



Be Better Than Before

10 STEPS TO MAKE LIFE AFTER
DIVORCE A LIFE YOU LOVE

BY COLE JOHNSON



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is hard, at times, to imagine my life being the way it is now years ago. The beauty of it is that God kept me all of the way. Even though I didn't know it, I waited on Him, and my strength was renewed. Thank you, Jesus, for healing me and giving me the strength to thrive. Your grace, Lord, is what allowed me to flourish.

So thank you, Father God! I love You so much!

To my ex-wife: Normally, this would be in poor taste, but I must say this. I humbly apologize for not being the man you needed in our marriage. I pray you can forgive me. If you have – thank you very much. Thank you, also, for the years we were together. I pray that you have found happiness in your own life, and I pray only future success for your entire family.

To the COMI Publishing, Inc. staff: The Lord led me to write on this particular topic, and you were gracious and patient enough with me to do it. It is quite difficult to talk about a painful subject, but – as you all have encouraged me to say, “I consider the present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us!” Thank you for your stability.

To my friends (too numerous to mention): All of you said that I would grow as a man because of this experience – and you were right. I am a better man because of this, and all of you aided in my healing. I love you all so much – and thank you for the enduring friendships I enjoy to this day.

To my wife, Michelle: You are the answer to my prayers! I longed to see the end to such misery. I didn't what it looked like. However, when you came into my life, in the words of Lionel Richie, “You made my jagged edges smooth.” My journey of heartbreak, sorrow and torment ended the day you walked into my life. I am eternally grateful for your love. I love you so much, baby!

This book is dedicated to those who can't see the happiness for the bitterness. I was once in your shoes. It was hard for me to form positive words in my mouth when it came to my ex-wife. Setting her free has been one of God's greatest gifts. I pray that you can put down death – so you can pick up life. Thank you for your patronage, and may God bless you in every endeavor!

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BEGINNING THE PROCESS

You probably picked up this book because you want relief from feeling so helpless. You want an answer to your lingering loneliness. You want to free yourself from the cage of anger toward your ex-wife or ex-husband. You want a safe haven from seeing an Earth-bound hell on a daily basis.

When you hear the pastor utter the words, “Till death do you part,” he/she means that sentiment. It is said during a ceremony marking one of the biggest celebrations of your life. Things, in some respect, can’t be better. You ... couldn’t be much happier.

Then – the day of reckoning happens.

You know the day to which I’m referring. You see the day where your ex-wife, or ex-husband, says, “I don’t love you anymore.” You see the day where bitterness has replaced optimism as the tapestry of your marriage. You see the day dawning where being alone is more of a comfort to you than to be joined to someone you consider an albatross. You see the day when the option of departure offers more of a ray of hope than the vision of working through whatever obstacles that lay before you.

In short – you see death on Earth.

When you divorce, you go through a death. It’s that plain and simple. We hear it, many times, that God hates divorce. He is joy, peace and love. Divorce is pain, conflict and, most times, hate. This hurts God because it hurts you. He did not design us for divorce. It forces you to say things that are cruel and evil. It makes you think of ways to be injurious to another human being. It forces you to think of your own self a whole lot more – instead of focusing on others.

“I hate you.” “I wish I never met you.” “You hurt me.” “You should have never been born.”

Those are words I actually uttered to my ex-wife. Those were emotions I intensely felt for a long time. My heart was cold, stony, and bitter. I wanted my ex-wife to suffer because I was in extreme pain. It was like someone twisting a knife in my chest when I found out she was enjoying her life more without me. Worse still - when I had to go back to my former house and pick up the rest of my belongings, I walked into, ‘The Place of What Might Have Been’. I was in a constant state of anger. I was filled with so much hate for life, in general.

Then, when I discovered my purpose, I slowly, but surely, got away from the death of my marriage. I got more and more in touch with myself. I was spending time helping others. I was bonding with God more. I was exploring things I never dared tried when I was married before.

I became happy when it ceased to become all about having my ex-wife hurt. The most powerful weapon in the world of grieving came into my life: Forgiveness (I will discuss in greater detail, later).

Believe me; for about two years, I didn’t want to utter the word, ‘forgiveness’ – much less perform the action. Yet, one day (at the two-year mark) – I was sitting in my living room after an intense argument with my latest ex-girlfriend. I was all alone. I was still filled with rage. I didn’t have anyone to share the pain of what I felt when my ex-wife abandoned me (or so I rationalized).

Suddenly, a light bulb appeared. I have a life to lead. I have friends to love. It is an amazing concept, but it’s one I didn’t entertain because I felt I was unlovable.

I actually began to understand that, to be healthy, I have a relationship with myself to build.

Healthy relationships can't happen if I'm still saying, 'Death to my ex-wife.' I have to say, 'Life to my ex-wife,' and mean it.

Today, I DO want my ex-wife to be healthy, happy and full of life. I want her to prosper, grow, and bless someone. I want her family to be full of love and life as they keep navigating their way through this journey. It took a long time for me to say these words and mean them ... but I can utter them with a smile on my face and a song in my heart.

