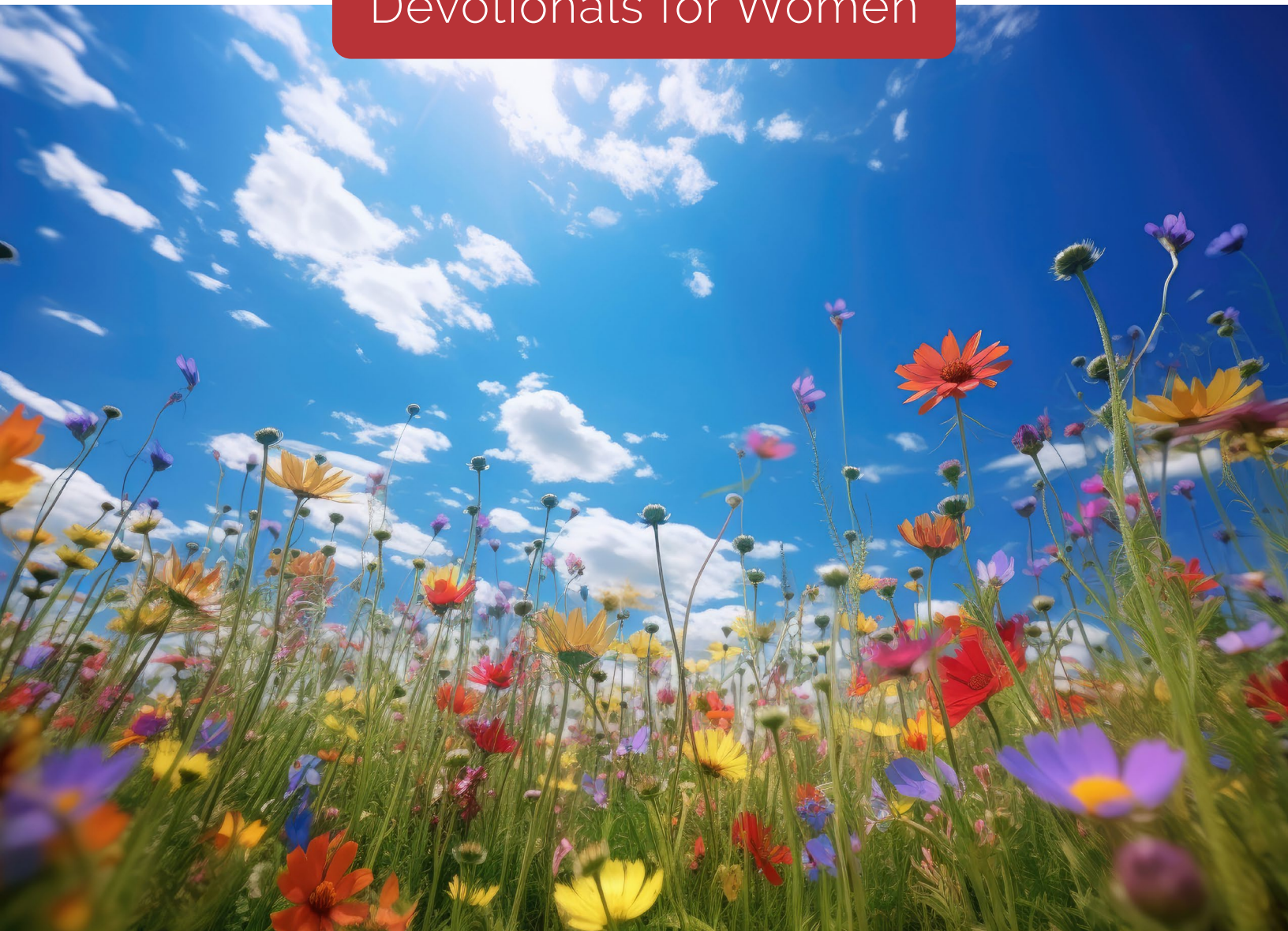


Never Abandoned

GOD SEES YOU, KNOWS YOU,
LOVES YOU, AND WILL SAVE YOU.

Devotionals for Women



WRITTEN BY

Echo Macdonald

Louise Macilvane

Michele Francesca Cohen

AUDIO VERSION

You may listen to the free audio recording of the devotional at the following links.

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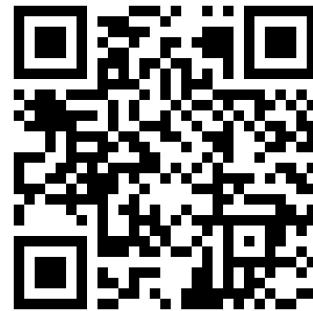
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INTRODUCTION

The biblical meaning of “widow” is one who is bereft and/or stripped of supportive income or family—one who has lost a spouse or one who has been abandoned by their spouse in divorce.

Such a sense of abandonment can cripple the heart and make daily life seem impossible to face. It can cause one to feel that they're drowning, unseen, swallowed up in a sea of fear and despair.

Awareness that we are never abandoned by the Lord is the life-saver that strengthens us in seasons of deep grief. These devotional writings, written by women who have survived such turbulent waters, will inspire all those who are making their way to new shores of hope.

May you be comforted by these stories of the faithfulness of God. And may you be encouraged, knowing God will never leave you nor forsake you. He sees you, knows you, loves you, and will save you.



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1: Fear Not

The searing pain of my new reality hit me like the blow of a knife as I awoke the morning after the call. My husband of 38 years had texted me the previous evening on his way back from a conference. "I am not coming home; we are done," he said.

"How could this be?" I thought. "What on earth is he thinking? How could he do this to me?" My son had died less than two months before this. Grief upon grief. Where was God in all of this?

Life is complicated. When things get tough, we don't always act in ways that bring glory to God. We sin, we fail, we hurt, we cry. Hagar knew the sting of abandonment. Tossed out of the fold of Abraham's family with her young son, Ishmael, she stumbled in the desert of Beersheba with few supplies and no compass. She had willingly become the surrogate bearer of Abraham's seed. But now she was abandoned and left to die in the wilderness. It was a cruel divorce inflicted by a once inviting and desperate Sarah.

