

The
Divorce
Journey

The Divorce Journey

A Christian's Travel
from Heartache
through Healing
to Happiness

S a n d y W a l l a c e

REDEMPTION  PRESS

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

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ISBN 13: 978-1-63232-093-3

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2010905555



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THE DIVORCE JOURNEY



*A CHRISTIAN'S TRAVEL FROM HEARTACHE,
THROUGH HEALING, TO HAPPINESS*

Sandy Wallace



Introduction

The Journey's Manual

The battle is ours, the outcome is God's.
—Thomas Jonathan “Stonewall” Jackson

AS I WRITE this book, I think of Moses and how unqualified he felt to lead the exodus of the Israelites from ancient Egypt. Nevertheless, God told him he was the chosen leader, and Moses obeyed. All of his early life was preparation for this journey, and yet Moses was unaware of God's plan.

In *Come Before Winter*, Charles Swindoll writes, “When God wants to do an impossible task, He takes an impossible individual . . . and crushes him.”¹ My divorce crushed me, yet I knew God had purpose in it.

During the four years I worked through my recovery, I spent much time looking for answers and for healing. I listened to many speakers, read many books, and spent much time in God's Word. Although I found there was very little Christian information written directly for those going through divorce, I did find numerous insights in many different sources. I want to share those insights with you and, more importantly, to reference these various resources and encourage you to locate and study them for yourself.

I never thought writing a book would be in my life's plan. I do not feel I have any special gift or savvy for this. I do feel the divine nudge, however, so I am going to be obedient. My attempt is to help each reader find hope for healing.

I want to ask forgiveness of my former husband. It has taken time to realize we both had issues. In fact, I must add that I divorced him after only a couple years into our first marriage. We were fortunate to remarry each other, but this second marriage took place before any mending, growth, or changes had been completed in either of us. I made many mistakes and committed many sins while trying to make sense of my marriage. Therefore, I do not suggest that I am writing this book because I am a wise, godly person; rather I am a broken, sinful one. Yet I still acknowledge that I am a child of the King and that God is a God of new beginnings.

In this book I will concentrate on the stages I went through during this journey. Some of the things I say about suggested corrective behaviors will be repetitive, but this seems unpreventable because the journey is about healing. Only God, the Great Physician, can provide absolute and immediate healing. Therefore, his directives to us for healing will be continually repeated.

The last part of the book discusses children issues, boundaries, and codependency. Please feel free to turn to those chapters as certain issues in your journey arise. For instance, if you have children, please advance to the chapter dealing with children and divorce. As parents, it is our responsibility to protect our children, but children suffer in silence. Others of you may have severe boundary issues. Jump to this chapter even as you progress through the journey's stages.

My purpose and desire for sharing my journey is so that you, the reader, will know that you can make the decision to stay "stuck" in your pain and confusion, or you can choose to take steps in a journey that may start with hurt, but that can eventually end in healing and happiness.

Stonewall Jackson said "The battle is ours, the outcome is God's." This should be stated differently for Christians: The battle, as well as the outcome, is in God's power. However, we can influence the outcome by the work and attitude we adopt during this journey.



CHAPTER 1

A Journey Is About to Begin

Anyone who underestimates what God can do with the ordinary has rocks in his head.

—Max Lucado¹

WE WERE RETURNING home from a Thanksgiving weekend with my husband's family. My husband acted nervous—even ill—throughout the entire trip. His appetite was noticeably gone. I knew something was upsetting him, but I also knew he would not be discussing whatever bothered him with me. We had been married for twenty-five years, but my husband still did not trust me with his feelings or thoughts. I, on the other hand, loved to discuss who I was and what I was thinking with special people in my life.

Like many men who go into their caves when they would rather not deal with certain things, David felt that his feelings and thoughts were private, and that I should not question him. With that in mind, I ignored my woman's intuition and decided to make the best of the return trip.

As we passed through the various small towns, I suggested it might be fun to stop in one of them and stay overnight. The children were raised and on their own. Our finances were solid and in order. Both of us had the following two days off with no plans. I said I

thought it would be interesting and romantic to wake up in one of these small towns and spend the day exploring its unique sights. David seemed irritated and said he could not imagine why I would even think of such a thing and that he needed to get back home.

I had handled this kind of disappointment and the differences in our priorities for many years. I had actually become pretty good at it. So I sent up a prayer asking God to help me love my husband through my feelings of rejection. I also asked the Lord to let David understand, at some point in our marriage, how much I loved him and that I wanted to share more of our time together.

We had no more than arrived home when David stated he was going for a walk. It was obvious he did not want me to accompany him. I camouflaged the pain by going inside and busying myself with a wallpapering project.

Two hours later, he returned home and brought a chair into where I was working. His eyes full of pain, he said he needed to talk. “Haven’t you ever wanted to feel really close to someone, and that the two of you were really one?” he asked. I told him that I had these feelings for him and had been praying throughout our entire marriage that he would have them for me.