Divorce is an awful place to travel. This is how nasty it can be: Days before my divorce was finalized, I asked my uncle, who also went through one, "What can you tell me about divorce – since I'm about to go through it, myself?" His answer was very simple: "It's my experience ... and I ain't tellin' you."

I was hurt, then, but now I understand. It's painful to bring up something that you really want to forget. However, for me, I learned that there's more to my pain than building beyond it for myself.

Pain is meant to help others when you are on the other side of it.

So – now that I'm on the other side of divorce, I take full responsibility for the marriage and the dissolution. I wasn't as knowledgeable in the Word of God as I am, now. I understand the power of being equally yoked, now. Learning that lesson freed my soul as I learned how to be a husband – and what to truly seek in a wife.

If you have gone through a divorce, chances are you've had to deal with law enforcement. You've had to handle escalating arguments that even neighbors can hear. You've had to navigate the nasty waters of family intervention. It all leads up to court proceedings, property separation and custody battles. Divorces are never pretty. In fact, it can carry the residue of hate for a long time (on both sides) if left unchecked.

You must overcome this nastiness through the art of healing. That comes by allowing the Lord transform you from the inside.

In situations such as these, I'm reminded by one of my close friend's favorite Bible verse – Psalm 46:10: “Be still and know I am Lord.”

It's simple, yet it carries so much weight. In times such as divorces, we rely on the power of someone's gavel or attaché case. We lean on any kind of advice. Most times it's that Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar-type of advice that Job received.

We want to be 'right' when it comes to the battle, even if deep down we know that the other person wasn't completely to blame.

Even in those situations, we have to be still and know God has us in the palm of His hand. In His Sermon on the Mount, when He talked about The Beatitudes, Jesus said to His disciples, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

Make no mistake about it: When you go through a divorce, you are mourning the death of something powerful. You are grieving.

However, just like Jesus reminds us, there is life after death, and for you,— there is most certainly life ... after divorce!

#1 – The Origin of Matrimonial Separation

DEUTERONOMY 24:1-4

Moses Lays Out Divorce Ground Rules

1 If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, 2 and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, 3 and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, 4 then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

To put this in proper context, Moses was preparing the Israelites for life after his leadership. They were on the east side of the Jordan River getting ready to cross over into their Promised Land. He wanted to impart upon them how to live a holy life under God. One of the things Moses noticed were women not being treated with the reverence they deserved. They were being passed around from home to home.

Sounds very familiar, doesn't it? This was to satisfy those who didn't want to be married to their 'flavor-of-the-month' woman anymore – and could legally justify it (for any reason).

Unfortunately, many of us get the purpose of divorce wrong. These days, we can divorce someone simply because of being treated too well. You laugh at this, but I actually witnessed this with my own two eyes on the television show 'Divorce Court.' A woman wanted to divorce her husband because of being treated like royalty – which raised her suspicions.

This fear-based quick fix was exactly what the Lord wanted to avoid.

During the time before the Israelites crossed over the Jordan River, people wrote certificates of divorce pronouncing separation. God was seeing, even back then, that divorces (for no apparent reason) could ruin society. One must gain the proper reasoning behind a certain subject in order to understand it. Moses was hearing from the Israelite men that they wanted to free themselves of their wives so they could get with another.

For a good while, I thought I was detestable in the Lord's eyes because I was divorced.

Of course, I had to understand that the Israelites were living under Mosaic Law. Now, we are living under grace – where we are not bound to such things.

However, the process has become a whole lot more complicated, now. We can't just draw up a divorce certificate out of sheer whim. There has to be a legal proceeding to help necessitate the process.

After really thinking long and hard about this particular Scripture - it is for those teetering on the brink of divorce. Please think long and hard about the decision. Don't enter into this journey lightly – as the Israelites back in the day did. Do everything you can to save your union. Otherwise, your battle to lick wounds will begin. Please, don't throw away something that can be so beautiful. Your current struggle can turn into the most powerful bond you've ever had!

However – if you are at the point of no return, then ...

#2 – Your Ex-Spouse Is Not Your Enemy

LUKE 6:27-31

Jesus Mentions Loving Our Enemies

27 “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Prepare to fight this battle the right way. I’m going to put this as simple as possible: Your ex-wife is not your enemy. Your ex-husband is not your enemy. You are correctly reading this – your ex-spouse is not your enemy.

“But what about if she holds my children against me, man? I don’t get a chance to see my children because of what I did (or didn’t do) in the marriage!” Your ex-wife is not your enemy.

“He was abusive to me – and all my friends tell me that I should hold a grudge because I can’t allow him to get away with thinking that abusing me was OK.” Your ex-husband is not your enemy.

“She’s putting bogus charges on me! She’s being completely spiteful to me – and she only responds to my being spiteful to her in return!” Your ex-wife is not your enemy.