Then a voice called to her, "'What is wrong, Hagar? Do not be afraid, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he lies. Get up, lift up the boy, and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.' Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water" (Genesis 21:17-19). Hagar named the LORD who had spoken to her "You are the God who sees me" (Genesis 16:13).

No matter how severe our pain or how deep our abandonment, God sees us. He knows us and loves us through it all. We are living out the tailor-made details of His salvation journey for us as He walks beside us. He has known severe hurt and abandonment with only His Father to comfort. He lifts us up and opens our eyes to His loving heart, a wellspring of Living Water. And so, He has promised, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).

Abba, Father, thank You for seeing me and loving me as I walk this rugged road. Amen.

—Echo Macdonald

Scripture

[Genesis 16:13](#)

[Genesis 21:17-19](#)

[Isaiah 41:10](#)

2: Hold On

When you find yourself suddenly abandoned by your spouse, fears, worries, questions, and unknowns begin to dominate every thought. This abandonment is a tragedy of great magnitude. It's a grieving of a deep, often unforeseen, loss. As a woman of faith, I could not fathom why God had allowed this to happen in my life. I felt it was undeserved, unfair, and horrific. At the time, I believed God abandoned me as well. I could not pray, and I could not focus. Words of comfort, lines of scripture, and acts of kindness were only temporarily helpful. No amount of reassurance, prayer, or support could set me on a course of confidence and peace.

It was a time of darkness, aloneness, and grief. It was a pain so hard to bear, I believed it would kill me. It felt like the valley of the shadow of death. But as difficult and deep as that valley was, eventually a time came when one day was brighter than the day before. Small changes came, then, bigger changes. With a resilience I scarcely knew I had, I made significant decisions. Shifts began to happen. I grew in ways I never knew I would, and there was a perseverance on my part to get there. I'm here to tell you, my life has been restored into a new and beautiful life that looks different from my old one, and it's better in ways I could never have imagined!

Now, what I must tell you, you may not want to hear; you may not yet be able to hear, but it is this: For a time, you will feel alone. You will feel as though life will never get better. You will feel as though no one understands, nothing helps, and no one knows. But I encourage you to hold on to a different possibility, and remember what God says in Joel 2:25-26 (ESV): "I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten... You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you."

It's important that you hold on. Just hold on.

Lord, help me remember, without faith it is impossible to please You, because anyone who comes to You must believe that You exist. You reward those who earnestly seek You. Amen.

—Louise Macilvane

Scripture

[Joel 2:25-26](#)

[Hebrews 11:6](#)

3: Uncovered and Vulnerable

I had the privilege of growing up on the New England coast. One of my family's favorite summer outings was a day at the beach playing in the ocean and basking in the sun on the soft, warm sand. In the evening we would eat at one of the large shore dining halls. I remember with fondness feasting on clam cakes, clam chowder, corn on the cob, and very rarely, a lobster. Interesting fellow that ugly crustacean with its huge claw! When its shell gets too tight, the lobster crawls under a rock and slowly squirms its way out of it. Then it scurries and hides, naked and vulnerable, burying itself in the sand to avoid becoming dinner for another sea creature. The lobster's new shell takes a long time to form, which leaves it fearfully hiding under uncertain and temporary protection.

After my divorce, I felt like that naked lobster—afraid, panicky, unsure of my future, fearful of a thousand predators. Rejection and abandonment wreak havoc on one's psyche, creating traumatic soul-wounds that persist and fester. Like a lobster fearing subterranean sea waves that could unpredictably expose its naked flesh, I would experience waves of panic every time I drove past the courthouse where the divorce was finalized. My stomach would turn into knots as I remembered each traumatic experience before the judge who finally pronounced the end to our 38-year marriage. Exposed and quivering at the realization that my old life had been ripped away like the abandoned lobster shell, I would ask myself, "Will I ever feel safe in this world again?"

Hebrews 4:13 says, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." God sees my nakedness and vulnerability. He is my loving Heavenly Father—and my Husband. He will protect me. He promises, "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:19). And He encourages me: "Put off your old self" and "put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22, 24).

Lord, hold me gently in my uncovered state and painful vulnerability. Teach me to draw my strength and protection from You as I await the unfolding of the new life You are creating for me! Amen.

—Echo Macdonald

Scripture

[Hebrews 4:13](#)

[Isaiah 43:19](#)

[Ephesians 4:22-24](#)

4: Wilderness Wanderings

It was a beautiful day for an early morning hike. With a trail guide in hand, I eagerly explored a thirty-minute forest trail in the North Carolina mountains. The trees displayed an extravagant blush of new life. After forty-five minutes of drinking in the scenery, I began to realize that I'd somehow taken a wrong turn. I had no idea where I was. I began to panic, but then, I prayed. As I listened, I could hear distant sounds of traffic. I walked to a road and flagged down a female driver who happened to be traveling to where I needed to be. I was lost, but I was found.

Walking the unfamiliar road of life as a newly divorced person, I often felt like I was lost, wandering in a wilderness of grief. I wondered, "Where do I go next? What should I be doing now? How will I find my way?" In many ways, I am still wandering, seeking the path God wants me on. Grief takes time to find its resting place. New identities take time to forge.

Joseph must have felt that way searching for his wayward brothers in the wilderness of Shechem. Little did he know what awaited him. At the hands of his jealous and vengeful brothers, he was soon to become an Egyptian slave. His years as a slave humbled his heart, but they readied him to fulfill the prophetic role that his youthful dreams had foretold—as the prime minister of Egypt. It took 40 years of wandering in the Sinai desert for Joseph's descendants to enter the Promised Land and to be cleansed of the slavery of Egypt and its idolatry.

Jesus, too, spent time in the wilderness—40 long days of fasting and praying before He began His earthly ministry. He was tempted by Satan in His weakest moment, but He knew who He was and where He was going. He passed the test, spurned Satan, and was ministered to by an angelic host. He may have wandered, but He was never lost.

