

RECONCILIATION
&
REMARriage

...strengthen the things which remain

RECONCILIATION
&
REMARriage

...strengthen the things which remain

SANDRA YOUNG HARRIS



© 2008 by Sandra Young Harris. All rights reserved.

Published by Redemption Press, PO Box 427, Enumclaw, WA 98022.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any way by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording or otherwise—without the prior permission of the copyright holder, except as provided by USA copyright law.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. The “NIV” and “New International Version” trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society.

Scripture references marked KJV are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture references marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible, © 1960, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

ISBN 13: 978-1-63232-616-4 (Print)

978-1-63232-617-1 (ePub)

978-1-63232-618-8 (Mobi)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2006903556

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to
my husband, Herbert,
my partner in faith, and
to my children,
Corrie and Herbie,
my students of faith.

I also dedicate this book to couples who are committed to reconciliation and remarriage after divorce. It is my prayer that, in spite of the brokenness, you will find the grace of God to be sufficient to strengthen the things which remain, as He proves His faithfulness to you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	xiii
1. The Ministry of Reconciliation	19
2. The Scriptures Speak of Marriage	31
3. God Speaks	47
4. The Children Are Tender	61
5. Be Informed!	81
6. What Remains?	99
7. The Era of Grace	111
8. The Helpmeet Role	129
9. Choosing The Right Marriage Counselor	149
10. Thy Maker Is Thine Husband	159

11. Spiritual Warfare	183
12. "It Is Finished"	217
13. God Is Doing a New Thing!	225
Endnotes	257

PREFACE

“...and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die...”

—Revelation 3:2

Other than her personal relationship with Jesus Christ, there are not many things that define a wife more than a successful and satisfying relationship with her husband. I believe that the overwhelming majority of married women want to succeed in their marriages, and I believe that they work harder at it than their husbands. It is one of the most important things that identifies who a wife is physically, emotionally and spiritually. For this reason, after a divorce, she often tends, unfortunately and sometimes tragically, to drift through life, unfulfilled, half-heartedly and at less than full potential.

My own experience, as well as my interaction with and observations of other women, has led me to conclude that success in marriage for a woman can be compared to a man's need to succeed at a job. Indeed, even in this modern age of "political correctness," a woman's role as a wife usually identifies her and takes priority over other roles in her life, including her role in the work force. If the truth were to be told, most women would say that a successful career comes second to a successful marriage and family life. For this reason, a wife tends to continuously try to "make a marriage work." The truth of the matter is, however, we as women have no power to "make it work."

In this regard, God can use the most desperate situations for His glory. Most of the valuable lessons and precepts of the kingdom I learned were in the valley of separation and divorce. This is where I really got to know who God is and what He means to me personally. This experience is one of my precious possessions. However, my most precious one is when I became a Christian. Although I confessed a hope in Jesus Christ at age ten, it was not until I was about 46 years of age, when, for the first time as a Christian, I got to know God's ways in the midst of a very hard trial.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank God for His love and for empowering me with His Holy Spirit. Next, I extend my sincere gratitude for the support, patience and encouragement received from my husband, Herbert, and children, Corrie and Herbie, during this project.

I also wish to thank my good friend since college, Brenda Moorehead Wilson, for reading through my manuscript and making suggestions for necessary changes. Also, a warm thank you is owed to my sister, Kay Turner, and my good friend, Minnie Fountain, for being my cheerleaders.

A special thank you is also extended to Connie Neal for allowing me to generously quote, “anything I wanted to” from her book, *Holding onto Heaven While Your Husband Goes through Hell* . Also, I am grateful to Cook

Communications Ministries for allowing me to refer to the wisdom found in *Men in Mid-Life Crisis* by Jim Conway and to Tyndale House Publishers for allowing me to include excerpts from the compelling work, *Hinds' Feet on High Places*, by Hannah Hurnard.

Finally, I wish to thank Athena Dean of Redemption Press for her leadership and guidance for helping me to make my story a reality in print.

INTRODUCTION

As I peered out the window, I was thankful that Saturday had finally come, in spite of the fact that it was obviously going to be another cloudy, rainy day in late November. We had eaten breakfast and were settling in to watch an old western movie to consume the rest of the morning. In my mind, I was waiting for the movie to start, but in my spirit, I was marveling at the peace that existed between Herbert, my husband, and me almost ten years later. Years before, our marriage had been completely dead and gone. I have no doubt that the restoration we share today was wrought directly by the hand of God through the power of His Holy Spirit.

