read in the strict literal social context of the time in which Jesus spoke it, He was actually challenging the power of the abuser over the abused person. A backhanded slap across the right cheek of another person was an expression of dominance by the person performing the slap. Backhanded slaps across the right cheek were administered to slaves and those considered to be of lower status.

When a person turned the other cheek and presented their left cheek to the persecutor, it put the persecutor in a difficult situation. It invited a backhanded slap from the left hand which was only used for unclean purposes. The abuser confronted with this situation would generally then not perform another slap because to strike the left cheek of another with the open right hand would infer equal status to the person being hit. This would be contrary to the desire of the abuser.

The command to turn the other cheek is about equality. It is about turning our back on victimhood and taking control of our circumstances. So defy your abuser, turn your cheek, head towards the door and walk through it.

Love recognises the wrong and refutes the authority of the wrongdoer but it does not retaliate or seek revenge.

Those who would harm you need to be confined within strict boundaries of love. Defend yourself with fences that help the abuser face their wrongdoing. Keep them at a distance but always keep the door of reconciliation open for them. Do not, however, offer them your trust, unless they are willing to recognise your boundaries and have proved themselves worthy. Trust is a precious thing. Like a crystal vase, when it is broken, it is one of the hardest things to mend.

## **11. Leave your vengeance to God**

*"It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.  
Romans 12:19*

When you are freshly arrived in the midst of the anger and pain of relational breakdown, revenge can seem a very sweet and satisfying course of action on which to embark. After all, you have been wronged, so shouldn't you return like-for-like? An eye-for-an-eye? All's fair in love and war and divorce – isn't it? If you had seen that poignant Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner film; 'War of the Roses' you will have some idea of the extremes warring partners can stretch to in their desire to inflict pain and humiliation on each other. Ultimately neither won. Their passion for revenge costs them both their lives.

It is a normal reaction to relational breakdown to feel you want to inflict hurt on the other party or perhaps a third party, if your spouse has left you for someone else. There was no third party in my marriage breakdown but I have a friend who phoned up the woman her husband had left her for and abused her down the telephone. She admitted that at the time it had felt so good, but later regretted her actions.

I have to admit to some anger venting of my own in that, after our separation, I dumped my husband's entire wardrobe of clothes on the front lawn of the house of where he was staying at the time. It felt good at the time, but I'm not sure it actually changed things.

Acting in haste according to our feelings of anger can further damage relationships, sometimes irreparably. Interestingly though, my friend mentioned above eventually became good friends with her ex-husband and his new wife, so the path of reconciliation can always be re-negotiated.

## **An eye for an eye**

This saying is often used to justify seeking revenge. Contrary to what it is commonly perceived to mean, an eye-for-an-eye was never about condoning revenge but rather about obtaining appropriate compensation or justice for the offence that was committed. We are all entitled to seek compensation for loss and injury. We are just not justified in seeking revenge. What is the difference you may ask?



If someone knocks over and smashes a vase in your house, it would not be unreasonable to expect the culprit to replace the vase or compensate you with the monetary value of the vase. That is a just response. A vase for a vase. Breaking into the culprit's house and smashing all their possessions is an example of an unjustified act of revenge or retaliation. Seeking to inflict harm on the offender in that manner is revenge. Seeking compensation from the culprit is an eye-for-an-eye.

In a relational context, say your partner or spouse steals from you or broadcasts untruths about you to others, a just response would be to expect an apology, return of the goods and a retraction of the false statements. Forgiving the other person does not absolve them from making compensation for what they have done or place them outside the law. What would not be justifiable, even if you felt like doing it, might be arranging for someone to physically beat up your spouse or partner. That would be revenge.

Seeking compensation through appropriate legal channels is constructive but revenge is destructive to everyone. It is tempting to choose the revenge option when the request for compensation is refused by the offending party. When all avenues of justice have been exhausted, that is when we need to learn to let go of our anger and leave our cause with God.

This can be especially true if you find yourself caught up in a contentious marriage settlement. You can spend years and thousands of dollars fighting your cause in the judicial system, trying to reach a settlement. The longer one tends to spend fighting for it in the courts, the less you tend to end up with. I realised early on that there comes a time when just have to draw a line in the sand and find contentment with what you have, even if you consider you were entitled to receive more. Blessing and judgement flow out of the hand of God according to how we incline our heart towards Him.

Choosing to leave your anger with God enables Him to bless and enrich your life with what you already have. I found this to be true after receiving my divorce settlement. I did not find peace until I let go of my anger and the feeling I was entitled to more than I had

received. Choosing to hold onto anger is actually a choice to avenge and avenging is God's prerogative.

When God avenges, He metes out just punishment. Bearing in mind that neither partner is really innocent in a divorce, both partners can find themselves under judgement for their actions. Being aware of our own shortcomings is a great leveller. It helps with viewing the person who you believe has wronged you from a more realistic perspective.

*This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

*Romans 3:22-23*

*For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

*Matthew 6:14-15*

Be assured, even if someone persists in treating you wrongly, God will deal them the same way He will deal with you if you continue to harbour hate and anger. We need to bear in mind that God often has a different time to ours and He often doesn't act as quickly as we would like, or think the other person deserves. The final appeal court in the justice system is actually God. It takes faith and trust to leave our causes with Him. Leaving them there allows you to get on with your life instead of dragging them around like decaying carcasses. Believing that God will honour his promises is the same challenge that faced Adam and Eve when confronted with the serpent in the Garden of Eden. We all know how that turned out when they chose to believe the serpent!

When God metes out punishment, His desire is to correct our focus and bring us back into a relationship with Himself. It is constructive. His punishment is meant for our ultimate good, not our ultimate destruction. That also applies to those who have wronged us as well, in spite of our desire to see their total destruction. Our continued anger actually hinders the process, which is why Paul encouraged the Romans to do the following:

*Do not to take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."*

*Romans 12:19-20*

*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

*Luke 6:27-31*

No matter how right you consider your position to be, harbouring anger will dam up the flow of God's blessing into your life. So let go of your wrath and let the wrath of God do its work. The wicked will not flourish for ever, but it's God's place to determine the timeframe.

*I have seen a wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a green tree (like a Cedar of Lebanon) in its native soil, but he soon passed away and was no more; though I looked for him, he could not be found.*

*Psalms 37:35-36*

## **Forgiveness – It's a journey**

Forgiveness does not ignore the wrong, it just makes a conscious decision not to seek revenge or harm the other person. It opens the way for reconciliation, even if the other party does not want to forgive or reconcile in return.

In view of our own weakness, we need to reach a place of understanding and compassion for those who have wronged us. We need to forgive them.

Our own self-worth is linked to our ability to forgive others.

I felt very angry at the time my marriage fell apart. I felt my husband had no right to reject me or treat me the way he had – to walk out and just leave me there in the counselling room. Reaching the point of actually forgiving my former husband took time. It was a journey. Fortunately for me, God was patient! Along the way I learnt that I also needed forgiveness.

*Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

*Colossians 3:13*

## **It's Just a Typo**

*Poor Susan. Should we insert a comma to mark the place  
between heaven and hell where she's trying to find grace?*

*Alleviate – abbreviate the pain she keeps  
just to give her breathing space?*

*Give her pause between the brackets of her daily strain  
and rephrase the terms of her existence.*

*Allow her to remember what she knows she ought to forget.*

*Observe – it's plain to see that she is not the forgetful type!  
With the tap-tap of her fingers on the keys she's trying hard to re-write her life.  
How she longs to melt into the space between  
sipping coffee and watching the delightful Delveen, hostess of the morning cooking show.  
For a moment the memory fades and she retreats - slips across the line to where  
the beautiful people strut upon the screen in their perfect world.  
She intrudes – just an interlude – a beat – to hold back the tears.  
In her pocket she fumbles for crumpled tissues,  
mumbles - no-one can know –*

*In a drawer upstairs underneath her silky underwear,  
hides a secret, a tiny lock of hair wrapped in cellophane.  
An indiscretion, an interjection of passion,  
an exclamation of joy groaned in the back seat  
of a Falcon parked somewhere with city views of twinkling fairy lights.  
Concluded with promises of love that ebbed and faded  
with the coming of the morning light.*

*Visions flash while making children's lunches,  
today, this hour – it marks the day –  
the day when she was ripped apart by groans  
and another exclamation of joy –  
the derivation of a single night of pleasure,  
snatched into the waiting arms of hovering nuns.  
"It's a boy!" they shout.  
Taken somewhere - God knows where!*

*Concluded with pious lips enunciating,  
"Go and sin no more, three Hail Mary's will expiate the shame."  
Prostrate before the cross of pain, where blood and sorrow freely flow she hears;  
"Go forth, forget this place, forget the hour, forget the day."  
All remembrance - obliterate.  
White out the stain – it's just a typo – move on – begin again.*

# CHAPTER 6: STANDING TALL ON THE ROCK OF LIFE... LAYING FOUNDATIONS FOR SELF-WORTH



Facing rejection or being abandoned can be devastating, especially at the hands of those whom we have trusted or relied on for support. It is a part of our psyche to seek acceptance and find a place of belonging. The acceptance and reaffirmation that comes from others provides reassurance that we have value. Without it, we can feel adrift in the very lonely sea of life. Yet there are times when we will all encounter rejection from others because of beliefs or our actions. So how does one stand tall and hold on to self-worth in such circumstances?

My present husband has a background in selling insurance and encountering rejection from potential customers came with the territory of sales. He runs a successful financial planning business that is mostly about advice these days, but his insurance sales history stands him in good stead in learning to cope with rejection by turning it into a positive.

Early in his career he did a fair amount of cold calling. It's not really permitted in his profession today, but back in the 1970's that's the way it was done. When he started out, he was told by his mentors to expect a ten percent positive response rate – that's a ninety percent rejection rate! So, from a practical point of view he needed to get through a certain amount of rejection in order to find a potential client. He learnt to incorporate rejection into his workday routine – to see it as a normal and even essential expectation. He had to get through the negative to get to the positive. In the process, he has learnt to separate himself out from the experience.

What people thought of him and what he was trying to sell did not determine his own perception of himself. He knew there were people out there who needed what he had to offer – he just had to get past the ones who didn't, to find them. He saw value in himself and it was not based on what others thought of him. He believed in himself before others did. He did not allow his circumstances to define his self-esteem.

How we see ourselves influences how others perceive us. If you are interviewing someone for a job who has a nervous disposition, it's likely you might consider this person to lack confidence in their own abilities. Someone who projects confidence is more likely to

have a favourable effect on the interviewer, in spite of the fact that both interviewees might be quite capable of performing the job. We need to believe in ourselves.

The trick is finding inherent value in ourselves that is not influenced by external experiences or the opinions of others. The amount of confidence we have in our inherent self-worth will determine how each of us will respond to negative experiences such as rejection that will come our way as part of daily living.

Self-worth is built on firm foundations!

You are probably familiar with the well-known parable told by Jesus about the wise and foolish builders. Matt 7:24-27. If you are from my generation you might even recall singing the chorus in Sunday school, about the wise man who built his house upon the Rock. When the rains came down the house stood firm, but the house of the man who built his house on the sand went - BANG!

## **Rock or Sand - where are you now?**

Now might be a good time to run a quick site check on your own foundations: What of ground are you standing on - sinking sand or solid ground?

- When you look in the mirror what do you see?
- What do you want to see?
- What do you think other people see?
- Can you live with what you see?

I know what I saw in the mirror at the time of my marriage separation – a broken and wounded person – someone I didn't recognise anymore – someone gashed so deeply with pain that the floor around me was red with sorrow. In fact, I wanted the floor to swallow me up. I wanted so badly for the pain to just go away.

I felt like I was standing alone in the bottom of a very dark pit and life as I knew it was falling away - it was going bang!

## **God's Wrecking Ball**

My life as I knew it had begun to unravel. I felt desolate and alone. I cried out to God in my pain, trying to make sense of it all. God came



near to me and in the solitude of my anguish gave me a vision of a large wrecking ball smashing into the side of a building, demolishing the entire structure.

God seemed to be saying to me, "Kate, you have built these structures in your life but they are not fit for habitation. I am going to totally destroy your life as you know it."

"Well, that's cheery!" I thought. "Here I am in pain and God, you're just promising me ... More pain!"

Hours, weeks and months went by as I languished in the deep darkness of depression where I could see no light at the end of the tunnel. Periodically I cried out to God, "Have you finished wrecking my life yet?"

I was anxious to escape my world of pain but the soft answer that would come back to me was;

"Not yet, Kate."

Thankfully, I'm now in the re-construction phase of my life. I can look back on those dark times and see them as a necessary, albeit painful, experience. And although I felt so utterly alone, God really was there. At the beginning of the dark times I had also received a reminder from God that when he sent his children into exile he also sent them with a promise of restoration. Exile was only ever for a predetermined time.

God is like that. He wants us to have hope, not despair, even in the face of disaster. He only allows destruction so that there can be re-construction and exile so that there can be reconciliation.

God loves and accepts us as we are, even though we come as condemned dwelling places. When we invite God into our lives we are inviting in a furnace like refining fire, and a violent rushing wind.

Individually and corporately we are meant to be the dwelling place of God. Jesus said:

*"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our home with him."*

*John 14:23*

Yes, we are to be God's home. Not just a lowly two up two down with creaky floorboards and dodgy plumbing, but a home of ornate

beauty and palatial magnificence on the scale of Buckingham Palace.

Nothing else would be fit for our King and Creator.