God brings us into wilderness wanderings. It seems they are to point us toward new paths, new identities, forged by His hand alone.

Lord, help me to honor Your process of cleansing and transformation as You guide my steps towards humility and perseverance. I may have been lost, but now, in You, I am found. Amen.

—Echo Macdonald

Scripture

[Psalm 107: 4-6](#)

5: All Things New

I was walking on a trail at the nature center near my home when a revelation dawned. "You do a thing because you've done a thing," the Lord whispered to my heart. "So, for a while, do nothing, so that the momentum of the old thing has a chance to cease. Then you will be ready for a new thing." Immediately, I remembered Isaiah 43:18-19 (ESV). "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

When a life-change occurs, especially one rooted in abandonment, betrayal, or rejection, it can take a while for cycles of thought and behavior connected to that event (and the history preceding it) to dissipate. We can find ourselves navigating situations and relationships connected to our former experiences in ways that are reactionary. We can find ourselves operating on "high alert," cycling in modes of survival and self-protection. This can prevent us from stepping into new territory and gleaned the benefits of the new things that are at hand.

God's exhortation to simplify my life was welcomed, and I took action to see it become so. I detached from people who were not to be part of my new life going forward. I stopped attending events that allowed voyeurs and gossips to cast speculations about my story. Most of all, I allowed mindsets that had initially entrapped me in an unhealthy situation to be recognized, dismantled, and replaced. It was up to me to initiate my life's reset. No one was going to do it for me. But my strength to do this came from the Lord.

The God who was, who is, and who is to come, can make everything new in every "now" moment. The mystery made known to us, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27), is continually happening whenever we allow it.

Lord, help me remember that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). May I experience this renewal day by day. Amen.

—Michele Francesca Cohen

Scripture

[Isaiah 43:18-19](#)

[Colossians 1:27](#)

[2 Corinthians 5:17](#)

6: Who Can I Trust?

It takes courage to open your heart to another in love. A lifetime of romantic ideals and dreams woven into a marriage vow before God can be easily demolished by divorce. The heart, once tender and open to love, can become tattered through trauma and fearful of trusting again.

Trust is a fundamental aspect of all relationships. It's the first and most foundational question a baby asks of its caregiver. "Can I trust you to love me and keep me safe?" If the answer is no, the child develops what psychologists call an "attachment disorder." The impact of that discovery during the first three years of life frames the child's ability to form healthy relationships with others throughout life. No parent is perfect, and consequently, many of us have attachment disorders. We struggle to trust and successfully achieve intimacy in relationships.

Dallas Willard claimed that we all have attachment disorders in our relationship with God this side of the fall. We struggle to fully trust God to love us and to keep us safe. Willard believed that Jesus's divine love heals all human attachment disorders. Peter faced a trust dilemma when Jesus invited him to walk on the water during a storm on the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:22-33). Peter stepped out of the boat and eagerly walked several paces. Then he looked at the turbulent waves and began to sink. He chose to fix his eyes on the wind and the waves instead of fixing them on Jesus. He had seen Jesus perform many miracles, but at that moment, Peter failed to look beyond his own resources. He forgot who Jesus was.

Do I trust Jesus to love and care for me? Am I safe in His arms, within His watch-care, living inside His plans for my life? My answer will rest largely on whether I choose to measure my life on my circumstances or on the divine attributes and power of God.

Dear Jesus, thank You that my attachment to You is secure and eternal. Help me to take my eyes off myself, off the things I cannot change, and my flimsy resources. Help me to fix my eyes on You, the God of all heaven and earth, who loves me. Help me to remember what You have done for me in the past and to trust You completely as You walk beside me. Amen.

—Echo Macdonald

Scripture

[Matthew 14:22-33](#)

[Matthew 28:18](#)

1: The Guiding Hand

Sometimes we are brought to the valley of the shadow of death, and we get stuck there for a long time. In my own marriage abandonment experience, I was in that valley for so many years, I could barely remember how or when I arrived. I was suffering but unaware, comfortably numb. God used the actual abandonment to propel me out, whether I liked it or not.

One day, the numbness lifted a little, and then a little more. I began to see my reality. I was raw with new awareness, and I created this poem to describe some of my journey.

The Hand

One day, someone loved me and cared for me in a way I'd never known,

That unconditional outpouring pierced me, and I started to feel again.

Soon after, an invisible Hand unexpectedly grasped mine and tugged at me.

At first, it pulled me gently, and then its tug became more frequent, more urgent.

My soul resisted in its comfortable numbness as the Hand dragged me along.

I realized disbelievingly; I was being taken to the shadowed valley!

I screamed, "No! Please, no! Engulfing, evil shadows await me there.

A darkness that will weaken, pummel, and devour me.

Do. Not. Make. Me. Go." I pleaded.

Yet the pulling Hand forced me onward, directing the path.

Soon I began to experience the rugged, difficult terrain of the valley floor.

I felt the cold, painful darkness of its basin deep within my being.

Many times, I stumbled and fell upon my face. The Hand gripped tighter.

We passed through terrifying, long shadows of despair.

Together we wrestled the demons inhabiting each murky fracture.

Those battles altered me beyond reason, nearly killed me.

Yet, my eyes, my body, my soul finally saw and fought each one.

At long last, we crossed the bridge over troubled waters,

Below, the dark, turbulent water sped and churned, yet no evil did I fear.

Lovingly, knowingly, the Hand slowly turned me around.

As I set my eyes upon The Valley of the Shadow of Death,

I recognized tearfully, the Hand had been pulling me out, not in.

Lord, I thank you that "in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37-39, NASB). Amen!

—Louise Macilvane

Scripture

[Romans 8:37-39](#)

2: Protector and Provider

I responded nervously to my counselor's suggestion. "He's hurt me in unthinkable ways for years," I said. "But I don't think he would ever do that." Sadly, I was soon to discover that "that" was exactly what my (former) spouse had already done.