“But what about if he cheated on me with my best friend? He doesn’t deserve to have anything positive to happen to him!” Your ex-husband is not your enemy (plus your best friend, as New Yorkers would say, is ‘mad foul’).

Making your ex-spouse an enemy does two things:

It puts you in a life holding pattern – where you relive the agony. It allows you to be unnecessarily bitter – draining you of positive energy (and aging you).

I heard it once that if you continue to carry anger for something – or someone – that it is akin to swallowing poison. Translation: Carrying a grudge hurts no one else but you.

What purpose would it serve if you continually say bad things about someone with whom you're no longer intimately involved? "It makes me feel better," you might say. I know that answer because I said that once in the name of 'venting' about my ex-wife. What you will discover (if you haven't done so, already) is that less and less people will want to be around you because your life is centered on anger and hatred.

Am I saying that you must be a robot and show nothing affects you? Of course not! You will need time to cleanse yourself of those emotions. You need time to be emotionally honest. This is when a close circle of friends – and prayer – come into play.

Nobody likes to be hurt. It is in our fleshy nature to repay hate for hate. Paul, however, wrote in the Bible that we "should never repay evil for evil." In fact, we "should overcome evil with good."

So – if you're dealing with an ex (or soon-to-be ex) that isn't on the road to forgiveness, you must do it, anyway. "Easier said than done," you're telling me. I can't argue with you on that point. But, I will say that it has to be done, if you want to Be Better! Not just better than your ex, but for you to feel better inside, for your heart to begin to heal and be a better you... for you.

Society teaches us to think of our ex-spouses as the devil. We heap upon them negatively-expressed adjectives and nouns(that aren't their real names). A friend once told me that calling someone out of their name is lazy, inexcusable, out of bounds and a coward move.

I was convicted of this – and here’s my story on that particular subject: A short time after a phone call I had with my ex-wife, I was in a group of co-workers. In anger, I actually said, “This (female) makes me hate all women!”

I wince, now, when I recall the story because it’s a sentiment I can’t erase. Despite these thoughts, both women in the conversation forgave me for saying those words and I’m friends of theirs to this day.

Imagine, though, if I said these things around someone whom I was interested in dating. This would be the first impression they would have of me. I wouldn’t look so good to someone new, right? Well, if you are doing these things, you look just as bad – and the move would be just as unjustified if it came from you, too.

Because we are in pain, we want to believe that ex-spouses are evil and that it is ok to think evil things about them. However, that type of thinking shows attachment and love.

You don’t believe me? Chew on this: Think about the times you spend plotting for your ex’s demise. Reach deep within your mind to process the many times you were pained when he/she was on a date with someone else. Consider the times you were agonized that your ex was happier without you. Ponder the times where you cried yourself to sleep at night – and then cried yourself awake – because your thoughts were centered on him/her.

Now – think about the times you pined to talk with someone you adored. Reach deep within your soul to embrace the moments you imagined being on a date with that someone. Consider the times you were happier with the thought of this person. Ponder the times where you smiled before – and after – you slept because you only thought about him/her.

Do you see the parallel? Anytime you invest emotion in something, you give yourself over to it. As former boxer Mike Tyson would say, "That sounds ludicrous," doesn't it?

If you invest that much time hating someone, then they still own a huge part of you. You must let go of that bitterness. You don't have to eat dinner with them, you can do this on your own.

It will still hurt at first, but eventually, the pain will become a distant memory. However, if you want to nurse those hurts and bad memories, the results are robbing you of joy, peace, health and life. They aren't doing it ... you are!

This is the time where you have to put down your sword of discontent. This is the moment where you have to reclaim your life, and start anew. There is an article from www.ivillage.com which states, "Hate can be just as binding as love – even more so sometimes – and if you want to be free to move on with your life, you cannot remain bound to the past."

The devil rejoices in your hatred because that means you are enslaved there. You can't go past the times where he cheated, or she cleaned out your bank account. You emotionally remain at that particular moment as life continues.

You owe it to yourself to break free from the prison of hating your former spouse. We have to take the shears and prune things that cease to grow in our lives.

Cut the dead thing that is growing from you before the decay spreads to the rest of your body.

Choose life – because you're supposed to exist in abundance!

#3 – Resist Lingering Bitterness
HEBREWS 12:14-15

A Warning to Those Stuck in Anger

14 Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many

It ages you. It disrupts your health. It wreaks havoc on your sleeping patterns. It shortens life, altogether. The condition to which I am referring is called bitterness.

Now, am I saying that you don't have a right to be angry? Of course not! Even Jesus got angry. It's a part of who we are. The focus is to not stay in that anger. If you are a divorcee – I'm hearing you say, "You're asking for the impossible." Going through a separation of any kind is tough. Any change that jolts a human being is unpleasant, at best. If we live in that state of anger, the long-term results can literally be fatal.

I'm sure when you were married, one of the most poignant pieces of advice given to you was the nugget, "Don't go to bed mad." You're reading this book needing to healthily manage emotions of divorce. So it's safe to say you went to sleep many nights (and awakened the next morning) angry with your former husband or wife.

