

# When Happily Ever After Shatters

*Seeing God in the Midst  
of Divorce & Single Parenting*

Sue Birdseye



On my wedding day I received horrible news. My dad was leaving my mom for another woman. Dad told my new husband just as we were pulling out for our honeymoon because he didn't want me to be surprised when I returned. Divorce hurts. A lot. My heart ached when I read Sue Birdseye's story. Her husband's betrayal was like winter to the soul, but Sue turned to God, dug her roots deep in His goodness, and watered her pain with His word. God met her. God is meeting her still. Sue's message of help and hope is a must-read for those wintering the loss of a marriage.

—TRICIA GOYER

Author of thirty-four books, including the co-authored book *Lead Your Family Like Jesus*

Anyone struggling with the pain of spousal abandonment needs a friend to walk the journey with them. Sue wants to be that friend to you or someone you know experiencing the rejection of divorce. She knows how you feel. Her words will help you know you are not alone. I'm amazed at her remarkable faith, her tenacity to keep going each day, and her sense of humor to keep laughing in spite of her circumstances. Read her story and share it liberally with the many others who need it.

—BARBARA RAINEY

Co-founder of FamilyLife, author, artist, creator of [www.EverThineHome.com](http://www.EverThineHome.com), mother of six, grandmother of 19

With personal experience and Biblical insight, Sue Birdseye shares how to navigate the complex journey of divorce and single parenting. *When Happily Ever After Shatters* provides Christian wisdom and day-to-day comfort for the person experiencing the death of his or her marriage.

—LAURA PETHERBRIDGE

International speaker and author of *When I Do Becomes I Don't—Practical Steps for Healing During Separation or Divorce* and *The Smart Stepmom*

This is the *best* book I've read this year. Disarmingly honest, full of hope, and immensely practical. A great read for everyone, not just those whose marriages have failed. No trite answers, just real honesty. A courageous book. Get five copies. One for yourself and four to give away!

—SUSAN YATES

International speaker and author of thirteen books,  
including *Raising Kids with Character That Lasts*

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of Divorce & Single Parenting*

Sue Birdseye

*Foreword by bestselling author* SHAUNTI FELDHAHN

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A Focus on the Family book published by  
Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188

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In some cases, people's names and certain details of their stories have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved. However, the facts of what happened and the underlying principles have been conveyed as accurately as possible.

Editor: Brandy Bruce

Cover design by Erik M. Peterson

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### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Birdseye, Sue.

When happily ever after shatters : seeing God in the midst of divorce and single parenting / Sue Birdseye.— First edition.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references (pages      ) and index.

ISBN 978-1-58997-734-1 (alk. paper)

1. Divorced people—Religious life. 2. Single parents—Religious life. I. Title.

BV4596.D58B57 2013

248.8'46—dc23

2012040804

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 / 18 17 16 15 14 13

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## FOREWORD

There is a great—and currently unmet—need in the Christian community for a book that offers life, hope, healing, and practical guidance for those who are facing the shock of abandonment in their marriage. A book written not by a counselor or a psychologist but by a wise Christian woman who has gone through it, who couldn't find such a book when she needed it most, and who has been walking the journey toward her own healing with an eye for how God can use her story to help others.

The problem of abandonment is far more widespread than many realize, and up until now it has been in the shadows. What does a spouse do when the usual Christian resources about how to fight for your marriage no longer apply? How does one face a spouse's unfaithfulness and desertion with a Christlike perspective, both for one's own sake and, often, for the sake of one's children? These are questions Christian counselors hear from women and men every day, yet there are few written resources to serve as a healthy biblical companion on such a road.

I believe Sue Birdseye is the perfect woman to write this book. Sue was my closest friend growing up. We were in each other's weddings and spent many hours together as couples, delighting in each other's children—in her case, five children, two of which she and her then-husband adopted from foster care. There was no way that her husband, this godly, wonderful man I knew, a public figure, would have ever cheated on his beautiful, delightful, homeschooling wife . . . and yet, he did. He left her and their children for another woman. Sue fought for the marriage, but in the end, she had no choice in the matter. He was done.

Since then, I have known others who have faced abandonment and unwanted divorces. I meet these people every week at my events. They



call in when I'm on radio programs. Having never gone through this heartbreak myself, I can't truly help them. But Sue has and she can.