A week later, I sat down with my banker to get a better understanding of my financial situation (just as my counselor had strongly advised). I had always trusted my husband to handle our finances. It was something he'd insisted on doing for more than twenty years. I inquired as to the amounts in our joint accounts. I knew the figures would be high; we were both strong earners and diligent savers. But the banker showed me figures that were extremely low. I could feel anxiety welling up within me. "That's not possible," I said. "Could you please check again."

Through further investigation, it became evident that my husband had, for many months, been siphoning our savings over to his new personal account as well as depositing his paychecks into his new personal checking. I now had access to only a few dollars of all that we'd both formerly earned and accrued. Later that day, when I summoned the courage to confront my husband, he raged angrily. The betrayal, abandonment, and abuse I'd experienced for decades was now extended to every area of my existence.

I had trusted my husband to protect me and provide, but repeatedly this trust was betrayed throughout our marriage. After our divorce, it took several years to heal from debilitating fears that financial rugs would be pulled out from under my feet. I had to repeatedly remind myself of Philippians 4:19: "And my God will meet all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." I had to make a conscious choice to trust the omniscient God to be my protector and provider.

God, You see what I experience. You are aware of all my fears. You comfort me when I'm frightened and when trauma feels relived. You are my protector and my strong fortress. You are my protection. With You, I am safe. Amen.

—Michele Francesca Cohen

Scripture

[Philippians 4:19](#)

[Psalm 18:2](#)

3: God Knows Our Needs

When my children were infants, I could distinguish their individual cries, even if we weren't in the same room. Though they weren't yet able to express themselves with words, I frequently knew what they needed. I could tell when they were hungry, thirsty, or uncomfortable. I could tell when they felt bullied, frustrated, or tired. Typically, I was able to arrive on the scene before their crying turned into inconsolable wailing.

Our heavenly Father knows the unique sounds of our cries and the longings beneath our heartfelt prayers. When teaching His disciples how to pray, Jesus said, "... Don't babble like the idolaters, since they imagine they'll be heard for their many words... your Father knows the things you need before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:7-8).

There have been many challenging seasons in my life when I've cried out to the Lord with pleas and supplications. In the same way my children received aid from me when they didn't have the ability to help themselves, my faithful heavenly Father answered my prayers by sending support, information, or practical help just when I needed it, and before my cries turned into inconsolable wailing!

Typically, when my young children cried, there was a specific reason. But there were also times when they seemed irrationally distressed, and it took a while to figure out why they were crying. This is something I can relate to as an adult, because I don't always know what I need or why I feel upset! Romans 8:26-27 (CEV) speaks to this dilemma saying, "In certain ways we are weak, but the Spirit is here to help us. For example, when we don't know what to pray for, the Spirit prays for us in ways that cannot be put into words. All of our thoughts are known to God. He can understand what is in the mind of the Spirit, as the Spirit prays for God's people."

Heavenly Father, when I pray, I will go into my inner room and pray to You who is unseen. You know what I need before I ask You. You understand and respond to every inflection, vibration, and sound of my heart. When I don't know what I need or how to obtain it, You know. And I trust You will always provide. Amen.

—Michele Francesca Cohen

Scripture

[Matthew 6:6-8](#)

[Romans 8:26-27](#)

4: Appointed

The morning after my divorce was final, I woke up with a pit in my stomach. I had prayed for a turn-around until the very last day, but the "necessary ending" (to use a phrase of Dr. Henry Cloud's) had arrived, whether I liked it or not. Leading up to that moment, I had often wondered what my life might look like going forward. I had been a dedicated minister throughout my marriage. I truly wanted to continue this path, but wondered if I would still be welcomed as a speaker or an evangelist? I wondered if making a choice to escape abuse would cause me to be discarded by the church and benched because of my new and unwanted status?

I'm happy to report, God did not spare a moment before letting me know His thoughts on the matter. As my eyes opened that first day as a divorcee, I heard the familiar whisper of the Holy Spirit speaking Jeremiah 1:5 (NIV) into my heart. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

These powerful words not only settled my soul, but they ignited me with fresh vision for the future. The Lord was letting me know that I wasn't in ministry just because I had married a minister. I was (and still am) a minister for the Lord because He formed me and set me apart to be this, even before I was born. My divorce has nothing to do with my calling. "Press on, child of Mine," I heard Spirit whisper. "Be diligent to fulfill your appointment." "Take heed to the ministry that you have received in the LORD, that you may fulfill it" (Colossians 4:17, BSB).

The impact of this truth strengthened me during a season of recovery. It held me together with purpose and reason at a time when my life felt smashed into a million pieces. I hope you will receive this truth regarding irrevocable appointment for yourself also. Before you were formed in the womb, God knew you. He set you apart and appointed you. Whatever your purpose or calling is, don't allow anything to keep you from it. Your purpose is your path, and it can be your sunrise after the dark night of your soul.

Lord, You knew me, even before I was born. You set me apart and appointed me! Through this awareness, my confidence is strengthened. I will be strong and courageous! Amen.

—Michele Francesca Cohen

Scripture

[Jeremiah 1:5](#)

[Colossians 4:17](#)

5: Story Keeper

Relationship closure is a deeply personal journey that can feel dark and painfully lonely. The story that leads to the end of a marriage is known only by God and the people who walk it out. In the final months or years of their togetherness, a couple's communication and decisions can become weighted with heaviness. There's an awareness that every word being spoken, and every step being taken, is profoundly influencing the future.

No one is exempt from their life being public to some degree. People watch us from a distance, forming their ideas about us as our life stories unfold. They hear bits and pieces of news and developments, but they don't know the reality of what has transpired or what is still transpiring. And the truth is, they never will.

People will never know your whole story. Making peace with this is important. Realizing also that the Lord knows your story, and every detail of it, can offer much-needed comfort during uncertain times when you feel estranged from hopes that once held you.

Knowing that God understands the intricacies and complexities of your life can light a candle of companionship in the cavern of your soul. Knowing the God who knows your full story offers even more: an invisible hand of providential care that can guide you through labyrinths of emotion and choice. Christ within you knows everything about you. And there's no condemnation for those who are in Him.