While the experience of reconciliation for us is ongoing even today, the actual trial with its accompanying storm occurred over a seven-year period, from

1992-1999. For many years, it has been an experience closely guarded and very private to me—one that I personally did not want to share with anyone, especially because of the deep shame that I felt about my husband's attempt to be married to someone else.

For a long time I felt embarrassed and humiliated, until God removed the shame and told me that in His healing and restoring power there is no shame. He reminded me of His son Jesus' ultimate humiliation and shame as He walked up the *Via Dolorosa* and hung on the cross at Calvary with the shame of the sins of the whole world on His shoulders, as God, His own father, turned away from Him. It was the kind of shame no human being had ever known before, nor will ever know again. God gently reminded me that I could not begin to imagine the humiliation and shame that Jesus must have felt. With this admonition, He gently asked me to share my experience as a living epistle.

It is with my husband Herbert's urging and blessing that I have written this book, with the hope that it will encourage other families to seek God for the kind of restoration that we have experienced. We feel no shame, for we both know now that "old things have passed away" (2 Cor. 3:17). Therefore, I share our experience in hopes that it will help and encourage others who are going through the valley of marital tribulations. The experience has taught me that "trials do not come to last, they come to pass."

Out of this experience, even with all the suffering, one of the many transformations that occurred for me was reaching a place in my personal relationship with

Jesus Christ of wanting to please God more than I want to please myself. I was somewhat surprised that when I was going through my trial, I was unable to find any information that addressed my specific situation. I knew that couples had experienced reconciliation, but apparently and understandably many were not willing to share the experience, because it is very private and sensitive. On the other hand, however, with so many marriages and families being dissolved, we who profess to be Christians cannot stand idly by. Those of us who have experienced it know that, through Christ, reconciliation—to the point of remarriage and recovery of more joy than ever before—is very possible. Yes, I did find many books concerning marriage that greatly encouraged me, but I was almost completely in the dark otherwise when it came to finding ways to handle the turmoil of this valley.

While this book is designed to help anyone who is in need, I write it mainly to separated and divorced women who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ and who desire to be completely reconciled to their husbands. This is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, being born again is a prerequisite. Even if there were scriptural grounds for divorcing, if you choose to stay in your marriage or return to your marriage in spite of those grounds, I am a living witness that while there may be grounds, God has grace. His grace is sufficient and supercedes any grounds, not only to completely restore the marriage (and the children), but also to heal all the past hurts and to keep every aspect of the marriage in the future (2 Cor. 12:9). Obviously,

this book is written from a wife's perspective, but I must tell you at the outset that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). What He did for me, He stands ready and willing to do for anyone one who will trust Him, woman or man, just as the scenarios included in these pages show.

Perhaps you have picked up this book because you are, at this point, as I once was, groping in the dark for answers and trying to hold yourself and your children together after the trauma of a divorce, not knowing what your next move should be. Or perhaps you are separated, and are in the valley of decision, not sure what to do next. You may even be in a valley of hurt, confusion and disbelief. While my story is true, I do not know the facts of your particular circumstances; therefore, I have included several scenarios that could ring true in any marriage. It is my hope that sharing my own experience, as though I walked in your shoes through the valley of the shadow of divorce and betrayal, will encourage you, for God is with you (Ps. 23).

On the other hand, if you have no intentions of reconciling with your spouse, and perhaps just picked up this book out of curiosity, I must tell you that reconciliation is not just a suggestion. It is a very, very powerful, life-giving force. For you see, reconciliation purchased our salvation, and God has given unto each of His children that same ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). Through Christ, we have the power to succeed in our marriages.

All who read this book will not accept or agree with its message. Agreement by all readers is not my goal. Yet,

I have no doubt that it is necessary. I cannot say exactly who this book is for. However, I know that there are many estranged spouses, both men and women, who desire to be and should be restored to their marriages and families. As well, there are multitudes of children who need both of their parents in harmony with each other in a safe and intact home and family so that they can thrive and be happy. Therefore, this book is for those who have ears to hear (Matt. 11:15).*

Regardless of why you picked up this book, after you have read it, I believe that you will be transformed by the careful and thoughtful consideration not only of God's word, but also His mighty acts. Your mind will be enlightened and renewed. From Genesis through Revelation, you will marvel at what the Holy Spirit will teach you. God ordained marriage at the creation in the Garden of Eden and remains involved throughout to the last one, the marriage of Jesus Christ, the Lamb, and His bride, the Church.