Yet we come to God with structures in our lives built out of our sinful behaviours and founded on half-truths and lies. These have often taken years to fabricate. Minor repairs will not cover up the defects in our habits and ways of thinking, while they also leave the corrupt foundations intact. No, it all must be demolished and cast into the fire, or blown away in the cyclonic wind of the Holy Spirit.

I had previously laid the foundations for my self-worth on my former husband and my value to him. Without him I perceived my life as nothing and my world sheared apart.

I needed to recognise the truth about myself. The foundation for who I was rested not on my former husband or his opinion of me, but on God's love for me. I needed to see myself through God's eyes and believe that through thick or thin, for better or for worse, in God's eyes, I would always remain someone of great value.

A precious jewel.

A princess worthy of palace not a shabby humpy.

The process of demolition and rebuilding is a tough time. Perhaps you are in a similar place and it's painful – but don't be quick to blame Satan for your difficulties. If you have asked the Holy Spirit to come and dwell in your life, maybe God is just making Himself a home!

These words from the song entitled *The Rose*, written by Amanda McBroom, were a great comfort to me at the time of my demolition process:

*When the night has been too lonely  
And the road has been too long  
And you think that love is only  
For the lucky and the strong  
Just remember in the winter far beneath the bitter snows  
Lies the seed that with the sun's love  
In the spring becomes the rose*

There are seasons in our life. The cold of winter is necessary so that the spring bulbs can mature and spread a carpet of colour when the snow melts.

## **Standing on solid rock**

When I was nineteen I joined a local Baptist Church and went through full immersion baptism as an expression of my faith in God. On the day of my baptism, there were three of us being baptised; myself, another young girl and an older woman in her forties. This woman was a beautiful lady with a magnificent soprano signing voice and seemed to have everything going for her. Standing waist high in the water of the baptismal font she recounted in her testimony how she had broken just about every commandment, and found herself in a totally dark place, before meeting with God and giving her life to Him. I listened thoughtfully as she read out the first few verses from Psalm 40, which expressed her joy and gratitude.

Now, many years later after surviving reactive suicidal depression myself, I too had found personal meaning in those words; I too now knew what it is to find the rescuing hands of God.

*"I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry.  
He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire;  
He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.  
He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.  
Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord."  
Psalm 40:1-3*

If you are in the depths of a slimy pit do not be afraid – God is right there with you. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

*"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.  
For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."  
Romans 8:37-39*

Building blocks for self-esteem. When you are feeling down use these to help you stand tall:

1. God's love and grace are the only foundation for self-esteem. Our relationship with God is the cornerstone of our life building.
2. Demolition comes before reconstruction. It was only after God allowed my former life to unravel that I was finally able to find out

who I really was. For many years I had allowed other people in my life to define me, subjecting myself to their perception of who I was and what I should be. Now that I was on my own and those people had left, I was free to work it out for myself. More about this process later.

3. God meets us in our brokenness, but He does not want us to stay broken. Reconstruction is a lifelong process. Be patient. Make haste slowly.

4. We are all unique.

5. Spend time with people who truly love you as a friend. These are the people who accept you for who you are and where you are, and do not condemn you. They also have the courage to speak the truth to you with love.

*"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."*  
*Proverbs 17:17*

These are the people who love you warts and all. A friend in need is a friend indeed. This type of friendship is a place where healing can begin because condemnation, and more importantly the pressure to change, is absent. I was fortunate enough to be richly blessed with friendships such as these in the midst of my depression. They gave me breathing space and a place of safety where I could just be myself.

6. Find your passion and pursue it. After my nervous breakdown my family all left. I found myself sitting at home, not working - just looking at four walls. So to get myself out of the house I took up squash and ballroom dancing. I love dancing because it makes me feel alive. As I no longer had to spend all my time running around after my family I could do the things I really enjoyed.

Finding your passion and giving it freedom of expression will bring healing to your wounded soul. It opens the windows of the soul and lets in the fresh air.

7. On the flip side of all the things that we dislike about ourselves, there is all the good stuff. We are a dichotomous mix of good and bad stuff. The very things that drives us nuts about ourselves can be the very things that makes us uniquely gifted. The trick is learning to control the bad so that the good can shine. Accepting and loving ourselves – just as we are – is a good place to start.

## **Loving the annoying**

My husband is obsessive about details and it does drive me nuts sometimes. I like mowing, but my husband always does it.

He challenged me once about my own passion for mowing, “Well if you like it so much – show me what you can do?”

So I took up the challenge and offered to mow our grass. When I had finished, I thought I had done a reasonable job but not so according to my husband. He practically came out with a ruler to measure the height of each cut blade and happily pointed where I had left some sections too long and missed a few edges. Suffice to say, for the sake of marital harmony, I no longer mow the grass – I leave that to him.

While it irks me at times, I know my husband will always be obsessive about detail. In fact, I don’t really want him to change – It’s what makes him an exceptional administrator and business manager.

There are things about ourselves that will annoy others. That’s life. We are who we are. However, while there are aspects of our personality which we cannot really change, we do need to develop self-awareness and learn how to express our personality in a way that is respectful of others. For example, some people are short tempered while others are slow to anger. As mentioned above, the Bible does not condemn us for being angry. It all depends on how we handle that anger.

*“Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”  
Eph 4:26-27*

It is not wrong to be angry but it is wrong to let our anger smoulder on and lead to bitterness. The expression of our emotions, including anger, should be respectful of others. Bitterness and unforgiveness will not only undermine our relationships they will also open the door into our lives for the devil, and give him a place to create mischief. We are encouraged to resolve our differences and to live at peace with one another.

*"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."*

*Phillipians 2:1-4*

There are many personality assessment tools available these days. Most are based around the concept of the four basic personality types of Melancholic, Phlegmatic, Choleric and Sanguine, or the equivalent modern version of that matrix. Undergoing a personality trait evaluation can aid our self-awareness. Learning to understand who we are is a good starting point for learning to accept and love ourselves for who we are.

My personality type is heavily weighted towards the melancholic and choleric characteristics. While I have a good sense of humour, I do tend to be very serious and intense much of the time. I am goal orientated and while I excel at accomplishing task outcomes, the flip side is that I'm not very good at managing my personal relationships. I tend to annoy people easily and not fully appreciate their feelings. Rather than hating myself and wishing I was different, I have learnt to focus on accepting myself for who I am and continuing to work on improving my relationship skills. It's a process – a lifelong process. None of us will ever be perfect. We all know that but realising it is not an excuse for ongoing bad behaviour, but rather a starting point for humility.

Humility walks the pathway of repentance and forgiveness. The best I can do is to admit when I have done something wrong or have inadvertently upset someone. I can see the error of my ways,

seek to make changes and ask for forgiveness. My self-worth does not depend on the other person I have wronged forgiving me. It begins with me – with loving and forgiving myself, and knowing that before God I am forgiven and not separated from His love.

## Lost Things

*I thought of you today when I saw  
A mandarin lying abandoned on the ground in the darkened corner of a stairwell.  
Not long ago it was sheltered by a leafy surround  
And glistened with dew in the early morning light,  
Ripe with promise and full of succulence.  
Like you, its destiny was never to be entombed within that gloom.  
I remembered you again when I passed a solitary black school shoe adrift on asphalt,  
No doubt tossed from an open window in a boyish prank.  
Like you, it once enjoyed kicking balls in the dust  
And on rotating wheels embraced the wind.  
There you are – in the photograph hanging on our hallway wall  
Your place eternally marking time in space –  
Cheeky grin – radiant with hope – innocence swimming in your eyes.  
But just turn the dial and you have gone.  
The line moves on –  
Your laughter hollows out  
And only  
    the static  
    remains.*



# CHAPTER 7: MOVING ON... LEARNING TO BE THANKFUL



“You can consider this offer and then either accept it, or if you like, we can challenge it. But I warn you, it could potentially cost you a further \$20,000.” My solicitor had very aptly summed up the situation for me. The real winners when it comes to a property settlement can turn out to be the legal system!

Nonetheless, obtaining good legal representation and advice is essential, especially if your joint financial affairs are complex or if your divorce is not amicable. Depending on where you live there are legal time frames in place that determine when a property settlement must be finalised between divorcing partners.

At the time of my own separation I remember wondering how the finances of my former marriage could ever be teased apart. After twenty years of marriage everything seemed to me to be complex and completely entwined. Yet it had to be done.

Even if you think you can sort your own affairs out amicably, it is sensible to at least arrange an initial interview with a solicitor or a legal professional to clarify your rights and obligations and to peruse your agreed terms if you have established them. This will confirm that you considered all aspects of your financial affairs and can potentially avert disagreement that might crop up after all the dust has settled and the ink has dried on the contract.

Instigating and finalising a property settlement can be an intensely exhausting process. It can suck the life out of you and become the entire focus of your existence for what can seem an eternity. Deciding when to draw the line in the sand and call it quits can be a difficult decision but it needs to be addressed at some stage if you are to finalise your old life and move on into the new.

## **Property Settlement Considerations**

Outlined below are some thoughts for consideration if you are contemplating or even currently navigating a property settlement, or find yourself in a situation where you need legal advice.

### **Don't put off seeking good legal advice**

After I had been separated for about eight months a friend suggested I contact a solicitor with regards to advice on property

settlement issues. As suggested, I went along and spoke a solicitor who was very helpful and outlined the process for me. However at the time I really did not want to proceed with anything. The problem was I didn't want to admit that my marriage was over. To start the process would have meant admitting it was the end - that it was over. I was still clinging on to a vain hope that that things would get better, my husband would come back and we would sort things out as a couple. Emotionally I had not fully grasped the truth of my circumstances even though, to those around me, it was obvious.

It is a huge emotional hurdle to admit that your marriage is over. However, in order to move on into the future, it is necessary to close the door on a broken marriage and admit it is over. There can be no going forward into a new and even better life without first finalising the past. The stuff we don't deal with from our past blocks the flow of life into the present and the future just becomes more of the past. Moving on for me meant a paradigm shift in my thinking. I needed to finally take charge of my circumstances and make some decisions for myself. No longer did I have to consider anyone else anymore, including my ex-husband who at the time certainly did not seem to be considering me.

### **Deciding to move on is liberating, but brings its own challenges!**

Engaging a legal representative made the processes easier compared to endeavouring to navigate the hurdles entirely on my own. My solicitor was the essential go-between which buffered the stress to a degree, and helped me reach agreement with minimal confrontation. I engaged him upon recommendation by a friend and was more than pleased by the final cost for his services and the way he looked after my affairs. He was a God-send. If you are struggling to find someone ask around your friends as word of mouth is a great advertisement. Always ask about cost upfront and if you are not happy with the terms of engagement look for someone else. Some solicitors will defer payment till the completion of the settlement while others will work on the basis of the payment of a retainer.

An independent legal advisor has no emotional involvement in your circumstances and is able offer an objective perspective. Emotions can so very easily obscure reason and escalate situations into extreme tension and even violence. Far better to have someone who can act as a go between and advise on what is fair and reasonable.

The legal system itself can be a nightmare to navigate for those unfamiliar with its workings and requirements. Again, it is more effective and time efficient to align yourself with someone who will lead you through it and navigate the pitfalls.

Praying to God that everything will be fine just because you have faith in Him, and then trying to handle everything yourself, may not necessarily be the wisest or sanest choice. It might save money but such savings could actually be very costly in the long run. Again and again in the Bible we are exhorted to be wise in our decision making.

*"Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil." Prov 3:7*

*"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.*

*Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves."*

*Matthew 10:16-17 (NKJV)*

*"Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse."*  
*Proverbs 2:12*

## **Look out for number one**

Now is not the time to be thinking of others before yourself. It is not selfish to think primarily of what you consider you are entitled to – it is essential! Whether or not it is fair and reasonable is open for discussion, but first you need a clear idea of what you want.

So, give consideration to the things you want to achieve as you have to go forward on your own. The two that have become one – now have to become two again. Draw up a list and then seek advice on whether or not it is fair and reasonable.

If you don't have a clear idea of what you want then you have no starting point for negotiations. If you consider you don't deserve much and ask for too little you may find life – post-divorce – more difficult than it needs to be and become embittered.

At the time of my own separation, I was informed by ex-husband's family that as I had brought nothing of financial consequence into the marriage I was not entitled to take anything out. Regardless of where we had started, as part of our marriage contract my ex-husband and I did promise each other the following; "with all my worldly goods I thee endow."

So, I was entitled to something and definitely not nothing. Working that out was the tricky part.

For this very reason, unless you are familiar with the legal process, engaging legal representation is strongly recommended. Dealing one-on-one with your ex-spouse can open yourself up to manipulation and even abuse. Emotions can run high taking their toll, especially if circumstances are not amicable and custody issues are involved. For both parties the desire to inflict pain on the other partner can become a driving force in negotiations, so there is a need to be protected from that as well.

## **The size of the pot**

It is also essential to give reasonable consideration to the value of the assets to be divided between you. Emotions can run high when negotiating a property settlement and cloud judgement. Partners can easily lose sight of what is really at stake and unjustly demand more than what they are entitled to.

Independent valuation of assets is worth considering to aid in the process of negotiating, so that both parties have a clearer understanding of the size of their asset pool. Bear in mind that if it is necessary to sell down assets in a hurry, you are unlikely to get the top-market value for them.

In the spirit of fairness, where possible allow your partner the right to keep items that may have particular sentimental or heritage value to them.

I learnt as a consequence of my own settlement that there was freedom and joy in letting go of certain items that I had previously decided I definitely wanted to keep. I realised how over attached I had become to material things and that everything was replaceable.

Letting go or selling some items meant that I could replace them with newer and more interesting things. I found that there really were a lot of things I could live without. My life was enhanced, not diminished, by letting go.