The people around you see you from the outside. They can never fully understand your inner world and path. It's helpful to remember that it's not your full-time job to make sure they do. Your responsibility is simply to walk uprightly before the Lord and allow Him to be the guardian of your story. It is He who will bring forth your righteousness like the dawn and your justice like the noonday.

Lord, Your Word reminds me to not fret or be envious of those who do wrong. You encourage me to trust in You and do good, to dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. I will take delight in You, and You will give me the desires of my heart. Your vindication is like the noonday sun. You will make my righteousness shine like the dawn. Amen.

—Michele Francesca Cohen

Scripture

[Romans 8:1](#)

[Psalm 37:1-6](#)

6: Rebuilt

Some years ago, I experienced a 5.7 magnitude earthquake in southern California. At 5:17am, I was shaken from sleep by gut-churning rumbles emanating from the earth. The steady ground I was accustomed to standing on suddenly became untrustworthy beneath my feet. I stumbled to the crib of my firstborn son. I was anxious to hold him and protect him from harm.

Under the frame of the bedroom door, I watched our apartment tilt and sway while I cradled my precious bundle in my arms. The chandelier swung, the bookshelves toppled, cans and jars fell off the pantry shelves. I held my breath for what seemed like an hour, all the while bracing myself as the foundation of the building rippled and rolled underfoot. When the earthquake was over and the damage was assessed, it became clear that many buildings would have to be torn down and rebuilt. A patch up job was not going to cut it to restore the region to its potential splendor.

It took time to process the internal stress that was generated by the event. The aftershocks and tremors seemed as unnerving as the earthquake itself. The ending of a marriage is like an emotional earthquake. And the aftershocks that come with loss or divorce can trigger trauma for years to come. It can take a long time to clear the rubble of a former life so that a new foundation and house can be built. When my world felt like it had collapsed and my existence felt like ground zero, God reassured me with these words from Jeremiah 31:4, NKJV: "Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt." He also reassured me that He wouldn't do a patch up job!

I'm grateful to tell you, the Lord has been faithful to keep that promise. Nothing was rushed. He was aware of my fragile state. Hurrying the process would have been too much for my nervous system. It took time to walk through the rubble of my life and retrieve my sense of personhood and purpose. It took time to shake off ashes of bereavement and allow that which is unshakable to beautifully shine.

Lord, at times I feel shaken to the core. But I'm comforted knowing that You will rebuild me. You will establish me on a firm foundation. And "the glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former" (Haggai 2:9, NKJV). Amen!

—Michele Francesca Cohen

Scripture

[Jeremiah 31:4](#)

[Haggai 2:9](#)

1: Who Am I Now?

I experienced many restless nights during the divorce process. Too many bills to pay, papers to fill out, and court dates, with a house to clean out and daily discoveries of memberships cancelled, support services withdrawn, and bank accounts closed.

Amid this chaos, my lawyer asked me if I wanted to change my name. The impact of that identity shift floored me. For forty years, my life and my identity had been aligned with my husband. Who am I now? The person who chose me as his own had rejected me. I felt empty, nameless, and unwanted. I struggled to trust that God still loved me even though He allowed this horrible mess to happen.

I'm reminded of Jacob as he fled Laban to return to Canaan, the territory of his estranged brother, Esau. In Genesis 32, Esau is approaching Jacob with an army of 400 men. After fearfully sending his wives, children, and possessions ahead of him, Jacob spends the night in the desert wrestling with an unknown man. At daybreak, the man tells Jacob to let him go. Jacob replies, "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (verse 26). Then Jacob is told that he would be given a new name, "Israel," "because you have struggled with God and with men, and you have prevailed" (verse 27). So Jacob recognizes the man to be an angel of the Lord, or God Himself. Then God touches Jacob's hip, putting it out of joint. This wound becomes a permanent reminder to Jacob of his past struggles.

If you have wrestled with God and man through your divorce, you will be given a new name as well. You will not be known as "the deceived one" or "the rejected." You are the daughter of the King, the apple of God's eye. The Lord is your new Husband, your Provider, your Comforter. He will never leave you nor reject you. He has given you a new name and a new purpose: to "live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Ephesians 4:1). We can share our transformation stories with our broken world, living for the glory of the One whose image and name we now bear.

Lord, help me to embrace with humility and grace the new name and identity You have prepared for me as You walk behind me and before me. Amen.

—Echo Macdonald

Scripture

[Genesis 32:22-32](#)

[Ephesians 4:1-3](#)

2: The Shape of Things to Come

I have lived in many residences over my lifetime. By the 25th move (of 35), I'd become so adept at setting up new spaces, I began offering moving services to others in my location. During my marriage of 25 years, I think I subconsciously hoped that each address change would open the gate for relational renovation. There was something about each new empty space that offered possibility for hope and healing.

When my marriage came to an end and our belongings were split, it wasn't just my residence that felt empty and void. My heart, my world, and my future felt like a vacuum with my sense of security sucked right out of it. I found myself questioning everything—my faith, my beliefs, my history, and my choices. Nothing seemed to make sense anymore. The way forward was unclear.

A few years later, while I was still trying to rearrange the "furniture" of my life, my eyes were opened to the beauty of "the void" and the potential that this emptiness held as I trusted God to make "everything beautiful in its time." (Ecclesiastes 3:11, ESV.) I wrote these words as a reminder of this potential and 'The Shape of Things to Come.'

If a vacuum lies before you
of word, and time, and knowing,
boldly enter it, learn to sup with it,
daring patiently to only breathe.

Here within this crucible,
darkness will be your teacher,
blindness will be your lighthouse,
and candor will be your food.

In the scarcity of conversation,
silence will sing you love songs.
Solitude will align you
with long-awaited paths.

In the anguish of ambiguity,
emptiness will give you substance.
Simplicity will carve within you
the shape of things to come.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13, NIV). May grace be yours to allow darkness to be your teacher, blindness to be your lighthouse, and candor to be your food. In the scarcity of conversation, may silence sing you love songs, and may solitude align you with long-awaited paths.

I thank You, Lord, for creating new things out of nothing. Amen.