You may also be surprised to learn about His commandment concerning modern day marital conduct, including divorce. It is my hope that you will begin to read with purpose and not just for information. Some scriptures are cited in the book, and only reference is made to others. This is intentional so that you will read with your Bible at your side. It is important that we read God's promises directly from His word, as they become more meaningful and alive. While I prefer the

* Disclaimer: The advice in this book should not be substituted for professional counseling.

King James Version of the Bible, I encourage you to use the translation that helps you to understand best.

Without a doubt, His word is living, and nothing can be compared to personally experiencing God. My hope is that you will, as I did, have the same wonderful experience of God personally communicating with you and touching you, as you seek Him with your whole heart. The sheer exhilaration of His touch cannot be described. No one, not even your spouse, can touch you like Jesus Christ can as He assures you that, “trials do not come to last, they come to pass.”

Chapter One

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away and behold all things have become new...God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

—2 Cor. 5: 17;19

She was 24 with a college degree, and today was her wedding day. He was the love of her life, her high school sweetheart, and they were getting married. Divorce was the furthest thing from her mind. It did not matter that her parents divorced when she was 12, and a single mother raised her. They had sought marriage counseling before the wedding, and she was so happy.

Does it sound familiar? It is basic to human experiences. Human beings want to be married. Rightfully so, we love love, and we want to be connected to someone who loves us. This need to be connected begins in the womb. It not only is necessary for physical, emotional and psychological fulfillment, but also for spiritual health because it is by God's design. In spite of the staggering and tragic divorce rate, we still opt for marriage. Even negative childhood experiences which we may have witnessed in our own parents' marriage cannot deter us from getting married.

A woman works very hard at making her wedding day the "perfect day" because she is marrying the "perfect man" with whom she will have "perfect children" and live the "perfect life." Paradoxically, however, it appears that couples often do not realize that we must have a personal relationship with the "perfect one," Jesus Christ, who can alone enable us to do the lifelong, hard work of achieving a satisfying marriage and home life.

FIRST COMES THE WEDDING, THEN THE MARRIAGE

Of all human experiences, other than when a person receives Christ, I believe that a wedding ceremony and the birth of a child are among the most glorious and fulfilling experiences in the world. A wedding ceremony, where a man and a woman are joined together by God, evokes the sweetest emotions on earth. Even men, young and old, become sentimental. It is a high and holy ceremony between the couple and among the witnesses in

attendance. A man and a woman make an agreement, a covenant between themselves and God. However, the truth of the matter is, in spite of those in attendance, God Himself is the witness:

Yet ye say, wherefore? Because the Lord hath been witnessing between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hath dealt treacherously; yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.... take heed to your spirit that you deal not treacherously.

—Mal. 2:14, 15

Holy matrimony is indeed a mystery. God takes two people and makes them one. After all, at the creation, they started out as one. Therefore, can a marriage performed by God really be irretrievably broken? Can unfaithfulness break it to the point that it cannot recover? No, it cannot. The Bible says, “If God hath declared it, who can disannul it? (Isa. 14:27). No one can disannul it, not even the partners themselves. Yes, I believe that adultery is grounds for divorce, but divorce still does not disannul holy matrimony, if one is a believer. We are told that “...sin shall not have dominion over the believer” (Rom. 6:14), and God’s grace can supercede any grounds. These are His promises.

I firmly believe that the vast majority of marriages begin with the couple earnestly and seriously taking their vows with hopes and dreams to, indeed, live together for better or for worse and until death parts them, as charged by the minister. On the other hand, after the ceremony is over, we do not hear ministers preach often enough

about the seriousness of that covenant. The scripture says, "...when thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it, for he hath no pleasure in fools, pay that which thou hast vowed" (Eccl. 5:4). Among the most important vows in the world are the marriage vows.

THE FIRST MARRIAGE—IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Theirs was a beautiful garden wedding. The weather was perfect. He slept peacefully, more deeply than usual. It was the most peaceful sleep that he had ever had. He was finally beginning to feel refreshed, renewed and whole. A change had certainly taken place in his body and mind. It felt mysterious, but he could not identify it. For the first time he felt complete. A change had taken place in his spirit, as well. When he opened his eyes, he literally saw the most beautiful creature on earth. She was unlike the creatures he had frolicked with earlier. She looked almost like him. However, there were some definite differences. She was soft, her voice was pleasant to hear, she smelled good, and she talked more than he did. Although he did not always respond, he loved the fact that she enjoyed communicating with him. As days passed, he learned that she was unable to do many of the things he could do. Yet, she was also able to do many of the things he could not do. They even thought differently, as they shared their points of view and showed different emotional responses. It made life in the garden for him more exciting than ever before, and she felt at home with him. But one day, when he was not paying

close attention to her, as God had directed him to do, she got into trouble for which he was ultimately held responsible, and the consequences have lasted through the ages.