In sorting through my possessions, I found a number of things still in their original packaging that hardly if ever saw the light of day. There and then I made decision that life was too short and that everything had to be either used or given to someone who would use them. I had been brought up with the attitude that there were things to be brought out only on rare special occasions and other things that were for everyday use.

From now on every day was to be a special day, so I could enjoy my lovely things all the time. If they got broken – well, they could be replaced.

## **Drawing a line in the sand**

Deciding on what you want is one thing, actually achieving it is another. There are many rungs on the legal system ladder that can be climbed in order to achieve what you believe you are entitled to.

There are only two things you need to actually climb the ladder: Lots of patience and money!

The higher you climb, the more you will require of each. It can literally take years to get to the highest level, which brings me back to the point made by my solicitor at the beginning of the chapter. There comes a time to decide when enough is enough. A compromise has to be reached between what you want and what you can reasonably achieve. The average divorcing couple usually does not have an endless supply of cash to ceaselessly fight one another.

So how do you decide when enough is enough?

That largely depends on your circumstances, and what's at stake.

*"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny."*

*Matthew 5:25-26*

Although, Jesus was not talking here about divorce settlements, His advice is still applicable. It is better for all concerned if the settlement can be negotiated in a timely fashion with the least amount of stress and cost. Engaging the court system in order to finalise a matter can be costly and be an added drain of your time, money and health. 'You will not get out until you have paid your last penny,' underlines just how costly it can be.

The couple of years that this dispute with my ex-husband lasted over property settlement were extremely stressful for me. The dispute totally focused my time as it was not particularly amicable. My life remained on hold until it was all sorted. Eventually I reached the point where I just wanted to get on with my life.

At the time I considered the money on offer to not be enough, but on the other hand I weighed up the fact that to keep fighting would also cost time and money. So I compromised and got on with my life.

### **From little things big things grow**

Reaching a compromise and then being content about what is received as a property settlement is sometimes easier said than done. Years on and looking back at my own settlement, I harbour no dissatisfaction. In fact I rarely think about it.

However, at the time, my attitude was very different. Even though I had finally reached agreement with my ex-husband and signed all the necessary paperwork agreeing to the terms and conditions, I still harboured residual dissatisfaction. The final agreement was not entirely what I had hoped for but that's the thing with a compromise – you don't get everything you want. I struggled with accepting that fact.

A good friend encouraged me to make peace with the situation otherwise my dissatisfaction could turn to bitterness. Instead of feeling hard done by, I needed to be grateful it was over and find contentment in what I had received and move on without regret.

I realised it was never about how much or what I ended up receiving, but my attitude towards what I had received that was

important.

Remember the boy who offered his small lunch of loaves and the fishes to Jesus (*Matt 14:17*).

The same God that turned that small offering into lunch for thousands with twelve baskets of leftovers has the power to prosper us wherever we are and with whatever we have.

After paying off some debts, I invested the bulk of the money and that became the seed money for the life I have today – a life I never thought possible, nor could have imagined on the day I signed the settlement. All the things that I thought I had missed out on with the settlement I no longer care about today. In fact, if I needed them, I can now afford to buy them. The little that I thought I had to start my new life has become the abundance I never expected.

Harbouring anger towards our ex-spouses is pointless and emotionally exhausting. Even if we end up being wronged by our ex-spouses and the settlement is essentially unfair, the story does not have to end there. Our ex-spouses may have intended for us to suffer hardship and be miserable, but that is not God's desire for us. We need to trust Him on that point and surrender up to him our anger and frustrations.

God's blessing was linked to my attitude, not the size of my settlement. The anger and resentment I had been harbouring were blockages to that blessing, until I was able to move on and let go.

As His children we need to heed the words of the Sermon on the Mount:

*"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*  
*Matthew 6:25-33*

## **Informing others of your new circumstances**

Aside from engaging legal representative to sort out your property settlement, there are whole lot of other considerations when it



comes to starting a new life on your own. Listed below are just some of the organisations which you may need to notify your change of circumstances:

- Banks - Bank accounts and credit cards
- Accountant
- Tax office
- Social Security
- Investment organisations and financial planners
- Schools and organisations with which your children are involved
- Local council and utilities such electricity
- Changing your will and the beneficiaries on your superannuation or life insurance.

Your solicitor will be able give advice regarding this. It's important not to put it off because if anything should happen to you there will be no clear legal direction for your estate and it may not be dispersed according to your wishes. It will be up to the Public Trustee or equivalent in your state to divide estate according to legislated guidelines, which may include giving your former spouse access to your estate, especially if you are not legally divorced.

## **Changing your name**

I retained my married name until I remarried but I know some people who have reverted to their maiden or some other name. There is a legal process associated with name changing and your legal representative can give advice regarding this. Bear in mind there will be numerous organisations that will need to be contacted in order to update your changed details.

Before I re-married, I did change my preferred common name. My given name is Catherine and for all the years up to my divorce I was known by friends and family as Cathy. After my separation, as a dare, I joined an online chatroom and used 'Kiss me Kate' as my tag. From that time people came to know me as Kate. For me, changing my name to Kate was significant as it drew a mental line of demarcation in my life between who I was and who I was becoming.

Essentially my personality is the same, but in many other ways I am not the Cathy person from my old life. Kate is the new Cathy. With the amazing re-modelling powers of the Holy Spirit I have become a new creation. I dress differently, see myself very differently, and have a different career and a new husband. I may be the same on the inside but my perception of myself and the world around me has changed dramatically

Needless to say my mother and sisters still call me Cathy!

## **Tidying up financial affairs**

I now work in a financial planning business with my husband and it is surprising how many divorced or separated clients come into our office who have neglected to tidy up all the financial affairs from their previous relationships. Some still retain assets and even bank accounts with their former spouses or partners. In some cases joint assets are retained by agreement for various reasons but mostly it's because both parties have neglected to rectify the situation. It can pose difficulties if one partner wants to sell an asset. Sometimes where a joint signature is required the former partner cannot be located or, even more frustrating, the former partner refuses to comply to release the funds. These sorts of issues should all have been finalised as part of the property settlement.

On separation, as soon as is practicable, it is wise to consider separating bank account and credit cards in order to become financially independent. This reduces the possibility of your former spouse lumbering you with debt or financial commitments that you are unwittingly liable for because you have a joint account or some other joint property.

Getting married and getting divorced are similar when it comes to the amount of paperwork required for changing names and addresses. In my own situation, years after my property settlement terms, I have had the taxation department chase me with regards to assets I no longer own because my former husband overlooked tidying up some of the paperwork at his end after the transfer of assets.

## **Changing Routines**

When the two that were one become two again the work load, if there are children involved, is unlikely to halve. In fact it will probably double.

Juggling children, work and domestic maintenance singlehandedly can be quite a logistical feat. Be prepared to ask for help from friends and to pencil in some respite time for yourself. Initially when you are separated you may be overwhelmed with offers of help, but do not be surprised if several months down the track such offers peter out. That is just the way of human nature. The measure of a true friend is someone who will stay the distance and throughout life we really only ever have a few true friends.

## **Riding out the storm**

The traumas of life often arrive suddenly and unexpectedly. If we are fortunate enough, there will be warning signs that a storm is brewing and that we need to batten down the hatches, take evasive action or make preparations. Facing a storm on your own can be terrifying. Finding adequate shelter in a storm is essential for survival and so is having an umbrella handy if you have to walk through a storm. My solicitor who aided me with my marriage settlement was like a large golf umbrella shielding me from the ravages of the legal system. Shelter might also come in the form of friendships, doctors or counsellors who can provide comfort as well as speak wisdom in to your situation.

While rain from a storm revitalises a land that has been suffering in drought, the storm itself can wreak havoc on the landscape. The Big D storms that can blow through our lives can leave a trail of disaster in their wake; broken homes, broken relationships and broken bodies.

Fortunately storms only come for a season. Healing and revitalisation need to take place after the havoc but will only come when we sink our roots down deep into the Holy Spirit. He is the well spring of life.

*"Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"*

*John 4:13-14*

If you have ever observed trees being buffeted during a storm you will notice how the limbs and trunks sway and flex. If you have watched a dead tree being rocked in the wind you will have noticed the exact opposite. Storms are testing times for trees. Dead trees have no elasticity in their tissue. They are rigid and will eventually break apart with the force of wind. Even living trees will lose unhealthy limbs or even be blown over if their roots are not firm. Standing near a dead or unhealthy tree in a storm is deadly!

To weather the storms of life we need to be flexible and have deep roots, so we can bend and not be broken. In a way we can be thankful for the storms of life as these testing times bring transformation to our lives.

*"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."*

*Psalms 1:1-3*

# Thunderstorm

*Whirling dervish leaves with clattering feet,  
dance on asphalt.  
Flaccid venetians drawn against the torrid heat,  
rattle out a warning.  
Metal chairs drag their feet across patio tiles,  
coursing to a heavenly rumba beat.  
Striped awnings set sail, backdoors slam, Sunday papers scatter,  
empty coke cans tumble.  
Children delaying, anxious mothers waiting at front doors calling,  
"Come back inside, now!"*

*Incandescent shards of light poke angry holes through bilious charcoal clouds,  
the afternoon cracks open.  
Celestial delinquents playing hateful games dash crystal marbles against window panes,  
rain sizzles on concrete.  
Quivering dogs cowering in corners under beds, howl, yowl, while outside,  
terror stalks the streets.  
Demented wailing forms with flailing arms and dislocated limbs,  
rip down power lines.*

*Eerie calm, luminescent afterglow, a psychedelic bow arcs  
over the mayhem left below.  
Broken palings, crumpled cars, rooves shrouded over with tarpaulins,  
rubbish strewn across lawns.  
Rivulets running over children's toes standing giggling in gurgling gutters,  
overflowing down suburban streets.*

# CHAPTER 8: CHANGING PLAYGROUNDS... LIVING WITH DEPRESSION



I sat in my doctor's consulting room, watching as he drew two circles on the writing pad on the table in front of me.

"This is the playground where you are now," he said, pointing to one of the circles with his pen. He pointed to the other circle, "This is playground you would like to be in, but there is a wall between them and you cannot cross over. For now you need to learn to play in the playground where you are."

The playground I was in was not very friendly. In fact, it was downright dangerous. The play equipment was broken with sharp edges that inflicted painful injuries on the unwary. Yet this was where I was – at least for the time being.

I had gone to the doctor because I had started self-harming. In the anger and pain I was experiencing as a result of marital breakdown I would sit in the shower and just bang my head on the wall, bruising my face and eyes. One morning, on gazing at my reflection in the mirror, I came to my senses and reckoned that normal people didn't really do this and that I should get some help - immediately.

The break point for my first marriage occurred the day after I had received acknowledgement for passing a professional post-graduate examination. I had worked and studied hard over a couple of years for this professional achievement. One moment I was on a high and the next in the depths of depression. The workings inside my head simply veered out of alignment and lurched my stumbling marriage into meltdown.

After pushing myself so hard towards my goals, achievement had come with a two edged sword – exhilaration followed by exhaustion. My exhaustion was compounded by years of emotional, physical and mental stress. I had eventually arrived at my end point – I had finally burnt out. One moment life was travelling as normally as it could be and the next I was plunged into reactive suicidal depression. The straw had landed that finally broke this camel's back. I did not see it coming, but something inside my head snapped and my whole world spun out of control. I began to spiral head long into a very dark place.

I looked to my former husband for comfort and companionship but none came – it was like I was married to an empty space. My feelings of rejection cut deep and anger welled up inside of me – anger that had been repressed for so long. For years, I felt I had lived in an emotional desert. Now a sand storm had arrived and it was destroying everything. I had arrived at the endpoint of our relationship. I could give out no more. My well for constantly giving support to my husband and children was completely dry.

Don't get me wrong here, I am not apportioning all blame for my breakdown onto my former husband. Relationships are made up of complex interactions and it is too easy to judge what happens between two people from a simplistic viewpoint. The seeds of the difficulties between us were sown many years before, right back at the beginning of our relationship.

They were sown from the many issues that never got addressed, and in the conflicts that were never resolved.

Looking back I can see just how overloaded the camel's back was before the final straw landed. The warning signs were there and what I thought was normal was actually abnormal. I was a disaster waiting to happen. The benefit of hindsight is a wonderful thing. Perhaps if I'd taken better care of myself, read the warning signs, I might have seen the straw coming but I didn't and its landing cast me into a very dark place where I would dwell for the next couple of years.

My doctor was right. I was now in a very different playground and I would have to learn to play by new rules if I were to survive there and find the gate back to the playground where all the normal people played.

He pulled out his prescription pad. "These tablets (Zoloft) are not the solution to your depression but they will help soften the blows and give you some breathing space, so you can find the answers you are looking for."

So began my journey into the darkness and then eventually – into the dawn.



## **Important points about depression**

There are many excellent books on this topic and I do not intend to cover in any depth here the symptoms, causes and treatment of depression. The following are some pointers that I found helpful in facing the reality of my own depression and its effects on my life and those around me.

### **1. Seek medical attention**

Clinical depression as a diagnosis is really the end point of an underlying disease process. Doctors can alleviate the symptoms of depression with various types of medication but the cure comes from treating the underlying cause. There are many potential underlying causes including hormonal, physical or emotional. It is important if you are suffering from depression that you consult a doctor whom you trust and who can carry out a thorough examination of you in order to determine the underlying cause.

Some of the medications can be addictive or have unwanted side effects which are not pleasant. Follow your doctor's instructions but see medication as a short-term necessity not a long term crutch.