—Michele Francesca Cohen

Scripture

[Ecclesiastes 3:11](#)

[Romans 15:13](#)

[Romans 4:17](#)

3: The Shame-Killing Love of Jesus

I hate being divorced. Before my marriage were mutual promises that divorce would never be part of our legacy. Now I feel like a big "D" has been sewn onto my chest; the shame of my failed marriage weighs me down. I'm now part of The Dispossessed in the church. It seems no one knows what to do with us or how to help us. Often, we are ignored. In a sense, we are marriage-widows. If our husbands had died, our church and community would have reached out to us with open arms. We'd be connected to essential resources. But no. We not only live with rejection from our husbands but also often from our churches and communities.

Thankfully, we do not live with rejection from God. "I will never, never fail you nor forsake you," says Hebrews 13:5 in The Living Bible. God sees all. He saw the eager heart of Mary after Gabriel's visit and unexpected announcement. As time passed, the implications of her pregnancy brought public shame, causing Joseph to consider privately divorcing her. Then God intervened with an angelic dream and inspired Joseph to accept His miracle and the weight of social disdain. God redeemed their shame with the birth of Jesus, the Messiah.

Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, was improperly taken by David. Essentially, she was raped and impregnated. David's lustful act cost Bathsheba her reputation, her husband, and her baby. The long-term consequences for David were devastating: civil war within his family and his kingdom, the loss of two sons, and the deaths of many in battle. Through Nathan the prophet, David was confronted with his sins, and he repented and found God's forgiveness. David and Bathsheba's son Solomon became the next king, the progenitor of Jesus.

Our God is a shame-killing God. Jesus experienced the naked shame of death on a cross for you and me. His love turns the smoldering ashes of our sin-damaged lives into creations of beauty. He did this for Mary and Joseph. He did this for Bathsheba and David. And He does this for you and for me. His love, mercy, and grace covers the worst of our sins.

Dear Jesus, thank You for Your consuming, purifying, rebuilding, redeeming love. Help me to open my arms to embrace my own brokenness and the broken ones around me. Help me to invite them into Your loving presence. Amen.

—Echo Macdonald

Scripture

[Isaiah 54:4-5](#)

[Hebrews 13:5](#)

4: Broken Vessel

I have shed more tears following my divorce than at any other time in my life. God promises in His Word that He loves us and has every hair on our head numbered (Luke 12:7). He promises that He sees every tear we shed (Psalm 56:8). He keeps track of all our sorrows and collects all our tears. If Jesus collects my tears in a bottle, it must have overflowed by now. Yet Revelation 21:4 assures us that someday in heaven, "He will wipe every tear" and "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain."

I am reminded that a tear comes in response to a sense of loss—dashed hopes and dreams, loneliness, regret, sadness, the loss of relationship, love that seems lost. But I know that Jesus is not just a loving God. He is love. And since we are His children, the fruit of His creative power, we are His beloved.

If we have received love, we never lose that love. It happened. It is pasted into the scrapbook of our life's story. It's an eternal memory. We can revisit it forever. So, every tear is a representation of love received, love lost, love eternally present in our history, love woven into the fabric of our life's tapestry.

There's a story of a Chinese servant who would carry two jars on a pole as he walked down a long, winding path to the river each day to collect water. One of the jars was new; the other was old and would leak water along the path on his return trip. His master noticed this and chided him for his foolishness in carrying a broken vessel. "But sir," he said, "have you not admired the lovely flowers growing on one side of the path? They have been watered by the broken vessel." As Psalm 126:5-6 states, "Those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy. He who goes out weeping, bearing a trail of seed, will surely return with shouts of joy, carrying sheaves of grain."

O, Lord of Eternal Love, so fill my heart with Your Love that joy spills forth from this broken vessel and nourishes the hurting souls who walk this path of life beside me. Help me to celebrate the tears You lovingly wipe away, being thankful for the gift of life and love received. Amen.

—Echo Macdonald

Scripture

[Psalm 56:8](#)

[Psalm 126:5-6](#)

[Luke 12:6-7](#)

[Revelation 21:4](#)

5: Forerunner

A few years ago, while walking in a local park, I noticed a little sparrow on the branch of a young tree that was planted alongside the path. This little feathered friend seemed to carry a special presence, as though it had a message to convey. After our introduction, I continued my walk and noticed the bird fly off to the next tree along the path. When I reached that tree, the sparrow flew to the next. When I reached that tree, it flew to the next. This went on the entire way around the park, about fifteen trees altogether! Each time the sparrow landed, it waited for me to catch up, as though it was reminding me what it means to be a faithful forerunner.

I believe the message in our interaction was this: No matter how small and insignificant you might feel, you can be a forerunner to someone. Though your "wingspan" might be limited, if you can fly to any degree, you can show someone else the path of Life. Simply follow Divine guidance and allow others an opportunity to benefit from your example and the lessons you've learned.

That day, the sense of humiliation I'd carried for years at losing my former status and influence as a married woman was exchanged for an awareness of the numerous ways that I was still inspiring others as a "little-winged" forerunner. I understood that it was not my status or the size of my influence that mattered to the Lord, but how faithful I was with what was in my hand.

Truly, we all are a forerunner to someone – maybe a child, a co-worker, a friend, or a family member, maybe a woman going through similar agonies to the ones we ourselves have suffered. In a world where tribulation is assured, encouragement is a fine thing. No matter what ails us, may we be a blessing to others and press on to hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:23, NKJV).

I praise You, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. Amen.

—Michele Francesca Cohen

Scripture

[Matthew 25:23](#)

[2 Corinthians 1:3-4](#)

6: The Alabaster Jar

The jar was heavy, ornate. Mary broke the seal on the jar and poured its fragrant contents on Jesus's head and feet. It spilled onto His clothing, His arms, His hands. It filled the air of the room with the fragrance of a kingly anointing. The alabaster jar, now broken like her life and heart healed by love, became a vessel of honor, blessing Jesus and everyone there.

"What a terrible waste!" some taunted. Jesus pierced their condemnation with these words: "Wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her" (Matthew 26:13).