He apologized and stated that he did not have these feelings for me, and that he needed to find those feelings before his life was over. (To think that this was one of the few times he had actually expressed any inner feelings with me—and this is what I heard!) I told him it sounded like he was struggling with some personal issues and that he might want to get some counseling before he made any radical decisions. He said he felt differently and needed some time apart to figure out how to fill the emptiness he felt.

I think I went into some form of shock. What was I hearing? What was my husband really saying to me? I decided to call my parents, now in Phoenix for the winter. They had visited us just the weekend before as they traveled from Minneapolis to the Southwest. I remember thinking how much easier this news would have been if David had shared it with me while Mom and Dad were still close by. Now I had nearly six months to be without them at a time when

I felt I needed them the most. (It would take me two years to see the blessing in this timing.)

My sister Susan, from a neighboring state, did come and stay with me for a few days. This helped get me through the initial shock. I needed to return to work, however, so her stay was short. The reality was that I might have to take care of myself from now on and that I better start seeing life that way. My job was a necessity and not to be abused.

My husband moved out of the house within a couple days of our return from our Thanksgiving trip. It was so ironic. I could see and feel the turmoil in him, and he appeared so confused. I knew he didn't want to hurt me, yet neither did he want to stay. I loved him so much and initially found myself hurting more for him than for me. I was sure he would eventually work through his frustrations and return home.

After a couple months of this turmoil, however, I began doubting that he would return. When I decided I could not go on like this without some support, I called a church in another suburb. (I did not want anyone in my church knowing what was going on in my home.) I was directed to a wonderful woman named Wava, who counseled separated and divorced people. I made an appointment to meet with her.

Wava immediately invited me into her home. She had been divorced herself for numerous years after a long marriage, and so she understood my pain and knew my need for direction, prayer, encouragement, and wisdom. She heard my concerns and then prayed with me. Before leaving Wava that day, she told me to spend time reading the Psalms and to honor the apostle Paul's request in Ephesians 5:20 to always give thanks to God the Father for everything.

I told Wava that I was certain there were several factors influencing my husband's behavior. I just had no idea what they were. Was he going through midlife crisis? Was he having trouble at work? Was he physically ill? Was someone else in the picture? My wonderful, wise friend advised me to pray for him, accepting that it was enough that God knew the truth. She told me that I did not need to know the reasons for his behavior at this time. This, Wava

said, was a purposeful time to lift up my husband in intercessory prayer and remember that God was in charge.

I left her house that day in unbelievable pain. I wasn't sure how things were going to turn out, but I knew I did not have any power to change David. Despite the ache I felt right then, God was so real to me. He revealed that he had to be in control of this mess or nothing would change. I could manipulate some actions, but anything I did would only put a bandage on a dysfunctional marriage.

At the time, I didn't feel any anger toward my husband, but I did feel extremely hurt. There were times when the pain was so severe I felt sure that dying would be a gift. God was going to have to carry me through this one.

David stopped by our house nearly every night, but he spent very little time with me. He tinkered around in the garage or worked in the yard. I didn't know if he was coming to see me and just didn't know how to express it, or if he just wanted to be around his belongings. Each evening he would tell me he "had to go home." I wanted to scream, "This is your home!" Instead, I tried to hold my tongue and not rock the boat. I had hopes that as long as he was coming over to the house, he must be having second thoughts about leaving in the first place.

Following months of this frustrating routine, however, I realized I had to take more control of my life and quit responding only to his actions. I was losing weight. Because I did not want my friends to know what was happening, I was living in a self-imposed prison. And I was uninvolved in any outside activities, fearing that I would miss his visits.

I also knew I had to find some other Christians who were experiencing this same circumstance. I located a Christian support group for separated and divorced people that met weekly. What a godsend! I found myself living for Wednesdays, when the group met. By Friday I was counting the days until I could be with my new friends and feel their strength and encouragement.

I also decided to search for a professional counselor who was a Christian. God led me to a man who I knew was honoring God's

principles. I cannot express the appreciation I felt having him pray for me and my marriage in our sessions. He was patient with me as I worked through some of the legalistic issues I encountered trying to save my marriage.

An example of this would be when I read Malachi 2:16, where God says he hates divorce. That text is pretty clear. “I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel.” But as I really studied this portion of Scripture, I was reminded that God is the author of divorce as a form of grace to those inflicted by a hardened spouse or country. In the nineteenth chapter of Matthew, the Pharisees tried tripping up Jesus with their questions. They asked him in verse 7 why Moses commanded men who had removed their wives from their homes to write these women a certificate of divorce. In verse 8, Jesus answered, “Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives but from the beginning it has not been this way” (NASB).

This was a form of grace to women so that they could have a legal agreement setting them apart from their former spouses, giving them the opportunity of having a new life. Without this bill of divorce they were considered cast-off property. This wise counselor showed me how Satan wanted me to dwell on the statement that God hates divorce and not see the grace Jesus bestowed in the Gospel of Matthew. Satan had sold me a legalistic view of God, but the counselor reminded me that God is a God of new beginnings and *grace*. He encouraged me to live in the victory of my new understanding.