Believe me, it's hard work to keep any relationship harmonious. It's just as hard to keep yourself in a harmonious state of being.

Ephesians 4:26-27 proves true: "... do not let the sun go down while you're still angry."

Why, do you ask? Why would Paul write such a statement? It's because you have given, "the devil a foothold," or an entrance into your heart.

You are not built to operate in anger for long stretches of time. I can't handle anger for long stretches, either. We are not created to live in fear-based emotions. Our bodies function much better in faith-based emotions. Fight or flight responses release Adrenalin. Which is good for a short time, but it tears up our bodies when filled with it for too long.

Divorce tests the limits of your faith like few other situations can. It pushes perseverance and joy to its brink in your life. Yet, even in this situation, you can push through the anger. You can get to the other side of shouting matches. You can be bigger than the insults. You can rise above the negative opinions. You just can't make it a life habit to function in sadness.

Listen to me: You are not built to be bitter. You are built to spread joy. Yes, even now – when you were wronged (or felt you were wronged) – there is still joy in this situation. It's a harder, more diligent journey to find it again. However, it is worth your time, your energy and your life to connect with joy.

When I say, "connect with joy," I mean to connect with Jesus. Earlier, I mentioned that Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted." He knows better than any entity which has ever existed on this planet that you need to be loved, comforted, healed and joyful.

All bitterness does is hurt you. This is where the devil has his fun. He would like to have you continue to live in abject bitterness the rest of your life. However, you're strong in Jesus, and you can defeat this condition.

Speak life. Speak health. Speak joy, and the devil will have no choice but to flee from you.

#4 – You Are Not a Failure

ISAIAH 54:4

God Encourages Isaiah about the Past

4 “Do not be afraid; you will not be put to shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth, and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood.”

One of the innermost prevailing thoughts I had about divorce was failure. I stood in front of my family and friends pledging my devotion to my now ex-wife. For many months following the beginning of my divorce, I heard, “... till death do you part.” Over and over again, the words kept playing in my head like a broken record. I meditated on the thought so much - that I embraced being a failure in life. Follow the logic, here (and many of you can do just that): I said that death would be the only time I would separate from this woman I claimed in front of God and loved ones. Yet – she’s still breathing, and I’m still breathing. Neither one of us is dead, but the both of us are living life apart from the other. That makes me a failure, I rationalized. The Lord said, “Not so fast, My son!”

This is the lesson I’m hoping you receive: In life, we will succeed at times and fail at other times. It’s not about if you fail. It is about what you learn and how you live afterwards. One of the sayings I’ve heard that depicts this particular Scripture is, “It doesn’t matter how many times you get knocked down. It matters how many times you get back up.” The only way you are a failure is if you never try.

Face the pain this divorce has caused you – and the bitterness that you have in your heart. But, don’t dwell on it.

If needed, seek the help on letting to go. Get in a safe place where you can honestly speak about your raw emotions from the death experience you’re undergoing. And after you have purged yourself from the horror of being alone again – look toward the future. Pour love, life and health into your soul.

One of my cousins asked me right around the time my divorce became final, “Where do you see yourself in five years?” I laughed at him and said, “I don’t know where I see myself in the next six months.”

What he was trying to get me to see is this: It may look dark, now, but God will turn around your situation if you allow Him to do so. It is amazing what maturity, wisdom, time and healing can do to a divorcee. In time, you will see that being angry, depressed and dejected is a total waste.

Being productive and full of light will propel you to a life better than your former marriage – if you allow God to do a mighty work within you.

God was talking to Isaiah about Israel being overrun by the Assyrians, and knew Jesus would heal the Israelites from their former pain. He wants to talk to you about doing the exact same thing. All you have to do is know that you are the righteousness of God and that you are a success – not a failure, because the Lord will take you to places far beyond your greatest dreams.

Oh, and about that, “where do you see yourself in five years,” question? Five years from when that conversation took place, I was one month away from marrying the woman God created specifically for me.

God wants you to prosper – and I am a living witness to seeing this actually come to life.

**#5 – Guard Against Being Hard-Hearted
EZEKIEL 36:24-27**

God Talks to Ezekiel about Being Soft-Hearted

24 “For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. 25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws.”

It is quite easy to become very hard-hearted in situations such as these. Let's see if you recognize these statements:

-“All men are dogs.”

-“No woman can be trusted.”

-“I am never going to marry again.”

-“Once a cheater, always a cheater.”

-“I will never allow anyone to get that close to me again.”

- I can tell you from personal experience that the lack of intimacy can bring about a person's heart to grow cold and stony. Love is an action that cannot grow from a stony soul. Healing can't take place. Enlightenment can't happen. Loneliness will continue to be your constant companion as compassion is not allowed to do its work.