Make the choice to get better; want to be cured; want to be independent of the medication. This is essential. Return to normalcy will not be possible without that desire.

Being sick has a bitter sweet underbelly. It brings focused attention from well-wishers and can create an unhealthy interdependence on both the medication and the health professional who is treating you. Being sick rather than healthy can become the preferred state of being. If deep down, in spite what you might say out loud to others, you prefer the attention you get from being unwell you will never get better. No amount of prayer or laying on of hands will have any affect. God will not interfere with the choice of your heart. It is perverse, but that is our sinful nature at work within us.

For some, depression is a matter of life time management of the underlying cause. I am the type of person who is prone to bouts of depression. I also now know that tendency will not go away. It is a part of who I am but it does not have to dominate my life if I am

willing to learn how to manage it. I no longer take medication but instead employ cognitive therapy to manage my depressive moments.

## **2. The value of counselling - no man (or woman) is an island!**

*"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:  
If one falls down his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls  
and has no one to help him up!"  
Ecclesiastes 4:9-10*

As the verse above indicates, even though we may be aimlessly wandering around in the darkened deserted playground of depression, we need not be struggling there alone. We need to engage someone else's perspective, but finding a good counsellor is like finding a good doctor. It is important to find someone whom you can trust and who is able to speak wisdom into your situation. Good counsel does not always have to come from a paid health professional. Spending hundreds of dollars does not necessarily guarantee a positive result.

While I did attend many professional counselling sessions during my period of depression, on reflection I did not always find them helpful and in some instances they caused more harm than good. We do, however, need to find someone with the wisdom and foresight to help pilot us around the rocks and give navigational assistance for the way forward. While we may not be able to see the light house on the rocks of destruction, we do need to walk with someone who can.

While finding good counsel is essential, acting upon that good counsel is imperative if recovery is to occur.

Two are also better than one, because when we fall in the darkened playground there will be another there able to help us up. The emphasis is on the 'up', meaning we are not supposed to stay in our position of collapse. If you see counselling as nothing more than an opportunity to engender sympathy, you are likely to remain in a stagnant position, endlessly locked into a counselling relationship – never getting up. You will be like a ship that was becalmed and fails

to put up the sails when the wind starts to blow again. Counselling should put the wind back into our sails so we can continue our journey back home. We need to hear the truth about where we are. Then we need to act on it by raising the sails in order to catch the wind. That wind, of course, is the Holy Spirit.

As believers, Christ expects us to be functional and healthy members of His Body. Should we become broken or damaged the other members of His Body are there to help return us to functionality.

*"... We should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love (to one another, we should) grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

*This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them."*

*Ephesians 4:14-18 (NKJV)*

### **3. You will be misunderstood**

Many well-meaning friends will try to cheer you up – to snap you out of it – and not understand why you don't just get over it and get on with your life like all the rest of the normal people! It can be difficult for someone who does not actually experienced depression first hand to understand why you don't just get over it.

The world is full of people with good intentions and it is human nature to want to make someone else's situation better! Why, you may ask – well unless you are a sociopath, being confronted with another's pain is discomfoting. We all want the horrible things to go away so the world around us is a pleasant place in which to dwell.

So people will continually to try encourage you, probably with one of the following clichés, which unfortunately tend not to be immediately helpful to someone who is experiencing clinical depression.

**a. There is always light at the end of the tunnel – ie: can't you see there's hope!**

For someone suffering depression the tunnel is so dark and long it is impossible to know where to even begin to look for the light. There is no light – not even a glimpse. The batteries in the torch are also dead!

**b. All things work together for good – ie: what are you worrying about – it will all work out!**

Personally I think this is one of the worst things to hear. It's an unbelievably insensitive thing to say and actually belittles the person to whom it is said and makes light of what they are going through. In the midst of the pain it is virtually impossible for someone who is really depressed to begin to comprehend the truth implied by this. To someone suffering depression, their world is so bad it is impossible to see how any good could come from it – ever. This clichéd saying is actually part of passage from Romans and it would be far more comforting to quote a passage from the end of the chapter:

*"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*  
Romans 8:38-39

What most normal people don't comprehend about depression is how alone and abandoned a person suffering with depression really feels. It was helpful to me to find people who were willing to accept me where I was and to walk the journey with me. To love me where I was and not be in a hurry to change me. It was a struggle at times to even hang on to the fact that God was walking with me too, but it was a comfort to know that at my worst, God still loved me.

**c. God will never let you suffer more than you can bear – ie: what are you whining about you wimp, it can't be that bad!**

What can one say!!! Pain is pain! Jesus didn't exactly jump for joy or hoopla around the Garden of Gethsemane when His Father asked Him to die on the cross. He struggled with the request and sweated

drops of blood. Rather than rubbing salt into another person's wound, we are encouraged to:

*"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."  
Romans 12:15 (NKJV)*

#### **d. Just have faith in God and He will heal you – ie: you are still sick because you don't have enough faith!**

We live in an instant world – the world of the quick fix. Unfortunately, healing takes time. Miraculous, instantaneous cures for any disease or condition are rare. So it is not down to lack of faith that you might not have received instant relief when you cry out to God for it. Circumstances don't always instantly improve when we pray about them. In fact, sometimes they even get worse!

Is God deaf or being downright cruel? I don't believe so, even though it certainly can feel like it when God seems to be silent in the midst of our tears.

King David is considered a great man of faith but for many years he wandered in exile in order to evade King Saul who sought to kill him. He faced great hardships and dangers. Many times his circumstances overwhelmed him and God seemed far away, and deaf to his cries of help. Here are some of David's cries to God in his hour of need. You may resonate with them:

*"You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me?  
Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"  
Psalms 43:2*

*"My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?" Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God."  
Psalms 42:10-11*

*"My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds;  
my neighbours stay far away. Those who seek my life set their traps,  
those who would harm me talk of my ruin; all day long they plot deception.  
I am like a deaf man, who cannot hear, like a mute, who cannot open his mouth;  
I have become like a man who does not hear, whose mouth can offer no reply.  
I wait for you, O Lord you will answer, O Lord my God."  
Psalms 38:11-15*

#### **4. Waiting for God to answer**

Waiting to hear from God is especially hard if you have endlessly cried out to Him in the midst of your pain. Many times, like David during his years of exile fleeing from King Saul, I was impatient for things to change and for my promised blessing to show its face. The Bible does not promise us quick fixes. As David found out again and again – we are exhorted to wait.

*"I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry."*

*Psalms 40:1*

*"Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes."*

*Psalms 37:7*

#### **If God cares – why do we have to wait?**

My well-meaning friends with their clichéd words of encouragement wanted my depression to disappear and for me to get better – sooner rather than later! So did I. If you are like me, I'm sure you prefer to go around the unpleasant obstacles in your path, or even better still have God totally remove them.

God seems to view things differently. He tends not to remove obstacles. More often than not He says, "You must go through them!" So it was for me when I cried out, "God, don't you love me, don't you care about me – don't you care about my pain?" His response to me was simply; "It's because I love you that you must go through."

Just like Gandalf and the band of ring bearers in the Lord of the Rings who had to go through the Mines of Moria because their mountain pathway was blocked, I had to go through into the darkness. Gandalf did not want to go that way, as he knew what he would have to face – his fear and the fiery demon Balrog that had lived from the beginning of time in the dark recesses of the mines.

It had taken me many years of dysfunction to finally end up spiralling into depression and it was going to take a number of years to finally recover. I would have liked a quick fix at the time – avoiding all the pain – but looking back on those times now with the value of hindsight I can see that God was right to take me through.

There were things I needed to face about myself and the choices I had made. If God had worked some quick fix miracle and changed my life instantly, I would have missed out on learning so much. Yes, it was hard. Yes, it was very painful and Yes, I came close to losing my faith in God. Yes, God seemed very far away. Every night I would pray before going to sleep the words from *Psalms 91:4*:

*"Cover me with Your feathers, Lord, give me refuge under Your wings."*

I would wake up every morning just to face another day of pain. It seemed endless but little by little, step by step, I was taking not only a journey back to health but a faith journey with God towards the dawn.

I believe it takes greater faith and courage to go on this type of journey with God than it does to just ask God for a quick fix.

How else other than on a journey through the darkest night can you learn that God is actually light? How else other than when you have reached the end of your tether can you learn that God does actually uphold you with His right hand? How else other than when all appears hopeless can you learn that God is actually your Hope? It is only when we are weak that we can learn that God really is our strength.

At the very lowest point in my depression, just before I was to be admitted to hospital, Jesus came to me in a vision and took me walking with Him through a beautiful garden. There was a moment of peace for me within the eye of the storm. I realised I was not alone and My Friend was walking every step of the journey with me.

What a friend we do have in Jesus!

## Feathers

*They said:*

*At the end of the tunnel there is light  
But all I see is dead of night  
The grip of pain  
It binds me tight.  
As I lay me down to sleep  
Cover me Lord with your feathers,  
you know my soul how much it aches and weeps.*

*They said:*

*The Lord will not burden you  
With more than you can bear  
What would they know?  
They don't walk daily in despair.  
As I close my eyes tonight  
Cover me Lord with your feathers,  
and just hold me tight.*

*They said:*

*All things work towards good  
For those who love the Lord  
But they don't know the road I travel  
Or my daily struggles with moving forward.  
As the darkness closes all around  
Cover me Lord with your feathers,  
and take me to that place where peace is found.*

*They said:*

*Don't fear, just have faith in God  
Leave it there, He'll work it out.  
But all I want to do, is in anger, shout  
It's not fair, why have You cast me here  
Don't You care?*

*As I toss and turn*

*Cover me Lord with your feathers,  
And give me the answers for which I yearn.  
What they didn't know:  
Was that crying through the night endureth  
Before the morning joy breaks forth  
The shadowy vales of death must be travailed  
before the victory banquet can be enjoyed*

*And only after the melting of the winter snows  
Will there come the blooming of the summer rose*



*As I lay me down all forlorn  
Cover me Lord with your feathers,  
Because I know You'll walk with me into the dawn*

*"He will cover you with his feathers and under His wings you will find refuge"  
Psalm 91:4 (NIV)*

# CHAPTER 9: WHERE ARE YOU GOD? FINDING LIGHT IN THE DARK



I do not believe that people who suffer with depression necessarily need to have demons cast out of them. That said, I do believe that a person in a depressive state is susceptible to becoming overcome with a demonic form of induced spiritual darkness. In fact, any prolonged episode of pain, disease or distress that has the potential to weaken our defences and disrupt our relationship with God makes us susceptible to spiritual darkness.

I have term these disruptive circumstances collectively as the four Big D's: Death, Disaster, Disease and Divorce. They are like the Ringwraiths in Lord of the Rings or the Horsemen of the Apocalypse riding around on the outskirts of our lives, always looking to make a way in for their master – the Lord of Darkness.

*"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."*

*Ephesians 6:12*

We may not consciously invite the darkness into our lives, but all too often we can provide the reasons for it to remain. The Lord of Darkness means only to destroy, and unfortunately we all too often willing participants in our own destruction. Our faith in Christ provides the keys to our own release but often we fail to exercise our authority to use them in order to open the door to our freedom. God has given us the authority to bind and loose things in heaven and earth. What an amazing privilege. What awesome power at our disposal!

*"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

*Matthew 16:19*

## **Separation from the truth**

Spiritual darkness is a demonic fog that clouds our minds and brings confusion. It does not take away our freewill, but it dulls our mind and obscures the truth. I know that in the depth of my depression it was very hard to determine the truth about my situation or appreciate the power I actually had at my disposal to change my

situation. In the midst of my emotional pain it became very hard to make decisions. I needed the help of good friends who could speak wisdom into my life and show me the way out of the darkness. If I had remained on my own and ignored their help I would have made some very silly decisions based on my incorrect interpretation of the truth.

The more we drown in our confusion and ignore the advice of good friends, the more we will become trapped in the darkness and the way out will be obscured. Our spiritual senses will become paralysed and the truth will continue to elude us.

Unfortunately, not everyone who lives with the darkness really wants to escape. These are the types of people who constantly find their way to prayer lines but never seem to find healing. In a warped kind of way these people make illness their friend. On questioning it becomes obvious they have no real desire to be free of the darkness because being there brings them sympathy and attention. Choosing attention over freedom will never bring release.

## **Prison with an open door**

Satan is a masterful trickster. The darkness in which he holds us hostage is in fact a prison with an unlocked door. When Christ rose from the grave he conquered the darkness, but Satan would like us to continue to believe that did not happen. He wants us to believe that there is still power in the darkness to hold us captive, that the door to our prison is firmly padlocked and that attempting to escape is futile. He wants us to believe that a lie is the truth, which is the same trick he used on Adam and Eve.

## **Overcoming the Darkness**

*"Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground."*

*Ephesians 6:13*

Satan intends for us to remain in bondage, choosing to believe that God cares nothing for our predicament. Overcoming the darkness requires making choices and acting upon them. Faith without the

follow through is just wishful thinking and has no more power than a feather floating in the breeze to withstand the oncoming storm. We need to be prepared to stand firm and fight for our freedom.

The choices we make are like keys or switches. Flicking them can change the course of our life, for better or for worse. Making a good choice is like flicking the switch in a signal box to change the direction of a train so that a collision with an oncoming train is avoided.

God will not interfere with our freewill. The choices between freedom or bondage, life or death, are always ours to make. It's that simple.

Choosing to change is scary but remaining in the darkness is even scarier!

## **Choosing Life over Death**

I came to realise that when I plunged into a depressive episode and the darkness overwhelmed me, I needed to make a choice. I needed to firstly ask myself a very simple question: Do I want to choose Life or Death? Do I really want to live or do I really want to die?