After several sessions with my counselor, I remember him asking me what my husband and I did together. I told him that we went to a movie occasionally, and attended church together on Sundays. I tried to think of other things we did together, but that was about it. This wonderfully wise man posed the question, “Is a one-hour marriage good enough for you?” It was as if a light went on. No, it was not good enough. I decided then that I would let God work and let him activate change in my life—and in David’s life, if that is what he wanted to do. And I decided I would not dishonor God anymore by accepting this sham of a marriage.

I continued allowing David to come to the house, but I started a life of my own. I took some golf lessons. I continued going to the support group. I attended the socials within the group and even hosted many of them. I made sure I was not in any kind of a one-on-one situation with any men, but I quit living in isolation and responding to my husband's design for his future. I was not able to serve my Lord as long as I kept myself in a state of depression and fear, and I was not honoring my husband by enabling his behavior.

As time went by I learned much about myself and about God's truths. I became stronger. I watched my new friends grow stronger. As they matured spiritually, I observed them extending more and more unconditional love and grace toward their ex-spouses. I wanted to do the same, and I was determined to hold on to the promise of Romans 8:28: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God" (NCV).

One Saturday afternoon my husband came to the house and said that he was not sure what he wanted. He suggested we just put this experience behind us and that he move back home. He said we should forget that the whole separation ever happened. Part of me wanted to leap into his arms. But over the past year I had studied hard, consulted with my counselor and friends, and taken a lot of time asking God to reveal my shortcomings. And I had asked the Lord to change me.

I felt it only reasonable to ask my husband what changes he had made that would make this marriage any different. What had he done to help him understand the emptiness he felt? Was he willing to put the Lord at the center of our marriage? David said that he wanted our marriage to merely return to how it was before the separation. He did not want to discuss anything that had occurred within him over the past several months, nor did he see any reason to change.

I spiritually reached up to God and internally recited 2 Timothy 1:7, applying the words to myself: "For God hath not given me the Spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (Sco). Then

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I told my husband that this marriage had not been a marriage for twenty-five years. It was, at best, a partnership. I also told him that if he had not found any need to change, then we could expect to be right back in this same place within a year.

I could not go back to the horrible pain of a year ago without changes in our relationship. I still hurt more than I could explain, but from all I had experienced and learned from my counselor and new friends, and from my study of God's Word, I had some hope for my future. I now understood that there could be a life without David if need be. My husband left that night enraged.

God knew I was willing to go on my own divorce journey and that I did not want him to spare me anything I needed to learn in order to use this journey both as healing for myself and as ministry for him. If I was to thank God in all things, then I must be willing to praise him in the pain that promised to produce the growth I knew would follow.

Perhaps you are reading these words because you are also on a journey or about to embark on one. It is possible that the journey is not yours but rather someone's in your life you love and need to understand. Either way, I invite you to go on this journey of divorce with me. I must say that at times I wished I did not have to make this trip, but I cannot say that today. While I so wish my extended family, friends, and most of all my sons could have been spared the pain we all experienced, I would not want to have missed the lessons, the growth, and the blessings that resulted in facing the journey and all it entailed.

The divorce experience was the perfect time for me to truly understand that God wants to be in charge of my life. Furthermore, he promises that all things will be resolved if we trust him. Isaiah 55:8-9 tells us: "My thoughts are not like your thoughts. Your ways are not like my ways. Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts" (NCV). It really is a matter of perspective. It is like this little story:

God's Embroidery

When I was a little child, my mother used to embroider a great deal. I would sit at her knee and look up from the floor and ask what she was doing. She informed me that she was embroidering. I told her that it looked like a mess from where I was. As from the underside I watched her work within the boundaries of the little round hoop that she held in her hand, I complained to her that it sure looked messy from where I sat.

She would smile at me, look down and gently say, “My daughter, you go about your playing for awhile, and when I am finished with my embroidering, I will put you on my knee and let you see it from my side.”

I would wonder why she was using some dark threads along with the bright ones and why they seemed so jumbled from my view. A few minutes would pass and then I would hear Mother's voice say, “Daughter, come and sit on my knee.” This I did only to be surprised and thrilled to see a beautiful flower or a sunset. I could not believe it, because from underneath it looked so messy.

Then Mother would say to me, “My daughter, from underneath it did look messy and jumbled, but you did not realize that there was a pre-drawn plan on the top. It was a design. I was only following it. Now look at it from my side and you will see what I was doing.”

Many times through the years I have looked up to my Heavenly Father and said, “Father, what are You doing?” He has answered, “I am embroidering your life.” I say, “But it looks like a mess to me. It seems so jumbled. The threads seem so dark. Why can't they all be bright?” The Father seems to tell me, “My child, you go about your business of doing My business, and one day I will bring you to Heaven and put you on My knee and you will see the plan from My side.”

—Author Unknown²

There will be times on this journey when you will ask, “Lord, what are you doing?” I know I certainly did. Remember that he sees your life—and mine—from his perspective. He has a plan for each one of us and he will work all those threads of our messy and

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jumbled lives together into a lovely picture. One day we will see it from his side, and it will be good.

Personal Reflection

What is your story? What do you see as the main issues impacting you and your spouse's relationship? Write these down for future reference.