Imagine listening to the history of how a land you were divinely given was taken away by your own callous nature. I don't have to use the Israelites as the example of this. Let's use your very own home. You built your roots in it with your spouse, your family and your memories. Visions of owning a house of your own are now a reality. That is – until times got hard. The economy falls. You are having a hard time trying to make ends meet. Bill after bill is piling up on you – and the mortgage companies are not accepting partial payment. They want your entire monthly note or you're out the home.

For those who faced that situation: It made you angry, didn't it? How dare anyone take from me what I so richly earned, you say? Why is this happening to me?

And when the answers didn't come as fast as you wanted them, your heart became more guarded than the gold in Ft. Knox. It's hard to rationalize having an entity take away what you hold dear. "It must be because of some injustice! Someone must pay!"

Divorce is very similar. We get indignant. We get belligerent.

The audacity of this person treating me like yesterday's news, you think! This could make our heart very rocky.

For me: I was in full-on hate mode. For almost two solid years, I kept everyone at arm's length. I didn't realize that my heart became callous to the world.

During this time period, I had a conversation with a woman who helped in my healing process. In the conversation, she compassionately said, "You're still thinking about her, aren't you?" The 'her' in question was my ex-wife. She was right. Because of her insight, I went on the mission of being more compassionate to everyone. I have finally arrived to that point – but it took a lot of Holy Spirit searching to get there.

Some of the most compassionate people I have ever known in my life went through divorces. One of my closest friends who helped me heal from my divorce was instrumental in having me learn this fact.

Roughly two years after my divorce was final, she said something to me that made sense and soothed whatever was bothering me. Curious, I asked her the following question: "How is it that you're so kind-hearted now?"

She answered, *"It's amazing what pain can do to help you gain a better perspective on love. I learned that I don't ever want to have anyone go through what I experienced."*

It is important for you to open your heart. Think of it as your mouth. I'm sure that when you eat something, your mouth is not closed. The saying goes, "A closed mouth don't get fed." Well, a closed heart doesn't get fed, either. For how can you receive anything you think you deserve if your receiving center (your heart) is deflecting everything coming your way? I understand that you've been scarred, battered, bruised and hurt. However, in protecting your heart, you also disallow any positivity to seep into you, as well.

You can forget about healing, forgiveness and love, too. These are key ingredients needed for you to get past the embarrassment, the hurt, the pain, the tragedy and the bitterness a divorce can cause you. It is quite simple: The sooner you are willing to open your heart, and allow it to be 'soft', the faster you will be ready to receive love again. Also, you will become stronger in the long run. Why? Because your heart gathers strength from love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, gentleness, and faithfulness (Fruit of the Spirit). You need your heart to cease being bitter because it is unhealthy for you to be so closed. Otherwise, you will become even weaker than at this moment.

Do whatever you can so that you are not the person people run from, because you are so bitter. If you think you can conceal it, don't flatter yourself.

You also do not want your heart to resemble concrete so that the love of your friends, family, a potential new mate, and life as a whole will bounce off your 'surface'. Before long, your misery will spread everywhere in your life – and nobody would desire to pour into you. You want to be light and life. That means vulnerability must resurface in your life. It's just that simple.

I get it: You are rubbed raw. Your emotions are frayed. Your trust has been shattered. There is no denying any of that. I would love to tell you there's a magic elixir that can put together your heart from the broken pieces you have, now. What I can tell you is that if you focus on Jesus, and put your broken heart into His hands – not only will you be healed, but you will be healthy.

#6 – Face Past Mistakes and Prosper
ROMANS 5:1-5

Paul Talks to His Countrymen about Peace and Hope

1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Face the fact you may feel that you hate your ex-husband/ex-wife. Face the fact that you don't want to live the way you're living, now. Face the fact that you may have the desire to hurt your former intimate friend/lover/helpmate rather than help them. The sooner you face the fact that you are holding hate, the faster you can get rid of the garbage that is consuming you.

Saying this is harsh, nasty, evil, and sounds like you aren't a good person, right? You must say these things in order to advance to the next stage in your life. When you do this, God will be able to get His glory in/through you because of it.

This place, as painful as it may be, is where you prosper, grow and blossom. You have to own all the unsavory things you have thought – or done – to your ex-spouse. All of this has must be completed – so God can (absent of pride, bitterness, fear and hate) rebuild you from a place of brokenness and selflessness.

Solomon wrote, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge/wisdom." The reason why it is being spoken, here, is because we have to get out of our own way.

You were hurt. You were offended. You were wronged. That's understandable. You also acted in hurt. You also offended, and you also were wrong. This isn't a blame game here, here. It's a true, literal 'coming to Jesus' situation.

It's time to put the bitterness away. Face your past, but don't dwell or live there. Tap into your powerful future that lies ahead. You may be suffering, now – but this is the beginning of better times. This will give you the strength and confidence to know that with Christ, you can survive and thrive in/through hard times. Because of it, you have put all of what you've suffered in your past behind you.

If you've never lived the song lyric, "The world behind me, the cross before me," before now, then you might as well make this your daily mantra. You are built to breathe life into individuals hungry for something good to happen in their lives. Your current test will serve to become your future testimony.