There are many implications for the events that took place between God and man in the Garden of Eden. I came to understand that there is one concerning marriage. As Christians, we should understand that there was a serious betrayal by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Just as married couples do today, Adam and Eve betrayed God's trust in them. It took a deliberate decision on God's part to work to restore the relationship. Even though God made the way possible for the relationship to be restored through the ministry of reconciliation, by offering Jesus Christ as a living sacrifice, He did not force man to return to Him. However, He definitely gave them the opportunity to choose to return to Him.

What does this mean for you and me? God has given us the very same ministry of reconciliation, which He demonstrated in reconciling the world to Himself through Christ, the Sacrificial Lamb. The gift of salvation, which is impossible without reconciliation, is not forced, but a free gift to all who will accept it. It is a gentle offer, not a demand. As followers of Christ, in our marriages we may be called upon to demonstrate the ministry of reconciliation by being a living sacrifice for our mate and children during times of family crisis. The good news is that, through Jesus Christ, we are well equipped to do it! Therefore, we are to be ready at all times to reconcile (2 Cor. 5:18).

THAT HORRIBLE ACT OF BETRAYAL

Adultery is such an abject sin of betrayal of the marriage vows, and Satan knows how crushing and thoroughly heart-wrenching betrayal can be. After all, he had Judas betray Christ, and he uses betrayal today on a grand scale to break up families. Most of the time, the wife does not see it coming, and usually she is the last to know. But the Bible says, "...where sin doth abound, grace doth much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). If we accept that grace, it is God who avenges the offended party. If the offender is truly repentant and turns from the sin, it is not the unpardonable sin. It is only through God's Holy Spirit that Christians exercise their full power to appropriate this kind of grace.

Those who minister are responsible for teaching reconciliation in marriage, and I must give credit to ministers who preach, from time to time, that we should be faithful to and get along well in our marriages. However, I have great difficulty with sermons about how we should forgive our "ex's" while moving on in our separate lives with someone else. I have sat in churches full of 30- and 40-year-old women, many divorced, where a minister will say, "Just keep trusting God, and you will get that husband." I have difficulty with this, because most men and women in this age group have been married to someone else who is probably still living. It can create confusion, because it tells an already vulnerable person, such as I was at one time, that the solution to divorce is finding another spouse, not restoration of the previous marriage.

What happened to God transforming our “ex-spouse,” and even us, through His power? I am sure that any woman would prefer that her husband be the man whom she first married, who is the father of her children, and who has been changed or made brand new through the transforming power of God. Certainly she would choose this over being in a new relationship with someone else with unknown flaws, or to go from man to man trying to find happiness. I know women, including myself, who, even after a divorce, still love their husband. They would prefer to return to the marriage if their husband has been truly changed, because women are created this way. Women in general want a satisfying relationship with one man. As God told Eve in the Garden of Eden, “...and thy desire shall be to thy husband” (Gen. 3:16).

However, reconciliation is almost as unheard of in pulpits today as the second coming of Christ. Yet both are what make life the greatest. Yes, it is hard going through a period of divorce and reconciliation, but I know that God can completely transform and keep our marriages “...above all that we can ask or think” (Eph. 3:20). Unfortunately, I also know that many Christians, including ministers, do not believe this. In a word, too many believers equate divorce to death. They reckon it all over with, but the best may be yet to come, as it was for us.

Marriage is the brunt of jokes in the world, which is to be expected. However, it should not be so among believers, but it is. The church needs to take a very honest look at itself, take a strong stand against divorce, and

begin to reverence one marriage for life once again. As you read these pages, be reminded that these scriptures are not admonitions to the world, but to the church—to followers of Christ.

Our spiritual leaders are responsible for watching for our souls. Yet it appears that many ministers have overlooked, forgotten or ignored completely the commandment for husbands and wives to reconcile (1 Cor. 7:11). I have heard ministers who profess to be true believers preach sermons to large congregations concerning what you can do “...the next time around with someone else.” One minister preached a sermon entitled, “Think Before Saying, ‘I Do’ to the Next Person.” The title of the sermon was announced in advance. Why did he not preach on “How to Reconcile with Your Former Spouse?” I believe he chose the first subject because he, along with his congregation, has adopted the world’s attitude about marriage and forsaken the scriptures. Obviously, he saw no wrong in seeking a new partner as the rule, even though the scriptures teach that estranged couples are to be reconciled to one another.