I am proud of my friend for walking this shocking road with grace, courage, and a determination to avoid bitterness, even when it would be understandable. I am touched by her ability to find life, encouragement, and even humor in a very humorless situation. And based on my eight years of research on men, women, and marriages, I know that a book with that tone will comfort and help the many thousands of others who find themselves on the same journey.

—SHAUNTI FELDHAHN

Social researcher, speaker, and bestselling  
author of *For Women Only: What You Need  
to Know about the Inner Lives of Men*



# Ambushed by Adultery

*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

It was my own personal 9/11. A beautiful day, not a cloud in the sky, birds chirping, children playing—when out of nowhere disaster struck with six words uttered by my husband: “I think I’m going to leave.”

With those six words came the end of my world as I knew it. But let me backtrack for a moment. Before I tell you my story of abandonment and divorce, let me share with you my love story.

My husband and I met at a Bible study on the book of Revelation. (I’m sure there’s a really good end-time joke there somewhere!) He was an engaging, handsome, intelligent man, and he definitely caught my eye.

I didn’t realize he had any interest in me until a few weeks later at one of the Bible-study meetings when he sat down next to me on the sofa and struck up a conversation. We soon were choosing each other’s company at more and more church events. We found we had a lot in common and enjoyed talking about our faith, politics, and our shared interests.

After the Bible study ended, we continued to do things together as friends. I say that, but looking back I might have been a bit naive to think

that was the extent of our interest in each other. He had just turned thirty and was seven years older than I. One night after we had spent a few months getting to know each other, he asked me what I thought a thirty-year-old man would be looking for in a relationship.

I said something like, “Someone to hang out with?”

He said, “No, I’m looking for the woman I will marry.”

I was surprised but replied, “Well, whatever God wants is fine. I’m happy being friends and would be open to this turning into something more.”

He shared later that my response actually made him like me more. He said he was attracted to my confidence. The nature of our relationship didn’t change immediately. I hadn’t planned on dating anyone at the time, so it took a little bit longer for me to wrap my brain around him as husband material.

One particular night he graciously ate two slices of the worst apple pie I had ever made. While watching him eat that horrible pie with a smile on his face, I knew I was falling in love. Then he leaned over and kissed me. The man had just eaten the worst thing I’d ever made, and two helpings at that! I had to kiss him back!

A few months later, on the Saturday before Easter, he professed his love for me. I shared that I loved him as well. Within the year we were engaged and married. I used to be proud to share our love story, but now after what has happened, I’m slightly embarrassed to share how quickly we were married. And yet I was truly blessed to be happily married . . . until the day I wasn’t.

The next seventeen years were filled with children, foster care, adoption, city management, church, homeschooling, community involvement, and life. Our home was happy, but as anyone with a family of five children will tell you (if he or she is being honest), it was chaotic joy. I won’t say I had it all together because I didn’t, but I did try. I passionately, but not per-

fectly, loved and respected my husband. I loved being married and taking care of my family, with all the struggles and joys that entailed.

There was no great season of tumult. There were no warning skirmishes, battles, or war cries. Only an ambush. There was no discussion of difficulties, disappointments, or impending disasters. There was just my simple question, “Hey, why did it take you so long to pick up your dry cleaning?” And my husband’s answer, “I think I’m going to leave.”

As my five children and their friends raced around us playing, blissfully unaware of the tragedy that was unfolding, I stood staring at the man I loved with tears streaming down my cheeks. Inside I was crying out in fear and disbelief, but what actually came out of my mouth were only shocked, whispered questions. He was unaffected and stoic. He gave me nothing concrete, no reason, and even denied the existence of another woman. I chose to believe him.

I was terribly misled. It took me days to determine there was more to the situation than I originally believed. As I fought desperately for my family, my husband withdrew more and more—and acted guiltier and guiltier. It didn’t take long for me to demand he come clean. At first he described the other woman as an acquaintance he found intriguing and was thinking about pursuing. Still, I felt there was more to the story.

A few mornings later, as we prepared for our day, I asked again about the woman. He literally ran out of our house, jumped in his car, and sped away. I called his office to no avail. When I did get in touch with his secretary, she said he was locked in his office and wasn’t receiving calls. I insisted she let him know I was on the phone. Thankfully, he took my call. Over the phone he shared that he had met someone else, but she was just a good friend. He implied it was an innocent friendship. I asked that he end it. He said he would think about it.