That may sound like a dumb question but it isn't really.

In the middle of my darkness the voices in my mind were showering my thoughts with death and suicide but deep down I knew I wanted to live. In spite of all the pain I still wanted to live. The Spirit of God was calling me to life but I knew if I listened to the other voices from the darkness, and followed the path they were tempting me with, I would die. It was a one way trip, a path of no return. To alter that course I needed to make a decision. To survive I needed to actively choose to do so. From the depths of my darkness I cried out to God; "I want to Live, I don't want to die. I don't really don't want to kill myself."

If you are reading this and you are in that kind of dark place you need external help. You need to seek medical attention urgently. At my worst, I called my doctor and asked to be admitted to hospital.

I knew I could not go on as I was. I was totally alone in my house. I was continually being bombarded with visions of how to kill

myself in various ways. Tempted continuously to go there. At the time it seemed the only reasonable choice to make so that the pain would go away! When I chose life a miracle did happen – God reached down and pulled me out of the darkness. As it says in Ps 40:1,

*"He lifted me out of the slimy pit and set my feet on a firm Rock."*

That's exactly what He did and it started with a feeble anguished cry from within my soul – but that simple choice started my journey back to health.

The fog slowly began to recede and the darkness slowly dissipated. When you truly invite the Light in – the darkness will fade.

*"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"*  
*John 8:12*

God provided a way and His light opened up a pathway for me out of the darkness. Through help from my friends and my doctor, I began my journey up that path. God will always honour the choices we make. He is a gentleman not a thug. He does not beat us into submission, he opens the door and invites us in. Entering is always our choice. When we choose to enter, He will do His utmost to clear the way ahead for us.

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."*  
*Psalms 119:105*

## **Medicine versus faith**

While I strongly believe there is a spiritual dimension to depression which is perhaps not always acknowledged or understood by the medical profession, I would always encourage someone who is suffering with depression to seek proper medical help and obtain a correct diagnosis. It does not mean you have a weak faith by seeking medical attention. The Bible encourages us to be wise in all our decisions and it makes no sense not to avail ourselves of all that

modern medicine has to offer. As far as I am concerned, faith without wisdom is stupidity.

The moment the darkness comes and the voices shower you with suicidal thoughts – make your choice.

Flick the Life switch!

Choose life but also take action.

A choice without action is just a passing whim. It will have no foundations in reality and will not bring change.

Do not give the voices listening time and they will leave. The voices are the sirens of death. If you keep choosing to listen to those thoughts they will entice you down a path of self-destruction and shipwreck you on the rocks of no return! If you need medical help to deal with your depression and suicidal thoughts – pursue that avenue at all costs and with urgent haste.

DO NOT remain your own and do nothing.

Phone a friend.

## **Latch onto the Truth**

What is the truth? What do you choose to believe?

Seek, and acknowledge the truth above all and at all costs. Hold onto it with all your might as your very life depends on it.

*"The truth will set you free."*

*John 8:32*

This may sound obvious if you are a believer, but it is not necessarily obvious to a believer suffering with depression.

Darkness clouds the truth. Once it comes, it becomes difficult to perceive or hear the truth clearly, if at all. It is important to understand this in order to overcome the darkness. Every fibre in your being will rail against that fact, but it is true – the voices from the darkness only utter lies. If you can grasp this concept that is a victory in itself.

My depressive episodes continued into my second marriage. During these bouts of depression I would hear inside my head

comments such as, "Your husband doesn't love you. Nobody does - you'd be better off dead."

I started to question this. I knew my husband loved me very much. It might not have felt like it after we had a disagreement, but it was the truth. I knew that, so I learnt to speak back to the voices and call them what they were – LIES! Does this make me mentally unstable or mad? I don't think so. It is necessary to speak out the truth and refuse to give listening time to the lies that are spoken into our minds. It is necessary to call them that to their face and refuse to utter them. Uttering them gives them life and increases the hold they have over our reasoning. I speak from personal experience here and it takes considerable effort, but making the choice to resist them is essential in order to overcome them.

We do not face them alone, the power of Holy Spirit will blast them away from your mind and the darkness will lift. So, remember it is a battle here. You won't always succeed. But don't give up. Allow yourself to be forgiven. Move on and be ready the next time the darkness comes. Continue to stand firm. We are in a spiritual battle and the battlefield of the spiritual realm is the mind.

*"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 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 Corinthians 10:3-5 (NIV)*

It helps to have someone who can speak the truth to you when the darkness comes because the darkness corrupts our ability to reason. Find someone who willing to walk your journey with you. Someone who is godly and trustworthy.

Call them. Seek them out and learn to listen to them when you are in the darkness. This is not easy as every fibre in you will want to resist the truth. The battle starts with our thoughts and motivators.

A good friend is also one who will not permit you to continually voice lies, but will stand beside you and help you to silence the lies. Ultimately, leaving the darkness is down to the choices we make.



Learn to make good choices. As believers our faith in God provides the keys to push open the door to our prison and let the light shine in.

The powers of darkness are real, and so is the battle, but the victory is already ours. We just have to stand firm and claim it. Every lie you refute more firmly stakes out your claim for the truth and your freedom. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God. We have to not only know the truth but act upon on it. Faith is belief in action.

## **Recovery takes time**

If only recovery from depression were as easy as flicking a switch in one's head. At the time of writing this book I have been assessed as having Aspergers Syndrome. Since people with this disorder are more prone to episodes of depression, receiving this diagnosis has helped me understand myself. As mentioned above, depression is the end point of an underlying disease process. In order to overcome depression, it is essential to have the underlying cause correctly diagnosed. A diagnosis provides insight on how to effectively manage episodes of depression when they occur.

## **Be encouraged**

It is common for most people going through relational or circumstantial breakdown to experience depression at some stage during the healing process. With the help of friends, supportive doctors as well as a desire to navigate the rough seas that continually dump waves on you, it is possible to break through. Hope can seem a very distant flicker on the horizon just as it did for the Israelites going off to exile and servitude into Babylon. God may have promised that it would only be for seventy years, but seventy years is a lifetime away when you are only at day one. Nevertheless, as we have read above, God did not abandon His children in exile and walked every day of those seventy years in exile with them.

Remember: There is nothing, not even the darkness of depression that can separate us from the love of God (*Romans chapter 8*).

Learn to recognise the triggers and be kind to yourself.

I have learnt to recognise the warning signs of my depressive episodes. When the depressive feelings overwhelm me I have learnt to let them wash over me, acknowledging them for what they are – a distortion of the truth. I know in time the darkness will pass and all will be well again. By using this approach I have avoided spiralling into serious depressive episodes. As a consequence, I have found that I am not continually haunted by the negative voices, as they have been denied listening time.

It does take time and effort and we can be our own worst critics, which is certainly true in my case as I really don't like to fail or make mistakes.

A friend recently told me it's important to learn to be kind to ourselves when the darkness comes; to see ourselves as worthy of love as we are loved by our Heavenly Father. Sounds simplistic but our mind needs to hear such thoughts when we are in the midst of a depressive episode to help counteract the dark thoughts that can potentially lead to self-harm.

Resist the urge to act impulsively on strong feelings of anger and have strategies in place to distract and redirect your thinking so that it can find its way back into the light. Distraction therapy can be very effective. I know that physiologically it can take me a day or so to recover my equilibrium. The body secretes various hormones and chemicals in response to angry feelings and these take time to be metabolised and be removed from the blood stream and body tissues.

In the meantime I will rest, walk and ponder the beauty in my garden or just chill out listening to music. Doing these things brings a calmness back into my world. You will have different initiators of calm; maybe it's going shopping, jogging or getting your hair done. Whatever it is, immerse yourself in those things that will promote the return of peace back into your life. It is not selfish to take time out to re-charge the batteries so don't feel guilty about it. As a child of God you are worth it. Everybody needs a bit of pamper time and self-loving. How can we give out love to other others if we have not learnt to love and respect ourselves?

*"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."*  
*Phillipians 4:8-9*

## Being Me

*Always on the outside looking in!  
That's me – that's where I dwell,  
observing silently from within my fortress of solitude.  
You want me to conform and fit in but I cannot blend.  
I see the differences and am compelled to point them out.  
I just don't get it – Why are you so offended? Why do you turn away and leave me  
standing there?*

*You say I am insensitive and blurt things out.  
Well, I say, what's the point of waffling round the edges – tip toeing round the truth,  
let's cut straight to the chase.  
This is how it really is –  
I feel more deeply and completely the things you cannot see or sense,  
the nuances of being polite are obscured by the importance of what's right!  
My perspective is focused through the Aspie lens –  
defined and diffused through a kaleidoscopic panorama of extremes,  
of light and dark, of hope and fear, of depression and delirious happiness  
warped by a whirlwind of emotion that ramps up to overload  
So, come and join here me, just for a while, in my solitude.*

*Don't be scared, I dare you, take my hand.  
We'll talk in twisted rhymes,  
gaze upon the psychedelic flowers  
bask and giggle in the barmy warmth of friendship  
and watch the dying embers of the day burnish clouds into a passionate blaze.  
Then as they recede into the cicada cacophony of evening,  
we'll dance with wild exuberance in celebration of another day survived.*

# CHAPTER 10: THE SEASON OF 'ME-TIME'... ENJOYING THE NOW



"These are lovely," commented the sales assistant as I laid my selection of clothes on the counter in front of her. "What's the occasion?" she asked as she removed the tags and folded the dresses before wrapping them in tissue paper.

"I'm the occasion," I smiled back. "Just getting ready for my future."

That shopping event was a landmark occasion for me. When I walked into a dress shop that day and selected a couple of cocktail dresses, including a little black number, I had done something rather unusual. I had gone shopping for myself. Before my marriage broke up, when I went shopping I always considered the needs of the other people in my family before myself. My thoughts revolved around providing for them and meeting their needs before my own. Rarely did I ever spend money entirely on myself and virtually never purchased new clothes for myself. Now I was on my own. There was just me to consider with no-one looking over my shoulder, instructing me what to buy or not to buy.

Shopping for myself was a truly liberating experience and it took a little time to get used to not feeling guilty about spending money on myself.

At that time, I was living totally on my own. In spite of the pain I was experiencing in the midst of my loneliness, I began to see it as a uniquely special time in my life that might never come again. It was a time of healing and recharging the batteries. It was a new season in my life. Seasons come and they go, so I realised that I needed to enjoy my new season and live it to its full potential. Life can too easily be marred by regrets when you look back on missed opportunities.

So, if through one of life's traumatic events you suddenly find yourself on your own, don't be in a hurry to rush off in another direction or into another relationship. Take a step back and take time out to smell the roses. You'll be a better person for doing so and your future will reap the benefits of your season of 'Me-time.'

## **Changing tracks**

It is commonly said that a change is as good as a holiday. That may be so, but if you are like me change, especially if it is unplanned, can be very stressful. I like to be in control of my circumstances and be the one to initiate a change of plans. I did not plan for my former marriage to end. When it did I felt cast into a kind of no man's land. Even though my previous life was not especially happy at times, at least I knew what to expect. After my separation everything changed. All the familiar landmarks in my life were gone.

There is always a comfort in the familiar, even the unpleasant familiar, which is why I think change can be so disorientating. Re-orientating the landmarks in life takes time. At the time of my separation I felt lost and had no idea of what direction to take. Someone in the signal box of my life had just shunted me onto a totally different track and I had absolutely no idea where I was headed or what to expect.

The change of my tracks affected every aspect of my life, including my friendships. There is a huge difference between relating to the world as part of couple compared to relating to the world as a single person. I lost many friends because people made choices between us or just didn't know how to relate to me as a single person.

With separation everything changes, from managing finances, caring for children and planning meals. Surviving requires making new choices.

The biggest choice I had to make was to embrace the change with open arms, and in spite of the pain and disorientation learn to see it as a positive in my life. I had to stop kicking against the pricks. (*Acts 24:14*).

I may have been forcibly shunted onto a different track in life, but even though it took a while, I eventually realised I was in for the ride of my life, and that the change really was as good as a holiday.

## **Loneliness - friend or foe?**

In spite of the negative emotional impact, being alone does have distinct advantages. For the previous twenty years, my life was filled

with running around after children and a husband as well as my workplace commitments. If you are a separated parent with young children to care for, I appreciate it may be very different as life will certainly continue to remain hectic. My children were older; one was in boarding school and the other had gone to live with her grandmother. After it all ended, my busyness ceased and I found the loneliness hard to bear before I came to appreciate that there was another side to it.

While loneliness can be oppressive, it does provide unique opportunities. I came to realise that I was being given a very special opportunity. I had been given a second chance, a chance for a new beginning. This was a unique time period in my life which I might never get again. There was nobody else to consider but myself. For years I had given out to everyone else, including the church. Now it was 'Me-time.' Everyone else was being sent to the back of the line! The one I had always thought the least about was now being given centre stage attention and that someone was me.

The emotional trauma incurred as a result of one of life's Big D's, takes time to heal, and we need to allow ourselves that time for healing to take place. God needs focused time with us in order to take us on His journey of restoration.

Loneliness can and does drive people prematurely straight back into relationships. We all know people who have ended one relationship and then almost immediately entered into another one on the rebound. Sadly, many of these relationships don't last and I suspect that is because there hasn't been enough 'Me-time' in between. Looking back, I can see that I was far from ready to enter another relationship, even though every part of me ached to have someone else in my life. A relationship was actually the last thing I really needed at the time. What I needed, was to be alone.