The fragrant oil covered Jesus from head to toe. It went with Him to the Last Supper, Herod's Palace, the cross, and the tomb. Gracing her hair, her hands, her clothing, it went with Mary to the cross and the garden encounter. She and her Master shared in the beauty, the fragrance, and the remembrance of that special moment.

Mary's extravagant gift calls us to do the same. Is Jesus not worth our everything? Have we not been healed by His love, made fragrant and whole in preparation for heaven?

I sometimes feel like Mary, the out-of-place guest. As a divorcée, holidays are the hardest. Banished from one half of my family, with no nearby relatives, I've had to recreate "family" through church and community friends. Folks don't routinely think to invite the divorced woman to social gatherings. It's too uncomfortable. So, the impetus, preparation, and production of celebrations becomes a solo job. It's been a humbling experience, helping me to see more clearly the needs of the lonely and the marginalized, both at church and within my community. There are so many hurting people in this world who need to be loved, and I am one of them, now broken and healing, sharing the comfort with which I've been comforted.

Lord Jesus, thank You that You valued me enough to become the Broken Vessel, with Your love and precious blood outpoured to cover my sins. Thank You for using me, while both broken and being made whole, to pour out Your extravagant love to others. May the sweet fragrance of Your presence fill my life and overflow to touch those I meet. Amen.

—Echo Macdonald

Scripture

[Matthew 26:1-13](#)

[John 12:1-3](#)

1: My Sacred Anchor

I've always been a bit afraid of water, especially the ocean with its powerful, sometimes turbulent waves. Having had a near-drowning experience as a young child, I developed a healthy respect for the water and a knowledge of good swimming techniques. But the fear of drowning, of losing my breath or being unable to "touch bottom," has never left me. Remembering that event can put my heart in panic mode even today.

That's the way I felt throughout my divorce process. I couldn't feel the bottom of my pain to know when the hurt would stop or when I'd be able to catch my breath. I'm still trying to catch my breath. It's like being in a boat without an anchor in the middle of a terrible storm and wondering how far from the shore you've drifted. You fear you may crash into jagged rocks or be engulfed by mammoth waves.

The disciples understood this fear one night on the Sea of Galilee. No doubt they were desperately trying to bail the water out of their fishing boat while Jesus slept peacefully in the stern. "Lord, save us! We are about to die!" they cried (Matthew 8:25). Jesus awoke and rebuked the waves, the water, and the disciples. "Oh, you of little faith!" He said. The storm and wind and fear disappeared. God was there in His power and glory. He became their Sacred Anchor in the storm.

Who or what or where is my anchor? Is my devastated heart the result of my making my husband my anchor, my security? Has my world fallen apart because he is no longer here, because he no longer loves me? Have I created an idol out of my marriage, out of my husband? Has Jesus brought me into this storm to win my heart back to full reliance on Him?

Oh, Jesus, please forgive me for the way I have drifted from Your holy presence. Please forgive me for allowing idols to take Your place. Please be my Sacred Anchor and help me to hold onto You and trust You to keep me steady in the storms of life. Amen.

—Echo Macdonald

Scripture

[Psalm 107:26-30](#)

[Matthew 8:23-27](#)

2: Eternal Canopy of Grace

Every traditional Jewish wedding ceremony takes place under a white linen canopy, a huppah. It's a symbolic representation of God's redeeming love and grace, as when a cloud rested upon Israel at Mount Sinai with the giving of the law to Moses. This was the "wedding ceremony" of a binding covenant between God and His people, Israel. Of all the nations from the seed of Adam and Noah, God chose to make a covenant with one: Israel, the offspring of Seth. However, due to their rebellion, the covenant was broken. But God forgave them and reinstated His love for His people, giving the law to Moses a second time. Still, the full marriage of God with His people will have to wait until heaven for its consummation, with the wedding feast of the Lamb of God.

Though my marriage vows did not take place under a huppah, the Lord's blessing was given by our pastor at a church on a warm, sweet August day. Yet like Israel who rebelled and fell into idolatry with a golden calf before Moses had descended the mountain—thus breaking their newly-formed covenant with God—my covenant also became broken by sin and idolatry. "All we like sheep have gone astray..." (Isaiah 53:6).

But God is a forgiving God. "His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23). We are broken, sinful creatures who need our Lord's gentle and compassionate hand to draw us back under His canopy of redeeming love and grace. God forgives the brokenness of our hearts and marriages because He loves us. And despite His forgiveness, like Israel, we will have to learn to live with the consequences of our choices. Thankfully, our God is the God of second chances. He loves to welcome us back to His family of believers. He invites us to the wedding feast of His Son.

And so, He continues to draw us to His side to rest under His canopy with these words: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!" (Isaiah 43:1).

Dear Father, thank You for Your forgiving, tender love for me. Help me to keep my heart pure for You and to look for ways to bless You with my obedience. Grow me into a bride fit for Your kingdom. Amen.

—Echo Macdonald

Scripture

[Isaiah 43:1](#)

[Isaiah 53:6](#)

[Lamentations 3:22-23](#)

3: New Eyes

During a time when my marital anguish was at a height, I was asked to accept a leading role in a high budget show. It was a grand production that required a grand investment of energy. Though I attempted to carry on as though everything was fine, my internal pain was reaching its pinnacle, and my body was feeling the strain in numerous ways.

In one of the rehearsals leading up to opening night, the stage was blacked out for our scene exit. In the darkness, I walked into a Christmas tree spoke which punctured a hole in the cornea of my eye. I visited an eye doctor immediately. As she examined my eye and diagnosed the injury, she commented that my eyes were scarred with numerous abrasions. I was shocked to hear that I might eventually lose my eyesight if the scarring continued or was not taken care of. Psalm 6:7 (ESV) came to mind. "My eye wastes away because of grief." I asked the eye doctor if crying daily for 24 years could cause that kind of scarring. "Yes, it can," she said seriously. "Sad tears contain chemicals that erode the eyes. If something is happening to you that makes you cry every day, please leave it immediately!"