This might seem hard to believe, but I felt relatively calm at this point. I thought that I might indeed be getting the truth. Oddly, it was a

relief. Unfortunately, I was again being duped, but I didn't discover the truth until later.

That evening I dressed up and went to one of my husband's weekly city council meetings. I made sure to look as attractive as I could. I sat down right in his line of vision. He looked extremely uncomfortable and wouldn't even glance my way. When the meeting ended, his staff all greeted me with smiles and kind words. Many said, "We're so surprised you stayed for such a long meeting!" Long meeting? Were they kidding? It was only ten o'clock! I had always thought the meetings went much later, sometimes until one or two o'clock in the morning. Oh my. I really had been fooled.

A few days later, on the sidelines at my oldest daughter's field hockey practice, he spilled the whole sordid tale. It was horrible and more shockingly painful than I can describe. What I had hoped was simply a fling was so much more. While we watched my daughter play, he shared about his relationship with this other woman. They had been together physically, and he thought he loved her. I was devastated.

I don't remember what I said in response. I just remember quickly grabbing our eighteen-month-old daughter, rushing to the car, calling a friend, and weeping like I never had before. The rest of the day and the next day and the next were a blur. My children stayed with friends, my husband continued life as if everything was normal, and I tried to figure out what to do. I tried to make a battle plan.

I called our pastors, who tried to talk sense into my husband. The few friends who did know the situation tried to convince him to stop the insanity, but he was indifferent. It seemed as though he had turned off his emotions. Everyone who spent time with him had the same story. They shared that he listened without response and seemed unaffected by anything they said. He was a completely different man from the one they had known for so long.

Close friends of ours urgently reminded him of the importance and value of our family, but he no longer treasured us. No amount of talking could influence him. This other woman had captured his attention and, it appeared, his heart as well. He told some of our friends that he felt bonded to her and considered her his soul mate. I had become nothing to him.

For the next several weeks, I begged, pleaded, changed what I thought might help, prayed, and wept. I didn't kick him out for fear he would never come back. I knew whose house he would go to, and that, frankly, wasn't an option. Although he said he was considering what to do, I think I knew that in his heart he had already left.

Despite the fact that he seemed to love someone else and had obviously shut down his emotions regarding me and our children, over time I came to believe that he didn't want to be the one who officially ended our marriage. I learned from our counselor and my attorney that adulterers often don't make the final move to end the marriage. Sadly, it's the betrayed spouse who is forced to make that difficult decision. I found that to be the case for us. (I'll share more about that process later.)

Strangely, based on some of the things my husband said, I wondered if he also thought he might be able to keep us all. I learned that this, too, wasn't a completely uncommon behavior for adulterers. In their view, they had been able to have it all up to the point of being caught, so why wouldn't everyone be willing to continue with the arrangement? My husband's behavior was clouding his ability to think rationally and realistically. Thankfully, my vision was clear, and my next step was to arrange for marriage counseling and for the two of us to attend a marriage conference.

He was willing to go to both, but he didn't participate in either. He was basically just a body on the counseling sofa—warm body, cold heart. Despite this setback, I was undeterred in my efforts to get through to

him. Every day I tried to talk to him about the hope I had for restoration. I tried to convince him that God had planned for us to be together. I reminded him of our vows, of our life together, of our children. It was our life to be lived together. He was not God's best for this other woman.

It was like reasoning with a rock. I kept thinking he would respond. I couldn't reconcile that this man, who had been my best friend, partner, and lover, suddenly was my betrayer. I kept remembering our life together. Only days before everything exploded, we'd been laughing so hard that we ended up practically sitting on the kitchen floor with tears streaming down our faces. How had we gotten to this point? I was baffled.

The pain of betrayal was more physical than I could have ever imagined. I couldn't eat or sleep. The thought of swallowing anything past the giant lump in my throat was daunting. I was definitely on the adultery diet—effective but not recommended. Every time I lay down at night, I would end up fighting thoughts of fear and despair. I would lie there beside my husband and feel hopelessness wash over me. It was completely surreal in so many ways, and all too real in others.