"I can't ever see that," you're saying. I was in the same situation as you – and now, you're reading exactly how I got past the worst pain of my life. Your prosperous moment starts right now. You are no different than I am. Own, and put behind you, your past. Let's claim your glorious future together.

I guarantee you: Your life will be much richer in the latter days than your former. You can do it!

#7 – Healing Is Essential
PSALM 147:3

David Sings of Restoration

3 He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

The word 'bind' has many definitions. One meaning of this verb is 'to make secure by tying'. Another definition of 'bind' is 'to cause to have an emotional attachment'.

However, it's the definition on which this particular Scripture focuses that carries the most impact.

When David sings of the word 'bind', here – he is referencing God healing all the pain, turmoil, anguish, nastiness and bitterness in someone's life with legal authority. He wants us to prosper, and healing sets the stage for our prosperity to blossom.

You read this right. God wants us to take the wounds we have stored up within us and give it to Him. That way, He can take the impediment of darkness away from our presence. Healing is all that's left. Since the Lord is love, He wants us to be healed from whatever plagues our progress.

Divorce can be a freeing thing. However, we can dwell in the recesses of vengeance, self-justice and negative aggression for far too long. We also can believe the false assumption that another person will replace the painful person or reminder of our past.

Unless that person's name is Jesus, you'll be right back where you started. Give yourself some time to heal, to forgive yourself and your ex, and get to know what real love is. Begin from the best source - Jesus.

Being real, here: No one wants to be around you rehearsing your wounds on a constant basis.

Any concerned human being will want to help you, of course. However, if the pain of your divorce still consumes your thoughts (and you mention similar stories to your friends all the time), they will take precaution to be around you less often.

What happens is that you become associated to whatever pain you want to voluntarily embrace. Example: I had a conversation with a friend of mine where we talked about a mutual friend. We both concluded that he wouldn't be available to hear anything we're saying to feed life into him because he was too busy being vengeful. Otherwise, we would be more than glad to help him through such a rough time. How can we help, though, when he still wants to remain emotionally injured?

God rejoices in seeing your freedom from a debilitating pain and heartache. This would have Him pour into you with talking to others about said pain in helping them in their journey. How should I know this particular circumstance? You're reading this very book – where I have been freed by my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, of the most painful time/incident of my life. I am evidence of the fact that there is life after such a traumatic time. You most certainly do not have to remain tied to anger and continue to exist.

Healing from a divorce is vital to your future and your health. If you were physically stabbed, you would immediately seek treatment – otherwise, you'd bleed to death. Going through a divorce, you have been emotionally stabbed. If you don't seek treatment, your heart would feel like it is bleeding to death.

Seek different places (church, divorce groups, counselors) to heal all your wounds. Once you are healed, you will be able to help other people. Just like I hope this book is helping you.

#8 – God Hates Divorce

MALACHI 2:10-16

God Speaks to Malachi about Divorce

10 Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our ancestors by being unfaithful to one another?

11 Judah has been unfaithful. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves by marrying women who worship a foreign god. 12 As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the Lord remove him from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings an offering to the Lord Almighty.

13 Another thing you do: You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer looks with favor on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. 14 You ask, "Why?" It is because the Lord is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

15 Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.

16 "The man who hates and divorces his wife," says the Lord, the God of Israel, "does violence to the one he should protect," says the Lord Almighty.

So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.

Wow! God said a mouthful in just one verse – let alone the seven that's on display, here.

There is one key word which rings true throughout any union that is splintered: Faithfulness.

For those of you who struggled with being faithful to your spouse, atone, seek God for forgiveness and repent (turn away) from the behavior. Then, after that – forgive yourself for it. If you still have to deal with your spouse after the divorce (and many of you do, considering the involvement of your children), then atone for the indiscretion and ask for his/her forgiveness.

Divorce is not meant for the weak at heart. It tears at the core of God's main ministry – family. You might be reading this, now, and are asking the question, "Why is my wife/husband not accepting my atonement?" The above Scripture shows how one person does not accept the other's gesture of reconciliation and old behavior resurfaces.

There is a scene in the Tina Turner biopic *What's Love Gotta' Do With It*, which shows this very well. Ike wants Tina back. He attempts to woo her with sweet talk, gestures and begging, but Tina's mind is rushing back to all the abusive times before this moment. After Tina refuses to get back with him, Ike reverts back to his old ways, and attempts to get physical. The key phrase that Tina said during this time was, "I was wondering when the old Ike Turner would reappear."

Sometimes, there are situations where it's too late to apologize ... too late to make amends ... too late to start over ... and rebuild something one person already has committed in their mind is destroyed.

If we treat each other with disregard, then it will be exactly how God described the situation to Malachi. We have profaned our husbands/wives. One of the definitions of 'profane' is 'to treat (something sacred) with abuse, irreverence, or contempt'. So – it's safe to say that I profaned my ex-wife.

