

Divorced

MEDITATIONS ON DIVORCE

Surviving
the Pain

Alice Stolper Pepler

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To women
everywhere
suffering a loss

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Foreword

*Even in the lives of Christians,
most certainly in the lives of Christians ...*

There can be times when all reason and logic vanish,
When Evil envelopes our lives,
When all is madness, or suffering, or emptiness,
 or despair,
When not only the box bottom breaks,
 but the side supports collapse,
When *what could never happen in our family does*,
When despairing depths of doom loom in the darkness,
And fish on shore flop frantically to find the familiar,
When pain persists ... pounding, pounding ...
And cancer cuts through every cell,
When all the persistent planning, training, and loving
 of a lifetime
 smash and shrivel into shattered junk....

*Even in the lives of Christians,
most certainly in the lives of Christians ...*

There are times when the pastor no longer can play
 the physician,
When family and friends can no longer heal,
When the patient can no longer digest oral pills
 and comforting couplets,

When faith has reached the fray of the rope,
and sackcloth is no balm to the boil,
When no human can help ... and God seems love-dry,
When one repeats like a ruined record, "Why, Why,
Just tell me why!"
And the answer is silence ... sustained, still ...
When God has walked away, as if in Gethsemane,
And one realizes for the first time
The hope less-nessss of Christ's screamm ...
"My God, My God, Why Hast Thou
Forsaken Me?"

*Even in the lives of Christians,
most certainly in the lives of Christians ...*

From far in the distance, from where God has walked,
comes rumbling thunder ... resounding, sounding ...
"BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD!
You Question My Love? I AM Love!"

And silence reigns and silence sustains

And then if one hears ... through one's tears,
And then if one's still ... and works His will,
And then if one stays ... to await His ways,

Then one WILL know,
will know God's love,
and receive His Spirit,
and, perhaps, finally

see
why...

*I will praise You, O Lord,
with my whole heart...*

*Though I walk in the midst
of trouble,
You preserve my life...
The Lord will fulfill
His purpose for me;
Your love; O Lord, endures forever...
Psalm 138:1 7-8*

Chapter 1

Introduction to Divorce

*How lovely is Your dwelling place,
O Lord Almighty!
My soul yearns, even faints
for the courts of the Lord;
My heart and my flesh cry out
for the living God.*

Psalm 84:1-2

It's all over. One final session in court, and a life together is over. If the marriage had ended in death (you muse), there would have been a funeral. Your friends would have been with you for the final service. Word and Sacrament would have been a comfort. Next Sunday there would have been prayers for the survivors. The grief could have been open and even proud. One need not apologize for death. But this is divorce ... and divorce is completely and utterly without honor.

Now you are alone. No matter who is with you, you are alone. You have begun a life that is totally unlike anything you have ever lived. It is not merely going back to the single state; it is to a new state that you're going. You have left your settled, comfortable, married world and entered an unsettled, separate one—a "limbo" you'll never completely share or explain to your single, married, or widowed friends.

You'll soon learn what all divorced know: that there is no way to "tell it like it is" to outsiders, that there is no vicarious experience for divorce.

You've never had any preparation for this new state ... not really. You remember wondering what it's like to be a parent, a mother. You remember querying occupations. You remember a whole childhood of multidimensional training; but unless it was a reality in your home, you never asked what it's like to be divorced, and no one ever considered preparing you for it. It would have been negative and self-defeating, perhaps, to even admit its possibility. But now its reality is even more negative. And you're not prepared ... not really. And your family and friends aren't prepared ... not really.

It's eerie. It's unreal. All time has stopped. You thought hard labor had begun with that first contraction so long ago. You timed and considered every contraction over the months or years. You hoped the divorce would have been final—the delivery room. But there's no relief yet. You're still back at the hospital door. You've only begun. And it will not be an easy delivery.

You're all alone,
but not really.

The Spirit ... the Son ... the Father ...
they're all there, too.

Really!

*God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear,
though the earth give way
and the mountains fall
into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam*

*and the mountains quake
with their surging.
Psalm 46:1-3*

Chapter 2

Shock, Despair

*To You I call, O Lord my Rock;
do not turn a deaf ear to me.*

If You remain silent;

*I will be like those who have
gone down to the pit.*

*Hear my cry for mercy
as I call to You for help ...*

Psalm 28:1

*For my days vanish like smoke;
my bones burn like glowing embers.*

My heart is blighted and withered like grass;

I forget to eat my food.

Because of my loud groaning

I am reduced to skin and bones.

I am like a desert owl,

like an owl among the ruins.

I lie awake; I have become

like a bird alone on a roof.

Psalm 102.3-7

The shock of the marriage death occurs long before the divorce decree. When you first suspected your marriage was ending, you wondered what was happening to you. You didn't feel joyous or tragic or free or despairing—you just didn't feel! You were in a twilight zone of shock and unreality—a nightmarish suspension from which you vaguely

expected to awaken. You were expected to awaken. You were a stranger to yourself; your husband was still more an unknown; and nothing made sense. You cried for help as if from outer space, with no one “real” around to hear.

HELP!

Help

h

e

l

p

if

only

Senselessness may have hovered for some time, but eventually it gave way to a feeling of loss. There is grief in marriage-breaking. It is natural enough when one still loves, but it exists even when one doesn't. A union, however bad it is, cannot be dissolved without a feeling of loss.

If the loss is especially dear or too overpowering, you may react with despondency. Strength sapped and spirit crushed by the demon of despair, you will be conscious of evil forces all around you. They'll be grinning, these grim phantoms, just waiting for you to give up so they can begin their victory feast. You will know too well the psalmist's anguished cry from the depths of nothingness, from the pits of hopelessness. You will think of, and perhaps seriously consider, suicide. You will wish to escape ... to escape ... to escape ... but it will seem impossible.

Nowhere

is too

low.

Swirling ...
darker and deeper ...
Darkness
everywhere

Brimful living goblet
of doom and horror

They drink and rejoice,
and I
hate myself ...

Peter walks on the water
above the mud,
but not alone,
never alone ...
impossible.

Nowhere
is too
low.

Even there
Thou art there.

You're in mud—the muddy mire of despair. If you were raised in the church, you may recall your childhood Christian training—the memorization of Bible passages and hymns, the warnings of Satan as the roaring lion, the assurance of God's love and comfort, the innocent firm trust of your confirmation day, the zeal of your forefathers tolling their faith in a new world.

Thoughts flash through your mind; but before they are complete, new observations appear. Everything runs together. Your brain hops from this to that. You can't concentrate. You can't get organized. You flounder. You debate with yourself. You understand only one thing: your confusion.

God is LO
VE and of course you have Christi
an upbringing and so
hate, horror, LO (?loco?) VE
encompasses all.

Come unto Me and I will give you rest.
Memmmmmory work
to withstand the RoaRRRRing li
on.

Once in confirmation
“be thou faithful unto death”
the endless rote—rote—rote ...

Where is that Faith?
Crushhh
ed in confound
ed, confus
ing, conflict
ing? Fool(ish) and fu
tile, lame Luther
an, lamenting ... lost ...

GOD IS
(I have loved thee with an everlasting) LOVE
wait on the Lord

WAIT

on the Lord

Again and again you will tell yourself that God is with you. And again and again you will wonder. Back and forth, over and over, you'll thrash about in this net you find yourself in. You will question almost everything you ever learned—truth, honor, friends, church, and the faith of your fathers. But you will not discount the reality of God's love.