This man who had slept beside me for more than seventeen years was now unrecognizable. This man who had been a leader and teacher in our church was no longer walking with the Lord. This man who was the father of our five children was daily pulling further and further away from them. And I was discovering that no matter how desperately I wanted to change him and our circumstances, I was unable to do much at all.



*Journal entry: I want a calm I cannot find. Lord, why did You call me to this? I feel hopeless right now—exhausted, sad, and lonely. I want someone to say it's all going to be okay, and I know in the end it will be, but this road seems long, arduous, lonely, and complicated.*

Regardless, I resolved to not give up on my marriage. It was no easy resolution. Betrayal was like no pain I could have imagined and responding in kindness was incredibly difficult. I did all I could to offer grace to him, to treat him respectfully, and to love him despite his behavior. I definitely didn't do it flawlessly. I struggled, but I felt that this was what I was supposed to do—until God showed me otherwise. I hoped God was going to do something mighty and miraculous, which to me meant restoring my marriage and my family.

I believed that God would bless my efforts because I was striving to be a godly wife to an adulterer. That warranted something pretty amazing from God, didn't it? That might not have been the best motivation, although I did honestly feel that God was leading me to love my husband regardless of his actions. I was hopeful that I could love him back to me.

To be perfectly honest, at times it still feels as if all my attempts to save my marriage were for naught, but I know they weren't. Like many people in this situation, I didn't receive the outcome I desired, but I did begin to understand myself and my relationship with the Lord on a much deeper level. And while it was a day-by-day, step-by-step, remind-myself-to-breathe kind of experience, I saw that God was (and continues to be) with me, helping me maintain a Christ-centered perspective even during the worst times.

### MARCHING FORWARD

I believe that God's perfect will is that all marriages stay intact (Matthew 19:5–6), that we love each other always, that we keep our marriage beds pure (Hebrews 13:4), and that we raise our children to love and follow the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). I also believe we live in a fallen world, where our choices have consequences. There is no doubt that the actions



of my ex-husband had negative consequences on my children and me, but there is life after adultery and divorce. I am proof.

My story is unbelievable, at least to me. There are still days when I shake my head in disbelief, but I no longer struggle so much with the troublesome thoughts that plagued me early on, such as, *I can't believe my husband was an adulterer! Am I really divorced? How did this happen? What happened to the man I married? Was it me? What did I do wrong? How am I going to walk my children through this? Will I survive this life? Oh, God, help!*

Maybe you're dealing with all those thoughts and asking yourself and God those same questions. Maybe you're where I was a few years ago—stunned, in the initial stages of grief, wondering, *Oh, God, how am I going to do this?* Maybe you are, like I am now, a single parent looking for answers for how to do this task you weren't really made to do—to be both Mom and Dad. Perhaps you're a friend of someone in this situation, hoping to find trustworthy biblical information on how to help him or her through this ordeal.

Unfortunately for me, none of my friends had the real-world experience with abandonment to help me understand all the eventualities. They loved me well, supported me completely, and blessed me immeasurably, but none of us were equipped to deal with the onslaught of issues adultery and divorce presented. Over the years I had met quite a few women who had been through divorces, but I hadn't considered asking specific questions about their situations and how they got through them successfully. I certainly hadn't gleaned any information that would have prepared me for a situation I never thought I'd be in.

Though friends at my church stepped up and tried to help prevent our divorce, they weren't sure how to guide me through the process once it was clear that it was going to happen. Even a biblically supported divorce is difficult to navigate. Others wanted to advise me from a worldly

perspective that just struck me as wrong. Even Christians can be vindictive and mean when provoked, and I didn't want to be that kind of Christian. Also, I had five children looking to me for help, comfort, and stability. It was more than important that I determine not only how to survive this tumultuous situation but how to succeed in marching forward as well.

### A BATTLE PLAN TO SHARE

My purpose in writing this book is to share my journey and offer you hope and a path to healing. I won't be able to provide a definitive five-point plan for surviving unwanted abandonment and divorce—because there isn't one. But whether you are the abandoned spouse or that person's friend, mentor, or counselor, I can take your hand and walk with you through this agonizing and arduous ordeal. Everyone's situation is different, but all spouses going through the experience of abandonment and divorce feel the same pain and need the same healing. And if you're going through this, or have gone through it, I want to encourage you that there is hope for those of us who have known the sting of betrayal and the ache of abandonment.