I tried to not believe it, but I did. When something is profaned, God finds a way to remove the blessing away from the assailant. It is why God had to remove the Israelites from Israel. It is why God had to remove the Judeans from Judea. They profaned the land.

The same premise works in deteriorating marriages. If we are the culprits of profaning something, then the object of our desire would most often be separated from us. I guess you can say that entities who have offended one another to the point of no return need some time to rehabilitate themselves and learn what it truly means to be married to someone.

That's what this Scripture displays for all of us to understand. Instead of focusing on being denied something, we have to turn our attention to doing things which spell healthier habits for the rest of our lives. You have to ask yourself these spirit-searching, hard-hitting questions:

- What are the things which make you an unhealthy partner?
- Why did your marriage go wrong?
- How could you improve in all your future relationships (not just romantic ones)?
- Where do you envision yourself five years from now?

The toughest thing to settle in your heart is the proverbial door closing on you. When something suddenly ends, it jars you in that way.

To see a removal of yourself from a situation (or seeing your spouse move away from you) is painful. However, you have to reconcile being your worst self in your marriage (and most certainly toward the end of the union).

Divorce brings your mess to the forefront. You are fragile. Your emotions float to the surface. You want harm to be done to a person where, weeks/months/years before, you pledged to give your life to him/her in a wedding ceremony.

ALL of these reasons are why God hates divorce. It makes a person hard-hearted, bitter, and difficult to enjoy. Most of all: It introduces you to hate – which is never in God's plan for you.

#9 – Choose Your Battles

PROVERBS 20:22

Solomon Warns About Vengeance

22 Do not say, “I’ll pay you back for this wrong!” Wait for the Lord, and he will avenge you.

How many times have you uttered the phrase, “I’m gonna’ get this person back for _____?” I had a conversation with a friend who, unfortunately, traveled down this road. I say, ‘unfortunately’, because my wife and I also know his ex-wife – who is a lovely person on the road to healing. She’s grasping onto the concept of, “the battle is not yours’, while he is still trying to do battle. They are clearly handling their divorce in two different ways.

The man is struggling in every facet of life. He’s preoccupied and bitter about all the things which have gone wrong in his marriage (and it’s holding him back). The woman, on the other hand, is progressing nicely in her friendships, her social life, her profession as well as her Walk with the Lord.

I had to do a self-diagnosis on this particular Scripture. “How dare she rob me of my future”. “The nerve of this woman being self-righteous!” I would seethe. The simple thought of my ex-wife made me uncomfortable and upset. Talking with her brought out the worst in me.

There was a part of me that simply said, “I’m not going to engage with her in the, “Whose Ego Is Larger,” competition. Whatever she wants, she can have.” It was a painful decision to make, but I decided to simply scrap that life, altogether, and start over.

I also had to learn to not pray for inappropriate things, as well. Praying for someone’s downfall is evil – and I did that. As I expressed, earlier, I had to come to a place in my life where I earnestly had to embrace her happiness coming from somebody else – and not me. That understanding only comes after God changes your mind about battling with your ex-spouse.

A few years ago, one of my friends was going through a divorce, and I saw a lot of the same types of behavior I had undergone. I told him something that my father would often say to me.

“Son, you have to choose the hills you die for.” Translation: There are certain battles in life you must fight. Then, there are other battles you must allow God to fight on your behalf.

No matter the battle, however, God is in the picture every time – period. Unfortunately, with divorces, people do treat the proceedings as if they are engaging in a war with an enemy. It’s a painful thing to see on all levels.

Warfare doesn’t have to be the climate of this type of separation. Many times, ‘vengeance’ the Lord’s way does not involve bloodshed. It simply involves being renewed in His way of thinking, His way of living and His way of loving. Believe it or not, you have to return back to love.

Remember: There is life after divorce. That would include not being in ‘crush ex-husband/ex-wife mode.’ It means dropping your sword and allowing the Lord to do the battle for you. In other words: If you allow God to fight your divorce battle – you ultimately win! Receive that you are both victorious – because that’s the greatest vengeance of them all.

#10 – Forgiveness: Divorce’s Ultimate Antidote
2 CORINTHIANS 2:5-11

Paul Writes about Forgiveness of Other Parties

5 If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely. 6 The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. 7 Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. 9 Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. 10 Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, 11 in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

Do you want to get back at your ex-wife or ex-husband? Do you want to demonstrate how they affected you? Do you want to, once and for all, strike the final blow in your divorce?

Forgive.

Do you want to have the life you still dream about with someone who was meant for you? Do you want to see a kinder, gentler, more beautiful human being across the table from you?

Forgive.

Do you want to get back on your feet and either find the man/woman to whom your heart truly belongs or reconcile with your ex-spouse? Do you want to experience a deeper love with someone?

Forgive.

The ultimate antidote in any divorce is forgiveness. Why is that, you ask? It is because you don't place yourself in the past any longer. You place love at the forefront – allowing things that were so devastating to you no longer have any affect, whatsoever.