Something woke up in me that day. The unfortunate accident that led to the examination helped me see that my body was suffering damage that was potentially irreparable. Though the divorce, a year later, was immensely stressful, I knew that exiting a toxic environment could give my body a chance to recover. I visited the same eye doctor a year later, and she reported that the abrasions were healing, simply because I was no longer crying sad tears every day.

One of the most challenging aspects of betrayal and abandonment is chronic illness born of stress—trauma held in the body. No question, the loss of a marriage is tragic beyond description. Yet, God wills that in all respects we prosper and be in good health even as our souls prosper. (3 John 1:2, NASB)

Lord, my vision became blurred because of grief; my eyes grew weak because of all my foes. But You heard my weeping and answered my prayer. Thank You for saving me from increasing ill health. Thank You giving me courage to follow Your guidance at all times. Amen.

—Michele Francesca Cohen

Scripture

[Psalm 6:7-9](#)

[3 John 1:2](#)

4: Providence and Purpose

No one enters a marriage thinking they will one day divorce. I know I didn't. Yet, there I was, facing the shattering of all I knew my life to be, not to mention my children's lives. The one person we trusted most, the man I assumed would remain through the good times and bad, the father of my children, was now with another woman. How could this be God's will? How could the dissolution of our marriage and the wreckage therein be okay with God? What had I done, or not done, to deserve this?

Guilt, shame, and failure were my constant companions during that season. Lying in bed at night, when the silence was deafening, I broke down into guttural sobbing that would continue for a solid year. There was so much to unravel, so much change to navigate for me and my kids. What would our future look like? How would I manage? Who would want me now? I knew no one whose husband had abandoned them, much less anyone who was divorced. I felt purely alone.

It was a long time before I remembered the wisdom I'd been taught many years prior: God's providence means "everything happens for a reason," both the big things and the small, the good and the evil. We see this clearly in the story of Job. God accomplishes His will through divine providence to ensure His purposes are fulfilled. He governs our affairs and works His will through the natural order of things. Romans 8:28 (NIV) assures us: "... We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." God is in control. You may not readily see it in the moment, as I didn't. But I now know more fully that God allows these things for a reason, and that His plan is perfect.

Today, I am on the other side of abandonment and divorce. The experience strengthened me and made me a better person. Knowing what I know now, if I walked through it all again, I would be less fearful and more faithful of God's love.

Lord, I am grateful that You know the plans You have for me - to prosper me and not to harm me, plans to give me hope and a future. May I trust in You to act providentially in my life for Your good purposes and plans. Amen.

—Louise Macilvane

Scripture

[Romans 8:28](#)

[Jeremiah 29:11](#)

5: God Is In It

It's impossible to describe the depth of pain you feel when you're suddenly abandoned by your spouse. I will never forget his expression when he was forced to admit his multiple affairs, and the most recent one with his business partner. I realized immediately that I no longer loved this man. My feelings simply evaporated. So, when he told me that his girlfriend would be happy to step aside to let us try and work it out, it was a hard no for me.

My wedding rings came off fast. Papers were served. The household was divided, and a year later we were divorced. (He remarried before the divorce was final.) I lived far from family, so I relied on my church friends to help me figure out my new life. I will forever hear my closest girlfriend telling me repeatedly, "God is in it!"

I was lost and unsure of so many things. At times, I was frozen. The words of Isaiah 40:28-29 (ESV) gave me courage. "The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength."

I moved across the country, found a residence, and began settling my children. I saved money, volunteered, and finished my master's degree. I healed through therapy. I helped my children heal through therapy. I found new friends. I became employed in a career I love. I prayed, and then I prayed even more. I integrated 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ESV) into my life. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

It turned out, God did me a solid favor. Today, I am married to the love of my life and share a love with him that I never knew was possible. We have a beautiful, blended family. I'm adored, valued, and respected. Not everyone's story is like mine. Maybe yours is 1000% different, and that's okay. But every story is similar in this: God is in it.

Lord, You promise that after I have suffered a little while, You will restore me and make me strong, firm, and steadfast. I see Your powerful hand in my life. No matter what I experience, God, You are in it. Amen.

—Louise Macilvane

Scripture

[Isaiah 40:28-29](#)

[1 Thessalonians 5:16-18](#)

[1 Peter 5:10](#)

6: Calling Me out of the Grave

I've been to more funerals in the last several years than ever before in my life. It seems the older I get, the more friends and relatives make their transition to heaven. My heart feels torn and divided grieving lost loves and at the same time envying the peace I imagine they are experiencing on the other side. I feel like Paul—wanting to be in heaven with Jesus and yet wanting to have a life of meaning and purpose here.

I wonder if Jesus felt this heart tug when he stood in front of Lazarus's tomb with Mary and Martha (John 11:33-44). He, too, wept over the destruction of His creation robbed of Eden's joy. He felt the loss and pain that death was causing to His beloved friends. He honored their grief, holding it gently in His hands. Then, He transformed the burden of their sadness into awestruck wonder and joy with the words "Lazarus, come out!" He cut the heavy silence of the witnessing crowd outside the tomb with life-giving divinity captured in His command—the Author of Life calling forth new life into His creation.

Grief is not easily stripped of its grave clothes. The clinging nature of the remnants and memories of death and broken relationships memorialize the pain. The shame that accompanies divorce is like the sticky ointment applied to grave clothes in a futile attempt to preserve what once lived. In short order, even expensive perfumes fail to mask the pungent odor of decay. A broken heart is a joyless heart, devoid of the life-giving hope of love. But Jesus meets us in the tomb. He's been there before. He's had a personal encounter with grief, pain, death, and grave cloths. And He has set them all aside.

In our darkest places, He brings His Eden glory, the glory that raised His body from death to eternal life. He calls forth, "Come out of your tomb of despair! Rise and live! Join me for a new day! I will turn your mourning into songs of joy! Behold, I am making all things new!"

Jesus, thank You for Your tomb-shaking, death-defying power! Thank You for calling me out of my grave of despair and grief to Your resurrection joy! Help me to fix my eyes on Your power, believing You will transform my joyless heart from death to new life in You. Amen.

—Echo Macdonald

Scripture

[John 11:17-44](#)