As I share my story, I pray you'll see that even in the midst of great pain, there is potential for great miracles. I've found that when life is beyond difficult, strength and peace are available through Christ. On both a practical and emotional level, each stage of the healing process is its own battle. In the pages ahead, we will tread carefully through the aftermath of abandonment and the minefield of divorce to the victory that lies ahead. I cannot promise you ease, comfort, or pain-free living. But I can promise this:

1. *God is "able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20).* After my husband left and was subsequently fired

because of his adultery, I feared that I wouldn't be able to take care of my children. In desperation I prayed that God would enable me to provide for us, and within a few months, I secured a job at a Christian school, where my four youngest children were welcomed as students. My two-year-old was cared for across the hall from my classroom, and my three-year-old was two doors down the hall. Occasionally I was able to rock them to sleep and even comfort them when they cried.

Going from being a homeschooling mom to a full-time working mom was gut-wrenching, especially with two toddlers, but God provided

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

—EPHESIANS 3:20-21

the perfect imperfect situation. That to me was so much more than I had asked or imagined.

2. *God is worthy of our trust (Psalm 37:5-6; 1 Thessalonians 5:24).* I had a lot of fearful and anxious thoughts based on the reality that was my life. But God was faithful to help me deal with each one. I feared the loss of my husband, and although that did indeed happen, God proved trustworthy in helping me handle my fears. He provided what I needed when I needed it. He gave me a

home, a job, friends who helped with my house, men who modeled godly manhood to my children, faithful friends and family who prayed for us daily, and the strength to meet each day.

Implicit in the directive to trust God is a big “do not worry.” In Matthew 6 Jesus speaks to this worry many of us struggle with daily. He compares us to birds that “do not sow or reap or store away” food but are fed by our heavenly Father. Jesus asks us, “Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”

(verses 26–27). Our Father knows what we need, and He will provide (verses 32–33). Beloved, God loves you very much, and He can be trusted with your life.

3. *There is hope (Psalm 25:3; Ephesians 1:18–19)*. The mere fact that God has allowed me to write this book is a picture of Him making something beautiful out of something exceedingly difficult. He has a plan for my life, and He has a plan for yours. Jeremiah 29:11 says, “ ‘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.’ ”

*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.*

—JOHN 14:1

God said those words to the people of Israel while they were still in captivity. God wasn't going to leave them there; He had a plan for them, and it was good. In little ways, I feel hopefulness each time I laugh with my children, each time my children say they love me, and each time they make good decisions. I'm thankful and hopeful because God is allowing me to be part of the redemption of this difficult period in my life and the lives of my children.

### MEDIC! DEALING WITH BATTLE WOUNDS AND SCARS

Regardless of whether your marriage ended two days, two months, or two years ago, or whether you're still battling to save your marriage, we share a common experience of grieving our losses. Each of us is somewhere along the continuum of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Denial, the first stage of grief, is marked by disbelief. We simply can't believe what is happening to us or around us. When we finally grasp the magnitude of the betrayal, blazing anger bursts onto the scene. We feel righteous indignation, which often gives way to bargaining. This

is when we try to figure out a way to make things work, to go back to the way life was, or change it for the better.

At some point along the grief continuum, hopelessness and depression might become our daily companions. When these two difficult emotions are dealt with effectively, we can finally reach a point of acceptance and begin looking forward to what the future holds for us. Each of us is coming to grips with both our new reality and the battle scars we got along the way. Understanding how we got here and what it looks like to come to grips with reality in a healthy way is a huge part of being able to move forward and heal.

Someone shared with me that there is an “unnatural natural progression” in the breakup of a family. See if this resonates with you. First, one spouse turns his (or her) back on God and then abandons his partner emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Once he has thrown away his relationships with his Savior and his spouse, it isn’t difficult to see that his children easily become the third casualty. I watched that exact process happen in my marriage. I just didn’t realize what was happening until it was too late.

There were a few signs of my husband’s struggles even during our first year of marriage, but I essentially ignored them. I know that many of my husband’s struggles began before he met me. I loved his family—and still do—but adultery was a pervasive theme in their home. My husband’s father left his wife when my husband was a young teenager—the same age as our oldest son when my husband left. My husband had always promised me that he wouldn’t repeat the sins of his father. When his father left his second wife, my husband wept and emphatically declared he wouldn’t do that to me, ever. (Thankfully, my ex-husband’s father has since committed his life to Jesus, and he is indeed “a new creation” in Christ [2 Corinthians 5:17].)