My loneliness felt like living in a desert, but deserts can be very productive places. Many of the great people in the Bible spent time in the desert. Jesus spent forty nights there after His baptism. Moses lived there for forty years fleeing Egypt, and then spent the rest of his life leading the grumbling Children of Israel through the wilderness. Elijah fled there when he feared for his life and found



God in the still small voice (1 Kings 19:12). Desert times are testing times, but they are also times for seeking out and drawing close to God.

Relationships distract us from ourselves and, more importantly, often interfere with our time with God. In the midst of loneliness we have to confront our fears and the things about ourselves we would rather not see. This was the time I needed to draw near to God. It was to be a time of pain, but only for a season. At the end of the season my tears would be traded for joy. God would lift me up out of my pit and place me back on solid ground.

*"Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up."*

*James 4:8-10*

## **Coping with the loneliness**

One of the antidotes to loneliness is to simply get busy. Distraction therapy is very effective. I took up ballroom dancing and tap classes as well as joining a social squash club. These were activities I would never have had time or opportunity for in my past life but were now my means of getting out of the house and socialising. What's more, they were enjoyable and were an outlet for emotional energy. Physical activity also generates real tiredness whereas emotional exhaustion from sitting around contemplating the woes of life can actually disrupt sleep.

Loneliness can breed loneliness if you do nothing about it. I enjoy solitude but deep down I still have a need for friendship and I know I will not find friends by staring at four walls on my own, or sitting at the end of the phone waiting for someone to call.

The Bible encourages us to make the most of our time. Situations in life will never be just perfect for anything we probably want to do. Life is out there and we need to make every effort to join in and be involved. With the advent of social media it is possible to interact with others without leaving home from the comfort of an armchair. I would caution against choosing this as the only form of social

interaction. There are a lot of on-line dating and chat sites out there in cyber space but nothing really replaces one-on-one, face-to-face interaction. Sooner or later, if there is to be any real depth or intimacy in a relationship, it is essential to meet up in person. It is very easy to hide behind a pen name in a chat room and there are some predators out there, even in reputable chatrooms. I personally find social media such as Facebook to be quite impersonal and full of boring small talk. Real in-depth discussions are not easy to conduct and I find many of the posts to be more like a glorified "look at me - look at me" show and tell. That is not to deny that such avenues of communication do not add dimension to a friendship. They do, but there has to be more if one is looking for a friendship that develops to a level of lasting value.

## **Sliding friendships**

*"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."  
Proverbs 17:17*

Friendships do change as result of Life's Big D's. Do not be surprised if you find yourself totally isolated outside the social group in which you once moved freely. If you are experiencing this, it is entirely normal. The whole dynamics of friendships changes when you go through trauma, or transfer from coupledness to singleness. With divorce some people will take sides or will not want to take sides (ie, will not contact either you or your ex-spouse). Others will just not know how to relate to you anymore because you don't fit in (ie, you are no longer part of a couple). Some friends were really your spouses' friends and will see no need to continue to have contact with you. I think it is the change of friendship dynamics that also adds to the loneliness, and for some people, drives them prematurely back into a marital relationship.

I experienced sadness as a result of the loss of a number of friendships from my former life. In most cases there was not much I could do about it. People had their reasons and I needed to respect that and let them go. What truly amazed me were the new friendships that blossomed in my life. Some of them were with

people who I least expected and whose friendship showered me with immense blessing during the time immediately after my marriage break up.

It was within these new friendships that my healing and restoration began. These were the people who accepted me for who I was and who did not place me under judgement. I was accepted by them – warts and all. Some of these people had walked the same road I was walking and so had immense compassion and understanding for what I was going through. They spoke wisdom into my life and helped me find a way back into the sunshine. It is not good that we are alone. We were made for relationship. Treasure the friendships you have and don't take them for granted.

*"The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'"*

*Genesis 2:18*

Good friends lighten the load, light the way and lighten up our life. Together the world is a less formidable place. For me, a famous Australian wine advert sums up friendship very succinctly: "Talk. Eat, Live Laugh." Find friends to do things with and enjoy doing things with them.

## **Enjoy the life you have**

For a long time after my marriage broke apart I held on to the belief that somehow my husband was going to come back and that we would both sort it all out. For a long time I refused to believe otherwise, which was largely due to my struggle with the belief that Christians should not get divorced. It was only after I faced the reality that we were both going our separate ways that I was able to find peace. On acceptance of this reality, a great weight lifted off my shoulders. I felt a great sense of freedom. The stress and emotional tension that I had experienced over the previous months lifted. Surpassingly, I felt no condemnation from God. If anything, I felt He heaved a sigh of relief that I, His child, had finally come to her senses!

I know there are books out there that encourage separated spouses to continue to pray for reconciliation with their estranged spouses and even prayer groups that have a focus on petitioning God to bring back errant partners so the marriage can go on. Personally, I would not encourage anyone to read these type of books or devote enormous amounts of their prayer life to petitioning God to make their ex-spouses see the error of their ways and return to the marriage.

I believe such a course of action to be emotionally draining, unhealthy and not very realistic. While God does hate divorce, He is also very compassionate and a realist at heart. Maybe your ex-spouse will be reconciled to you, but maybe they won't. In order to move on it is necessary to make peace with the possibility of either option, and to let your ex-spouse go. Pray for them by all means. Pray that they are blessed wherever they are, but let them go. The marriage, as it was, is over. If you do get back together, it will have to be a different kind of marriage to what you had previously.

'Me-time' is not about focusing on your past and its pain, it is about focusing on yourself and the now. It is a time for personal healing and refreshing. That will not happen if all your emotional energy is focused on someone else. It is not selfish to focus on yourself – it is necessary. How can we love others if we have not learnt to love ourselves by discovering the person that God loves within us?

You may not like where you are in your life right now. It may be painful, but it is where you are. When God sent the Children of Israel into exile to Babylon He promised to prosper them there even though it was in a strange and hostile country far from the Promised Land. Babylon was not where they wanted to go, but it was where they were sent and God went with them. In fact they were commanded to remain there and make a new life until they were told to leave.

*"This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number*

*there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”*  
Jeremiah 29:4-8

God’s promise is to prosper you wherever you are. It may feel like you have been sent into exile, and it may feel like you are in the wilderness, but even in the desert God can make the roses bloom. Remember, nothing can separate us from the love of God. This is where you are for now, but it is not forever. Even the Children of Israel returned to the Promised Land after a time in exile.

My ex-husband and I worked together in the same business in a large country town. When our marriage fell apart and I became unwell with clinical depression, it was untenable for us to continue to work together. Consequently, I left the business. Without the same regular income it was hard financially for me as I did not have personal Income Protection risk insurance. I needed to continue to work even though I was unwell.

Work opportunities within my profession were limited for me in the town where we lived, although I did eventually find some part-time work in another practice in town. Looking back now it was truly God’s provision for me in a difficult time. That workplace was one of the happiest I have ever been in, and I really enjoyed going to work there. The people there were a delight to be with and greatly lifted my spirits. Other part-time work also eventually came my way and my financial situation eased.

Remember, our happiness is not dependant on the state of our relationships. It is dependent on our relationship with God. Joy can come back into your life when you make peace with your circumstances. Accept them for what they are and move on.

## **Don’t play the blame game**

Dysfunctional people have dysfunctional relationships. Without apportioning blame it is reasonable to say that both partners in a failed marriage have in some way contributed to the dysfunction of it. Somewhere along the way something went wrong because both people made poor choices. Both partners will come out of broken

marriage broken or damaged to some extent. Some worse than others.

Continuing to point the finger at someone else for your circumstances in life and dump all the blame on their shoulders is emotionally draining and not helpful in the long run. You will eventually burn out emotionally. Perhaps the other person did do and utter some inexcusable and hurtful things, but there is no doubt that you probably did the same. Even if you feel justified in your actions, the other person probably feels the same. It is a no-win situation, so it's best not to go there. If you are struggling with wanting to continually blame someone else, perhaps standing in front of mirror for a while when pointing your finger at yourself might be helpful.

Blame erects barriers to the road ahead and bogs life down in the past.

One of the interesting aspects to being on your own is that there is nobody else to blame. All the decisions are yours to make. The flipside is that the responsibility for those decisions is also all yours. That may sound scary especially if don't like to make mistakes. Mistakes need not be the end of the world and can in themselves be great teachers. Nevertheless, it is still important to seek sound advice before making decisions. The point here is that it's the making of the decisions for yourself that can be quite liberating.

You can achieve things on your own. You can make good choices. You can do things for yourself. You do not have to rely on someone to continually make those choices for you. Making and being responsible for your own decisions is a sign of personal maturity.

## **Transformation time**

'Me-time' is about yourself. It is a time for healthy self-reflection and healing. It's about re-directing the path your life has been tracking by learning to make better choices. It's time to close the door on your old life and discover your new life. Time for the butterfly to emerge, spread its wings and fly!

Before embarking on a new track in life or entering into another relationship, it is important to first become your own person, to know who you are. Who we are should not be determined by the other person in the relationship. That is why my shopping expedition above was such a major event for me.

For many years I had allowed others, and their comments about me, determine the choices I made about how I looked and dressed. For the first ten years of my first marriage I never wore long trousers or jeans, as they were disapproved of by my ex-husband. I had always believed myself to be fat and never thought it possible to wear anything fashionable because I considered my backside to be large and unsightly. I hated wearing swimmers because I had lots of dark hair on my legs which was not easy to control with shaving.

Looking back on it all now, all those things seem a little crazy. What's more when I look at old pictures of myself, it's obvious my former clothing style was about as flattering as wearing a burqa. In fact my former style was symbolic of how I saw myself. Deep down I was ashamed of what I saw in the mirror and wanted to cover it up.

Once I was on my own, the veil lifted from over my eyes. Even then it was obvious that the truth I had believed about myself was based on a lie. Now I was free to determine my own style. I got my ears pierced and the hair on my legs professionally treated (Thanks heavens for laser hair removal). Then I began the shopping expedition for a new wardrobe.

The restoration of my life was in full swing. Just as God had promised, the damage done by the locusts was being rectified.

*"I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten"*  
*Joel 2:25 (NKJV)*

During this period of Me-time, it seemed to me that God was giving me back my youth. He was giving me another chance at my teenage years that had been such a miserable disaster the first time around! I believe I had never matured emotionally into the woman I was meant to be, but was stunted by the traumas that life had dished up to me in my formative years. At the time I had neither guidance nor the wisdom to confront and overcome them. Now that God was

restoring to me what the locusts had eaten in my life, I had a second chance. God pruned away all the distorted growth so that there would now be a flush of healthy regrowth.

Inwardly I felt a carefreeness and easiness I had never really known before, not even in my teenage years which were fairly miserable. I went out with friends, enjoyed life, lived a bit spontaneously and just let my hair down. The feeling of freedom was wonderful. I was accountable to no-one but myself. Life was fun.

After all those years of living under the shroud of someone else's interpretation of who I should be, I was finally throwing back the covers and working it out for myself. Roses began to bloom in my desert.

Since I knew this was only for a season, I intended to make the most of it while it lasted. I knew I would eventually get back into a relationship with someone and there would again be restrictions on my life. I don't mean restrictions in a bad way. It's just that when you enter into a relationship you become accountable to the other person and out of respect for them must consider their needs and desires. While I was on my own, I could eat when and what I liked, put on whatever music I liked, sing out of tune and dance myself silly without anyone watching or passing judgement.

So don't just break out – break the mould so there's no going back.

The following words from the theme song of "The Enterprise" written by Diane Warren and Rod Stewart, sum it all up for me:

*I'm going where my heart will take me  
no one's gonna bend or break me  
I can reach any star  
cause I've got faith - faith of the heart  
Dream, Believe, Create*

We were all created to be creative. The very life that we breathe in with every breath was breathed into us by the Creator, the giver of life.

*"In Him we live and move and have our being."*



*ActS 17:28 (NIV)*

After creating Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, God blessed them and said:

*"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*  
*Genesis 1:28 (NIV)*

Adam and Eve were created to make a home in the Garden of Eden and likewise we were all born to make the world a better place. Prickles and thistles only entered into Adam and Eve's world after their disobedience. Dysfunction was a consequence of their choice to walk away from the truth. It was not God's will for their lives. Neither is relational breakdown part of God's will for our lives. Never believe that for a minute. The miracle of our faith, is that God stands there with open arms, willing to help us create something beautiful out of the garbage that we have produced through our mistakes.

Like Adam and Eve we are meant to be productive and fruitful, not destructive. All of us have a unique set of gifts through which to channel and express our creative impulses. We might not attain worldwide recognition or become famous people, but in our own realm of influence, amongst our family and friends, we can make a difference.

Search your heart. Is there something you have been longing to do but have never got around to doing? Now is the time while you have the time. Fan your creative spark, be it making quilts or turning a desert-like garden bed into a blooming paradise. Take the first step to turn your dreams into reality. Believe you can do it and you will. The man who believes he can't, never will.

For me writing this book began with an idea, but it took effort and perseverance to make into a reality. Along the way, through the process of actually starting, and then continuing to write, I have learnt a great deal about writing, and about myself. Nothing is impossible to him (or her) who believes:

*What the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve.*  
*(Napoleon Hill)*

The creative spark that separated the light from dark, and arced across from God's finger to Adams' finger as depicted on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel, lives in the hearts and minds of believers and non-believers. That creative spark allows us to tap into the mind of God, and is there to give us the edge when confronted with the dilemmas of the world, if we tap into it. With it we can accomplish great things. Many of the great creative minds of humanity also had deep spiritual lives. Michelangelo who spent four years lying on his back on scaffolding high above the floor to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel was himself a deeply pious man. So dream on.