The advice he gave can be very risky because it provided no stopping point. If it can be done again once, why not three, five, or more times? Many people who confess to be Christians have had multiple relationships—which they refer to as marriages—as they seek for happiness. I believe the best rule is to realize that each marriage is different, and counseling to leave for good should be done on a case-by-case basis. When general, blanket statements are made from the pulpit, it can be confirmation for some to leave a spouse and seek

another partner, when their particular circumstance does not dictate that they do so. It is a big mistake to assume that everyone needs the same advice, especially when it comes to marriage. As for myself, in some cases, I had to completely disregard some of the sermons I heard.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Although one of the scriptural grounds for divorce is adultery (Matt. 5:32), I believe that most women ask themselves the question: “What should I do?” even when confronted with the reality of adultery in their marriage. Obviously, divorce is not always the first thing that comes to mind. I once heard a marriage counselor say that many couples he counsels have grounds, but having grounds does not mean that people should get divorced, and many of his clients do not get divorced. “Everything that is lawful is not always expedient” (1 Cor. 6:12). I have come to realize that even though people have grounds, God has grace—grace sufficient to change a spouse (2 Cor. 12:9). It is grace that can make even the most horrible betrayal only a distant memory, as love is truly restored again. Also, it is grace that goes beyond all that we can ask or think concerning the restoration of our marriage, home, children, and witness (Eph. 3:20).

Although betrayal is probably the most crushing blow one can suffer, we can find comfort when we reflect on the betrayal of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Did He forgive Peter who denied Him? Would He have forgiven Judas if He had asked Him? The answer to both

questions is a resounding “yes.” However, based upon what we seldom hear from the pulpit, one would think that betrayal is the unpardonable sin. While I firmly believe the offender should pay the consequences, it need not necessarily break up a marriage.

Forgiveness, based upon the love of God, is the hallmark of the Christian faith. However, it seems, when it comes to a marriage deeply affected by unfaithfulness, it is not so. It appears that this sin defeats us in almost all cases, and the devil uses it on a grand scale to wreak havoc on marriages, homes and children. Yet, as stated, it appears that there is complete silence in the pulpit concerning forgiveness of this sin. Too many of those in the pulpit appear to be engaged in purposely ignoring the scriptures. When it comes to preaching the gospel, the good news is that God wants husbands and wives to be reconciled, even after unfaithfulness, and if we allow Him, He Himself will do the work of restoration.

It is no secret that so many long-term marriages among Christians are ending because of adultery. People are flooding the prayer lines for prayer for marriage problems involving infidelity. Families are hurting sorely. Yet the healing power of the ministry of reconciliation is not promoted and preached as it should be. If families need anything now, they need to be reconciled, and church leaders should no longer watch the families in their congregations fall like dominoes while they fail to preach the ministry of reconciliation. Yes, we do hear sermons concerning how to have a happy marriage, but what about the already divorced Christians? Are we to just look for another? It appears so. When Herbert and

I were divorced, what was I to do? Make no mistake, I believe that some ministers wanted to preach reconciliation, and sometimes I heard it in code language because it was not a popular message to preach. For the most part, it appeared that our leaders had just left the flock on its own to figure it out for themselves. Yes, we can be happy with Jesus alone. However, in the marriage relationship, I believe God wants us to be happy with each other as we have been transformed by Jesus Christ, as well.

TEACH ME, LORD, TO WAIT

Reconciliation requires patience. Often times, the waiting is long and difficult because it takes time for human nature to change. Just how long should a person wait? I cannot say. “Let patience have her perfect work so that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (Jas. 1:4). When marital difficulties occur, usually both spouses are in need of drastic changes, which often require a protracted period of time. It took about a year for me to even realize that I had flaws that needed to be changed. Then it took another three or four years for God to work some bad habits, in particular, strife, out of my life. Even now, when I am tempted to argue with Herbert, I am reminded of how long it took for God to rid me of that awful sin. Herbert also had flaws to get rid of, which took him equally as long. Neither of us wants to be required to learn those lessons all over again. One day we were not speaking to each other and we were on the verge of a major argument. I happened to turn to the scripture, “Remember therefore how thou hath

received and heard...If therefore, thou shall not watch, I will come on thee as a thief" (Rev. 3:3). The last thing I want God to do is remove Himself from our marriage. I took this admonition to be fair warning, and I changed my mind about arguing with Herbert. Furthermore, my silence accomplished what I wanted. So how long should you wait? I don't know. But one thing I do know is that God is faithful.