The marriage counselor we went to said that all these things in his

family played into the struggles my husband faced daily. I can look back now and see many red flags regarding my husband's behavior, including simple interactions I observed between my husband and other women. There was definitely a difference between friendly and flirtatious. I chose most often to believe that my handsome, gregarious husband was just a very friendly man. And he was, but he was a consummate flirt as well. His flirting often made me feel devalued. I did ask at one point that he not flirt in front of me. I should have stated that request as, "Don't flirt with other women, period."

After I read Shaunti Feldhahn's book *For Women Only*, my husband and I had a conversation about the visual struggles men have with regard to women. He said he didn't struggle with this kind of temptation at all. I'd married the only man in the world who didn't struggle with admiring beautiful women! I probably should have recognized that false claim as a warning flag. Really, most of the things that I look back on were relatively insignificant things. But when I put them all together now, they paint a picture I doubtless should have seen more clearly.

After my husband left, I wondered, *Why didn't I pick up on things sooner?* I wish I knew why I didn't acknowledge my gut feelings back then. Why didn't I confront his flirting more directly and with some tenacity? I think I just loved him and trusted him.

At one point during our divorce process, I spent time reading through my journals from our early years together. As I did, it became clear to me that I did indeed have a sense that something was wrong. But the fact was, I wasn't a suspicious, unhappy wife. I had a happy home and a family I loved. We weren't perfect, and my husband's tendencies to pay attention to other women bothered me, but I knew he loved me and I never thought our relationship was in jeopardy.

Had I understood what was at stake, I would have been more willing to ask harder questions and take notice of uncomfortable feelings and

thoughts. I wouldn't have allowed myself to deny the possibility of an affair just because it seemed unfathomable. I would have been vigilant and focused in order to protect what I loved. Unfortunately, by the time I began fighting to save my marriage, it was already too late. I didn't realize it at the time, but the battle had already been lost. All my efforts were in vain.

It is a natural inclination when our marriage has been shattered to focus on the past—to relive, dissect, and rehash old hurts. Although this is normal and expected, it isn't advisable for prolonged periods of time. We can look back and try to evaluate what happened for the purpose of healing and changing for the better, but we must be careful not to continue to punish ourselves. It's a useless and harmful exercise to beat ourselves up for ignoring warning signs or being unaware of them. Regardless of missed signs or ignored inklings, we shouldn't dwell on the past beyond learning from it.

### BATTLING BITTERNESS

Probably like many of you, I enjoyed my life with my husband. Our marriage wasn't perfect, but I always thought it was pretty good. In fact, on the day my husband left, he stated that 90 percent of our marriage was great. At that moment, some sarcastic thoughts raced through my mind: *Ninety percent? For real? And you're leaving? Good luck finding a marriage that rates 100 percent, especially with an adulteress!*

Yes, I'll admit I felt a little bitter. For those of you who are reading this book on behalf of a devastated friend, all I can say is . . . welcome to the world of adultery! The battle against bitterness was and is fierce, and I've had to fight hard against it. It isn't easy; in fact, it's really, really hard. But it's a very important battle to win.

If I had allowed bitterness to take root, I wouldn't have been able to overcome thousands of other issues and emotions associated with aban-

donment and divorce. The number of emotions I felt throughout this nightmare was enormous. I had to recognize my emotions as valid and allow myself to feel them with caution, with concern, and with counsel. I wanted no emotion to overcome me and keep me from doing the things I knew I needed to do.

My faith enabled me to focus on something other than how I was feeling. I learned how to rest in the presence of God, trust in the sovereignty of God, and rely on the provision of God. And I desperately needed that provision, because to truly heal, I needed to *forgive*. That was the single most important thing I could do. And, of course, it was also the single most difficult thing to do. (We'll talk more about this important issue in chapter 5.)

There was a surreal, maddening moment when I realized that I was the "victim," and yet I was the only one fighting for my marriage. The injustice of the offended party having to convince the offender to stay was mind-boggling. So often I wanted to yell, "Hey! You should be begging *me* to stay in this marriage. You are such a jerk!" Actually, I probably did say that. Calling my husband a jerk wasn't edifying or encouraging, but it was the truth as I saw it. Still, although I felt that I had every right to sink into the pit of nastiness, it wasn't really where I wanted to be or where God wanted me to be.