*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."*  
*Isaiah 55:8-9*

## Wildheart

*I long to go to where the wild things dwell  
Look down from lofty heights upon the world below  
Mark the arc across the sky etched by the eagle's wing  
in thermals turning slow – rising up  
It makes my heart sing.*

*I'll dive into meadows sweet, hazed in the midday sun  
with a myriad buzzing things. On verdant velvet, luxuriate  
and feel the thrumming earth beneath bare feet  
Run with wind trailed streamers in my hair – flying up  
in thrilled delight.*

*I will arise from my torpid slumber,  
Call loudly to the day with the gulls as they rise upon the salty air.  
Break free – shake this spell I'm under.  
Crunch squeaky sand and stand where the sea froth in lacy mirth  
comes frilling round my toes.*

*Feel the burling breeze upon my cheeks,  
Tack the ruffling wind and with billowing clouds set sail to journey forth  
Full and by - course the way  
With dolphins curling, keel cleave the waves - spraying up  
Oh, salt encrusted epicure of joy.*

*At day's end that comes all too soon  
In the azure calm of a moon bathed lagoon,  
Drink deep the peace that settles low falling with the twilight afterglow.  
To the lullabies of singing wings  
be rocked to sleep to the slap and beat and creak of beech.*

*I will go – respond to the call  
that always draws me far from pavements, straight and bleak.  
From street lamps glaring into aimless faces staring, shoving, pushing  
Through traffic stalled in constant beeping,  
Radios blaring.  
Swap it all, for carousing Currawongs  
In a weeping Myall stand, the noisy Grevillia screech of Lorikeets  
And the pit-pit chitter of the Silver Eyes.*

*Against such ear sweet melodies no urban a cappella could compete  
or resonate so deep within my core.  
The austere lines of iron and steel,  
Compacted rock and mortared blocks cannot compare  
Nor such reverence be found as in a cedar cathedral, towering grand,  
Strangler figs draped tangled to the ground.*

*Birds belling through fern fanned air  
Cool and moist to the cheek.*

*Now is the time to seek the path my aching heart demands.  
Arise and flee this life I plainly keep confined within my concrete shell.  
Trace the rambling tracks to craggy peaks  
From ferny forest glade or wave lapped shores - swells up,  
This nectar from the gods, this ichor to my soul,  
Draws me, calls me - no more delay, time to leave and boldly seize the day.*

# CHAPTER 11: THE ROAD AHEAD... THE FUTURE BEGINS TODAY



## **Continually operating in reverse gear generates a lot of whining!**

The pastor I heard using this catchy phrase was encouraging his congregation to move forward in their lives without hanging onto the past. In order to journey forward, we need to look to the road ahead. Our future lies ahead through the windscreen and should not be distracted by the vision captured in the rear view mirror. Do you remember the words on the billboard at the crossroads?

*"God plans to prosper you and not to harm you, He plans to give you hope and a future."  
Jeremiah 29:11*

That promise of prosperity is for the present and not the just the future. It begins in the dark times at the Big D Crossroads. Just as God promised to prosper the Children of Israel in exile, He has promised to prosper us when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Exile is only for a season and there comes a time to return to the Promised Land and the normalcy of life. In order to leave the darkness of the crossroads and arrive at our future where the promise of our banquet of celebration is being prepared, we need to stop making the past our primary focus.

Now that you have had time to pause a while and think about your situation under the message billboard, consider which path to take at the fork in the road at the Big D crossroads.

There are three roads leading away. Choose carefully and remember - a decision made in haste can be a time waste and take you on a detour.

Getting better starts by taking steps to get better.

### **Pathway 1 – Turning back**

If you decide to take the path that reconnects with your old life, then hopefully this comes with the realisation that whatever you left behind is indeed over and dead.

If you are choosing to go back to your former life or marriage, don't just engage reverse gear. Turn your car around and drive back

by going forwards.

If you return by only engaging reverse gear your focus will always be on the past because you will be looking for guidance in the rear vision mirror! The future lies ahead through the windscreen.

Moreover, if you arrive back by engaging reverse gear and then engage first gear you will find yourself still heading in the direction of the Big D crossroads. Nothing will have changed and you'll head straight back to the Big D crossroads.

Life on your return needs to start afresh, not to return to the way things were. This realisation requires determination to seek reconciliation and change from a new starting point – a starting point based in the present with a new perspective and not the old ways of thinking.

Continually dwelling on the woes of the past just burns holes in the fabric of the present and will lead to heartache. It's a time to let go and to move on in a different direction, away from dead ends of disappointment. So turn your car of life around before heading back home from the Big D crossroads. Re-connect with your old life and drive off in a different direction. Plan a future that lies ahead through the windscreen, leaving the Big D crossroads behind in the rear vision mirror. In fact why not just trade the old car you're driving in for a newer model. Leave the problems such as the leaking oil and the squeaky doors behind you as well.

I know of a couple who separated for a while because of the strain that had developed between them. They lived separate lives for a while but still kept in contact. Eventually they started to have dates with one another and finally came to the conclusion that they still wanted to be together. Living apart for a time had given them a different perspective of one another and so they were able reconcile because their appreciation and expectations of each other had changed.

Sometimes partners just need time and space from one another. However for some, even after that, the desire to come back together wanes and dissipates. In that case it is not possible to go back, and the road into the future lies down another path.

If you are like me there was no option to return to my former life. The bridge back was completely destroyed. So I had to choose a completely different path leading to a completely different life.

So if returning to your former life is not an option, before travelling forwards into your new life open the boot of your car and take out the suitcases you have brought with you. Leave the baggage of the past on the side of the road. As you drive off, glimpse in the rear vision mirror and observe, as they shrink away into nothing behind you.

You know the saying, what happens in fight club, stays in a fight club, well, what happened in your old life needs to stay there too. There is no room in your new life for dregs of your past. Go buy some new luggage and fill it with the memories of your new life. Today is the beginning of a new season in your life. The old is passing away.

*"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'"*  
*Revelations 21:4-5*

## **Pathway 2 – Journeying solo**

If you decide to take this path, then you will be stepping out on your own for a while. Essentially you will be throwing yourself wholeheartedly into 'Me-time.' It's advisable to take your time on this path and really enjoy your surroundings. This special season provides the opportunity to do things you may never have had the time to engage in while being married or in your old situation. The downside is that it can at times be a lonely path, but in time you'll see these down times are outweighed by the immense opportunities that going solo can provide.

So dream on, undertake a course of study or immerse yourself in a hobby and explore your passions. Such activities are distraction to the mind, creating a positive sense of well-being. They also provide ample opportunity for social contact with others who have similar interests.



Well-meaning friends and family members may even try to find prospective partners for you. Such offers can be very tempting but need to be approached with caution to further avoid complicating your life and jumping prematurely back into a relationship. The need for physical affection that comes with being on one's own can be overwhelming and can easily weaken resolve and cloud judgement.

Should you meet someone you consider could be a future life partner, don't be in too much of a hurry. Seek the counsel of others before you leave this path. Seek confirmation that this change of direction is the right one for you.

## **Loving from a distance**

Even though it may not be possible to return to your former life or marriage, it does not mean we should no longer love or care for those we have left behind. It comes down to an attitude of the heart.

After the disintegration of my old life I naturally felt a tremendous amount of anger and hurt, but all that has now subsided. I will never speak or ever again meet with my former spouse because he died tragically in a cycling accident several years ago. We were never able to reconcile or speak again after the divorce. But if that opportunity had eventuated, and he were to have turned up at my door, I would have wished him well. I now have a happy life, and after all these years I see no point in harbouring anger.

Separation and divorce does not necessarily mean that you can feel no love for your former partner. It is possible to love one's former spouse from a distance. Although it is not the romantic love of marriage it can be a love that harbours understanding and compassion. It is a love that acknowledges the freedom your former partner has to be who they want to be and, if practical, is there to offer a helping hand should they require some assistance. It offers friendship, and who knows where that may lead to in the future.

After all, we are encouraged in the Bible, where possible, to live at peace with all people (*Hebrews 12:14*). I have remarried and am now in a blended family situation. My husband has grown children

with families of their own. His former wife is still the mother of his children and a grandparent to their grandchildren. She has every right to be included in family occasions and made to feel comfortable. I will never be a mother to my husband's children. At best, I can be a friend. However, the grandchildren think it is great because they have an extra grandparent to spoil them.

There is of course, a realistic danger that offering the love of friendship to a former spouse can be abused and even misconstrued for something that it is not, and never will be. This is especially so, when a former partner may be hanging onto the glimmer of hope that reconciliation is possible. In such circumstances, boundaries need to be established so that both parties are on the same page with regards to expectations.

### **Pathway 3 – Journeying into a new relationship**

If you journey down this road it's because you have decided to venture into a new relationship. Don't be in too much of a hurry to travel on this one. Remember the importance of 'Me-time.'

I have to admit that I was not immediately drawn to my new husband as a prospective partner. I just did not see him as my type. Therein lies the problem of moving on to new relationships. We do not always recognise what's best for ourselves and tend to endlessly run on the hamster wheel of past mistakes and misconceptions. It's no wonder that second time around a number of people tend to be attracted to partners similar to their former spouses, and consequently find themselves ending up with the same sort of dysfunctional marriage that they left behind them.

The problem of course lies with our programming and not our prospective partners. As a culmination of our genetics and circumstances I believe our spiritual blueprint for the choices we make in life can become innately pre-programmed. Our choices can run on a sort of auto-pilot, and if we are not careful the system can be pre-set for disaster. There is wisdom in making our thoughts captive to the scrutiny of the Holy Spirit (*2 Corinthians 10:5*) and seeking wise counsel before making life changing decisions.

I love watching Air Crash Investigations on the television. Most of the crashes seem to eventuate from a complex series of events that eventually terminate in an unforeseen disaster. Most were entirely preventable if the people doing the maintenance or monitoring the in-flight systems had paid attention to details, followed correct procedures, used the correct parts or not got distracted. We are no different. The Bible encourages us to be vigilant about how we process our own perspectives on reality. We need to pay attention to the detail and not get distracted by the world and its sparkling fairy lights that tempt and tantalise and divert us down rough roads full of potholes.

*"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, when we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."*  
2 Corinthians 10:5 (NIV)

Unless we invite the transforming power of the Holy Spirit into our lives we will continue forward into a future doomed to failure, like moths drawn to the candle and who end up consumed by the flames.

My second husband is vastly different to my former partner, which is why I suspect he is just perfect for me. For myself, I consider it a miracle that we ended up together. I believe it was the Holy Spirit who opened my eyes to the existence of the loving heart within the man I would eventually marry. That our paths crossed seemed such a co-incidence, a chain of random events. But looking back it was one of those moments in time which I think was a God moment. It was meant to be. We just needed to both realise it.

## **So which road?**

Three different roads with different possibilities for the future. So which will you decide to take and how will you decide? No road is necessarily right or wrong. The choice is yours and depends entirely on your situation. Weigh each up with wisdom and consider the consequences of choosing any of the paths.

While you are deciding, let's review some of the issues we have covered together during our time of contemplation, on the seat

under the billboard of opportunity and prosperity.

## **Making choices**

You are at the crossroads and there are important decisions to make as to the direction you need to journey on from there. You could of course decide not to make a choices at all and just linger at the crossroads. Remaining there long term is not a viable option if you want to access God's promise of future prosperity for your life. This is just a staging post, not a destination.

Procrastinating and making no choice, because it's all too hard or you are afraid of making the wrong choice, is also a choice, in a perverse kind of way – the worst kind of choice in this situation. Procrastination leads to stagnation. In life, the way of things is to either to get better or worse. Seldom do they just stay the same or remain unchanged, even if we do nothing.

Stagnation of course, by its very definition, implies that a change is taking place. A pond that does not have running water flushing though it stagnates. Leaves fall into the pond and they fall to bottom where they rot. A stagnant pond is characterised by its pungent fetid odour of decay and slimy green scum floating on the surface. Not a very inviting place to swim! Life will stagnate if you remain at the crossroads by making the choice to do nothing. You will get stuck in a loop of constant whining about how miserable your life is because God does not love you or is not doing anything to improve your desperate situation. Your friends are likely to become bored of hearing you continually complain. Consequently, your friendships will dry up and life will fall apart around you. Like a dead leaf you will be blown wherever the wind takes you.

Vacillation is as bad as procrastination. Making a decision and then continually changing your mind is like putting a lot energy into trying to move forward by jumping up and down on the same spot. The end result is that you wear yourself out and get nowhere. Jesus encouraged his disciples to be decisive and single-minded.

*"Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."*

Matthew 5:37

Furthermore, we are reminded that God's wisdom is available to those who ask so that the choices we make have a firm footing.

*"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does."*

James 1:5-8 (NIV)

## **Learning from mistakes**

I hate making mistakes, but I also know that mistakes are great teachers about ourselves and our motives. Even failed relationships and the disasters of life can be learning opportunities if we let them. Mistakes are the motivators for making better choices.

We have been designed to learn. That is part of our God created make up and the way we learn is by making choices - good and bad. Mistakes that arise from bad choices can be our best tutors for the future if we are willing to learn from them.

So make a decision, move forward. If it's a bad decision, learn from it and move forward again but in a different direction. God's guidance comes to those who are willing to move forward. He promises to make our footsteps firm (*Psalms 37:23*) and He can only do that if we are actually moving, not standing still.

## **Hearing from God**

At the time of my own divorce I pondered if I really should have married my first husband. I had felt before I married him that he was God's choice for me and that I had heard from God that he was the one.

I know of many people who say that they have definitely heard from God with regards to their choice of life partner. Until my separation I believed I was one of them. So in my case – did God get it wrong or did I really hear from God? With hindsight, I would make different choices but such thoughts become circular because there is no going back. In spite of the bad times in my former

marriage there were also good times and much to give thanks for. Nothing in life is ever wasted in the hands of a loving God. Our experiences shape and define us.

Struggling with questions about hearing from God when things subsequently go wrong can shake and undermine our faith. While answers to those questions are important, they are not as important as they might seem. Perhaps they are not even the right questions to be asking.

My understanding of God and His methods of guidance have evolved a great deal since I was a starry-eyed twenty-three year old entering into marriage for the first time. It is not sufficient to just point God at our situations like a divining rod and ask for a divine 'yey' or 'nay'; should I go forward or stay? Is this the person for me to marry or not? God – just shine the red light for 'no' or the green for 'go' - then I'll know!

I believe that God's guidance is a bit more sophisticated than that and that it comes through conversation and confirmation. The Bible says lots about seeking out our answers, and therein lies an important clue to God and his methods of guidance. I don't recall any verses about God just dropping the answers in neatly sealed little envelopes down from heaven into our waiting laps.

These days, if I believe I am hearing from God, I will always seek outward confirmation from others and my circumstances. I believe that God resides in the midst of the two or three, not the one. I have learnt not to rely solely on my own instincts. Sometimes I get things wrong and sometimes I get them right. As it's sometimes hard to know the difference. I seek the wise counsel of others when making serious life decisions.

Even if I firmly believe with all my heart that it is God prompting me one way or the other, I still look for that external confirmation. Invariably it comes, and when it does it gives me such a tremendous boost. I then know I'm not going mad and that, yes, God really was trying to communicate with me. God is not double minded and, believe it or not, He is trying hard to communicate with us all the time. He wants us to make wise decisions. Guidance from God is not

nearly as difficult to find as we think if we approach it in a logical manner and with the knowledge He is speaking to us.

So what about the questions above? Did I hear from God about my first marriage? I tend to think I did but even if I didn't, I don't have regrets or trust God any less. I believe I should have asked more questions of God at the time about my circumstances and sought the wise counsel of others to give me another perspective, but I didn't. Like many other twenty 'somethings' escaping from home, I thought I knew more than I really did! I was blind to what was probably obvious to others and so had to find out for myself after learning it the hard way, and after travelling through a great deal of pain. I tend to think wisdom is not just imparted to us, it's rammed into us by the school of hard knocks.

I don't believe God gets things wrong – I think we do. I might be stoned as a heretic for saying this, but I do not believe there is only one Mister Right or Miss Right out there waiting to be found and if we miss them we are doomed never to be happily married. Given the opportunity, I think we can find happiness with any number of people if both people are prepared to work at the relationship. Certainly I believe some people are more suitable than others as prospective partners, which is why we need to exercise caution and make wise decisions about who we choose to spend our lives with.

God may draw two people together, but the success or failure of a marriage has a lot to do with their own freewill, and the choices they make once they are in a relationship together.

## **Timeframes**

So often I hear it said that time is a great healer. Surprisingly, I must express my disagreement with this saying as I believe it to be a load of cobblers!

Time per-se heals nothing; it just takes time for healing to eventually occur. In fact, if given time, some things never heal, they just get worse. I have a friend who injured the nail of her big toe. She left it for a week and the toe became infected. Each day the pain got worse as the swelling and redness, increased. Healing only

eventuated when she removed part of the nail and started to bath the toe in antiseptic. Healing occurred because of the choices she made about her painful situation. Just giving it time was not enough. Healing does has a timeframe but first the healing process needs to be activated.

Most people want their lives to improve but without a willingness to first make changes in their current circumstances it is unlikely that the anticipated changes will be produced, no matter how much time is given to waiting patiently. The process starts by making wise choices about our circumstances. By all means ask God to heal you, but also go to the doctor and get medical advice as well.

## **Stabilising the trauma**

A broken bone that has been realigned and stabilised usually takes about eight weeks to knit and regain integrity. Even so, it can still take up to twelve months or more, depending on the severity of the injury, to regain normal function of the limb.

Bear in mind that if medical treatment is not sought, some broken bones that are not realigned with the correct support will also heal. The downside is that without correct stabilisation there may be deformity and loss of function of the injured body part at the end of the healing process.

Recovering from a disastrous event will take time. We cannot do it on our own and need the support of others and the wisdom and insight they bring to our circumstances.

Taking appropriate action will return us to full functionality within the Body of Christ but we need the support of the Body of Christ to promote that healing process. The love of friends provides a shelter for us so our wounded wings can heal. In time we'll fly again to the high places.

*"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:  
If one falls down his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls  
and has no one to help him up!"  
Ecclesiastes 4:9-10*

God restores what the locust destroys



*"After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before. All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the Lord had brought upon him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring."*

*Job 42:10-11*

I found the book of Job to be a great comfort during my depression and the early months of my marital breakdown. I could relate to Job's situation and his distress. Out of the blue, Job's life was turned upside down. Calamity struck. His wealth, family and health were taken away and he experience great personal hardship. He found no comfort in his friends, his wife or his surroundings, and he struggled to find the answers to his questions about the reason for his predicament.

Yet, the story of Job does have a happy ending. His wealth and position in society were restored. Even new sons and daughters are born to him and he lived to a ripe old age. During his period of misery, Job was totally bewildered as to why God had permitted such disaster in his life. Does that sound familiar? When pain and calamity strike we can find ourselves crying out to God, "Why me?" God finally confronts Job and instead of answering his question, asks Job a question:

*"Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm. He said:  
'Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?  
Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.  
Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?'  
Tell me, if you understand."*

*Job 38:1-4*

Job's perspective of his painful situation was out of whack. He had placed himself, and not God, at the centre of his universe. His focus was entirely on himself. Pain can do that to you. Pain can dwarf our appreciation of the awesome power of God and enlarge the importance of ourselves. Like Job, we think we have the right to an answer and explanation for our suffering.

Job humbled himself before God when God laid out before him the bigger picture of His purposes for the universe. God did not cause

Job's pain. Satan did that. Yet God's purposes for Job were perfected through the pain Job suffered. God knew Job's character and the strength of his faith, but faith is never proved unless it is tested. Interestingly, God never answered Job's question. The answer was not important. It was Job's continued faith in God in the midst of adversity without explanation that was important here.

Consequently, God rewarded Job in accordance to his faith. Likewise, God promises prosperity and a second chance to all of those at the Big D crossroads who are willing to maintain their faith in Him.

## **Vengeance belongs to God**

A lot of things in life are unfair and we can get angry when things don't go our way. Feelings of anger can be intense when life dishes out one of the Big D's.

Perhaps that is how you feel. Perhaps you have been dealt with unfairly. Perhaps the frustrating thing is that there is little you can do about it. Your hands are tied. It is unjust. The person who has wronged you is not being called to account for their wrong doing. Inwardly you want someone to suffer in some way for what they have done to you. You want blood on the sword – you want cold hearted revenge.

As much as we may desire revenge, the Bible encourages us to leave the working out of our revenge to God.

It might not seem like it, but there is a positive to this command. The amazing reward for the surrender of our desire for vengeance is our vindication. Revenge is sweet but vindication is even sweeter. The drawback is that it often takes longer to materialise, but it is worth waiting for.

*"Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this:  
He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn,  
the justice of your cause like the noonday sun."  
Psalm 37:5-6*

While the desire for revenge is maintained it clogs the channel for God's blessing into our lives. Revenge is also destructive and carries

within it the possibility generating a lot of collateral damage. Innocent people can get hurt along the way. Revenge is ego driven, but vindication is God focused.

When confronted with the perpetrators of wrong doing I often hear it said – “what goes around, comes around.” This is what is commonly known as karma and is a Buddhist teaching which exposes the principle of cause and effect (action and consequence). It is not dissimilar to the Christian teaching of reaping and sowing and aptly applies to the desire to seek revenge. At the time of his arrest, Jesus spoke these words to Peter:

*"Put your sword back in its place,' Jesus said to him,  
'for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.'"  
Matthew 26:52*

Seeking revenge buys into a cycle of violence that is eventually self-destructive, not to mention the collateral damage it also causes. The rightness or wrongness of your original situation is then of little consequence because you have become no better than the person who wronged you in the first place.

Vindication on the other hand brings honour and exaltation. The story of Joseph and his betrayal by his brothers and Potiphar's wife (*Genesis 37-39*) is a good example of vindication. Joseph was wronged by many people and he could have become bitter and sought revenge on them all, but he didn't. God exalted him to a position of honour and rewarded him for his faithfulness. He ultimately ended up in a better position than all the people who had wronged him.

## **Life is too short for regrets**

No regrets - these are the words immortalised in that famous iconic song sung by Edith Piaf:

*No! No regrets  
No! I will have no regrets  
All the things that went wrong  
For at last I have learned to be strong*

I don't believe for a minute that my Big D's of depression or divorce were part of God's plan for me. It was certainly not anything that I ever wanted for myself. That it eventuated was down to the choices made by my ex-husband and myself. My husband did not want to stay married to me and so our paths had to divide.

We all make mistakes; do and say things we wish we hadn't, but there is no going back. Taking the sorrow of our mistakes into the future can blight any hope of happiness and contentment. I am grateful that I have been given a second chance at happiness in marriage.

Neither is there any place for guilt in our future. Churches can too easily pile guilt on the shoulders of its divorcee members and vilify them as having committed the unforgiveable sin. As a consequence members can be barred from expressing their spiritual gifts and from positions of leadership within the fellowship of the church. Depending on the circumstances, such a position is unduly harsh and contrary to what I know of the nature of God.

By all means, if you hold a position of responsibility within a church fellowship, you should seriously consider relinquishing that role while you work through the issues surrounding your separation and divorce. After repenting and dealing with the issues, you should not necessarily be precluded from any future functional role within the church.

The whole divorce experience was a very painful one for me, but the miracle for me was that God was able to use that time of pain to make some very positive changes in my life. The locust may have eaten much of my past but God the restorer blessed me with a new and abundant life, just like he did for Job at the end of his time of suffering.

## **Second chances – new beginnings**

The God I know is a God of restoration. Just read through the last chapter in the Gospel of John. This would have to be one of the most amazing offers of a new beginning by God. What could be worse than publically denying the person for whom you promised to

lay down your life? Could such person ever be trusted again with the responsibility of leadership? Is such a person even leadership material? Jesus thought so when he asked Peter to feed His sheep!

No-one is irredeemable. To believe otherwise is to believe a lie. There is nothing that can separate us from the life changing love and power of God. The only barrier is our refusal to believe that we are loved. Today we think of Paul as one of the greatest, if not the greatest apostle. That was not how he saw himself in comparison to his contemporaries.

*"For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."  
1 Corinthians 15:9*

No-one, not even religious fundamentalists like Paul are beyond the reach of the forgiving heart of God. We ought not to forget that Paul before his conversion, authorised evil things, including mass murder, which is why his fellow apostles initially struggled with trusting him. As his conversion on the Damascus Road confirms, reconciliation and restoration are at the heart of the gospel message. Let him who is without the sin cast the first stone!

*"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ."  
Galatians 6:1-2*

## **Let the journey begin**

The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. The journey into your future begins with a choice and a decision to act upon that choice. Have faith in action and not be inactive in fear. Remember you do not journey alone. In the midst of the pain give praise to God who walks beside you and upholds you with His right hand.

*"Praise the Lord, O my soul;  
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.  
Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,  
who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,*

*who redeems your life from the pit  
and crowns you with love and compassion,  
who satisfies your desires with good things  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."*  
*Psalm 103:1-5*

## Marriage Pyre

*Pock marked Kodachrome,  
Snapshots of our treasured years,  
Our memories dislodged from their frames  
Now just your cast offs - shed so casually  
And showered like confetti into the flames.  
Like my blistering tears they fall and sizzle,  
Flutter and curl within the fire.  
A withering bride am I, consumed within our marriage pyre.*

*All pretence, you said, all lies and tricks, nothing vital remains  
Just the curling edges of smiling faces radiant in the flames.  
Ash to ash, dust to dust - remember what our contract said  
'Til death us do part - we pledged that when we wed.  
Can't you see - while there's breath - there's life  
But no! you say, as soon as the ring was applied, you died that day,  
slipped away, dripped away.*

*You say you don't love me anymore – I wonder if you ever did.  
Throughout our smouldering life  
I've been your faithful wife. You know that!  
Flashpoints of anger have arced and flared – Yes, that's true  
Please look at me and remember our moments of blissful calm.  
But you sneer and say, you mean the eyes of raging storms.*

*Without pain there can be no gain – this is just a setback.  
All precious things, gold and silver, are refined by fire.  
You called me your precious treasure once!  
Don't cast me aside – this is our furnace of pain.  
Together – our dross will be refined by the flames.  
But you push away and proclaim – I'm a tawdry imitation,  
When the sparkling veneer lifts and peels, nothing worthwhile remains.*

*Handfuls of ash – is this then the endpoint of our hopes and dreams?  
We consummated them with youthful passion  
You enfolded me in climatic jubilation within our wedding bower.  
But now like grit caught between your teeth you flick me out  
Your treasure now to trash.*

*Am I no more than an irritating stone  
Dislodged from your upturned walking shoe?  
But look once more at this pebble mistakenly cast before a swine,  
It's lustre will not be tarnished by the flames.  
I will transcend these ashen remains.  
I'll sanctify them with incense and like the Phoenix  
Above aromatic embers of cinnamon and myrrh*

*I'll spread golden wings and rise to live again.*