Responding in anger might have seemed like my right and even a reasonable response to my situation, but the result was more pain and less healing. I had many occasions to see and regret my natural inclinations. Those were the times when I learned to rely heavily on the Lord for strength to rise above them. I was so thankful that God understood all the things I was feeling, all the ways I wanted to respond, and the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual struggle of fighting for my marriage. I knew that God was intimately acquainted with betrayal, grief, and loss (Isaiah 53:3–5; John 13:21). He could handle all my tears and



rants and offer comfort in response (Psalm 55:22). He calmed my fears (Psalm 34:4). He was the perfect Medic (Psalm 103:3; 1 Peter 2:24), and He never left my side (Hebrews 13:5). He healed my wounded heart even as the battle raged on.

And if you let Him, He will heal yours, too.

### BATTLE WEARY BUT WINNING

In the midst of crisis, I had to survive. I had to face each day, especially as I walked my children through the crisis as well. They were used to my red, wet eyes. They probably heard my weeping in the shower or in bed at night. Only occasionally would they come to check on me. In some strange way, I believe it was comforting for them to know that their mother felt the loss just as intensely as they did.

I know my children found comfort in seeing me move forward and smile at times, even while I was wading through deep sadness. To realize that there can be joy in the midst of great sorrow and grief was a valuable life lesson for them. I didn't always handle things perfectly—I still don't. I surely freaked my kids out at times with my range of emotions. I just know that God enabled me to walk through this crisis with a grace that could only have come from Him.

Honestly, I still feel I didn't get a fighting chance to save my marriage. I'd lost the war before I even knew I was in the battle. Yet in the midst of abandonment and divorce, God gave me His perspective, His people, and His peace. He showed me that His way of looking at things would give me hope. He placed people in my life who loved me and my children through their actions, their words, and their prayers. He poured His peace on me as I took each step, believing His faithfulness and trusting His plan. He can do the same for you.

Thank you for letting me walk by your side into the fray. I pray that

you will find your voice as you hear mine. Sometimes it feels as though our abandonment and divorce rob us of our voices. We lose our voices as married individuals, our voices to communicate all we feel, our voices to share our view of the past and to clearly express our vision for the future. But as we march boldly forward, we will successfully find our voices again. This battle is painful, but it is not hopeless.

In the chapters that follow, I won't give you trite answers or throw Bible verses at you in the hope that you will be challenged or blessed or even comforted (though Scripture is comforting and I will share some along the way). I know from experience how easily someone's heartfelt words can wound an already fragile heart. Instead, I'll tell you honestly about my own struggles, my battles with negative emotions, my fears, and my failures. We will surely find common ground in those things.

*Wait for the LORD;  
be strong, and let your  
heart take courage;  
wait for the LORD!*

—PSALM 27:14, ESV

More importantly, I want to share the many ways God has blessed my family in the midst of our pain, how my faith has been strengthened, and how my fear has been replaced with hope. My prayer is that you will find healing as you read through the pages of this book. I have found healing as I've written it. There is strength and hope and healing at the end of this sorrow. We will claim it together.



*Lord, Your Word says that You are the “Father of mercies” and the “God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction” with the comfort we have received from You (2 Corinthians 1:3–4, ESV).*

*God, sometimes it’s so difficult to see beyond our own pain and suffering and to feel any ability to bless or comfort those around us. Lord, despite our own pain, please help us bless others. Let us find our strength in Christ. Lord, hold our hearts. You know intimately the heartbreak of abandonment and betrayal. Father, please heal our hearts, restore our minds, and mend our broken homes (Psalm 147:3).*

*As temptations come—those we expect and those we don’t—please help us lean heavily on You. Please don’t let us lose sight of Jesus. Give us strength to not throw away our confidence, “which has a great reward” (Hebrews 10:35, ESV). We are not of those who “shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls” (verse 39, ESV)!*

*God, be glorified in our messy lives. Your Word says You give “strength to the weary” and increase “the power of the weak” (Isaiah 40:29). We boldly ask for Your strength. Let our hearts take courage in You (Psalm 112:8).*

*In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.*