Years ago, I talked with a fellow divorcee, and I noticed something. Her level of love was so vast. She had a deep patience capacity about life I've experienced with very few people. Her compassion and empathy was so expansive. So, one day, I asked her, "Why is your capacity to love so great?"

Her answer: "Because I suffered through a divorce." This was from another divorcee, mind you.

Now, I thought the answer was odd – considering the things you undergo in a massive separation. However, her explanation made a lot of sense to me. She said, "I was in a place where hurt ruled my day. I just simply got to the point where God intervened. He took that pain away and replaced it with a deeper reservoir to love life." So, through pain, she became a richer human being by loving more.

That would be a poetic way to describe forgiveness to you. It sounds easy, exquisite and beautiful, right? Of course, it is anything but easy – but it is beautiful to be on the other side. The plain-and-simple way to say the same thing would be this: You get sick and tired of literally being sick and tired.

Divorce drains your energy. It keeps you focused on a narrow scope of life. It adversely affects your creativity. I heard pop/rock singer Pink say, one time, that she creates better from a place of pain.

Unfortunately, if you keep tapping into the well of despair on a consistent basis, your flame will eventually be prematurely extinguished.

There comes a time where you don't want to break stuff, anymore.

There comes a time where the motivation of hurting people changes to helping them. You can't keep plotting a person's demise forever.

Let me ask you a question: Who do the poisonous emotions you feel toward your ex-wife/ex-husband going to damage? Do your thoughts hurt them? Or do they only hurt you?

No matter your answer, you are driving down the road to your very own destruction. Stop it. You are killing yourself! You need to live.

Positive energy feeds on itself. You do enough positive things, then you realize things like alimony, petty disputes, child visitation squabbles and property division, don't mean nearly as much as walking in the Lord's joy.

Sooner or later – the stuff will belong to someone else. And if you have children – please do not use them as bargaining chips. It is grossly unfair to them – and they will, in the long run, resent you both. Negative comments about your ex should never be uttered toward their direction. They can become pained, jaded adults ... and that is something you do not want.

Pour life into your children and to this situation.

Author/minister Catherine Ponder could not put divorce any better than this proceeding quote:

“When you hold resentment toward another, you are bound to that person or condition by an emotional link that is stronger than steel. Forgiveness is the only way to dissolve that link and get free.”

This is why forgiveness is so powerful. Being stuck in feelings of hate is a weight that has you bound. You can claim, “I'm through with him/her,” all you want. However, as long as you are stuck in that cocoon of hate (like I was) not only are you bound to that person, but you're stuck reliving those painful experiences, as well.

Let me be real with you for a moment, here:

I know it hurts.

I know you want to take that pain and throw it out of your body.

I know it feels like no one can relate to what you're feeling.

I cried until I had headaches. I was purposefully aloof because sharing any kind of space was invasive to me. So when I say, "I've been there, I mean that I have traversed that dark and lonely road and sat there longer than I should have. But, I got out, and you can too.

The way out of your prison?

Love, and forgive, your ex for everything!

It doesn't mean get back together – or hang out. You simply have to internally set yourself free by forgiving them quietly. This is something done between you and God. You don't have to tell them, or tell anyone. But, you do have to have that conversation with yourself and God, and say the words.

Mahatma Gandhi, said it this way: "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong."

Here's your question: Are you weak? Or are you strong? ... If you want out of the prison of hate in which divorce has kept you all this time – all you have to do ... is forgive your ex-wife/ex-husband.

Let it all go, and you will be set free.

FINAL WORDS OF WISDOM

After reading all this, I want you to know that you can be happy again.

Immediately after my divorce, I was a wreck! I attempted to date someone the month after my divorce was final. It was a sheer disaster. I wasn't ready – or solid enough – to commit to someone and ended up dating another woman who I thought was more compatible at the same time. Neither one of those situations lasted long.

A year later – I met a wonderful woman who had great potential for marriage. This was going to be 'the one', but she ended up being 'the one' who helped me discover why I needed more time to heal.

When we started arguing, I would label my past dating life pains on her. Looking at it from a much more mature heart, that was grossly unfair to her. I sabotaged the relationship before it really could get off the ground. It was one of the great regrets in my life for a while.

By the second year, rejection from women didn't bother me. When rejection happens as a new divorcee – it literally is like someone dumping salt on a fresh open wound.

When you have made sense to learn from the wrong things that happened in your relationship. Not lay blame, but look at why things happened, what you had a part in doing and how you can make better, wiser decisions. THEN you are on your way to being ready for a healthy relationship. That day – the open wound begins to close and heal.

After four years, I was in a better place. I was ready to love and be loved. The Bible says, "He who finds himself a wife finds himself a good thing – and obtains favor from the Lord." As God would have it, I found my wife during this time - and I couldn't have asked for a better partner in life. She is the one that encouraged me to write this book. To share what I've learned to help you heal faster and better.

She's enlightened me on a lot of things about myself, and I've healed from it all in the process. I don't bring a lot of my past baggage into my present. It's not because I'm scared of my past. In our courtship – my wife said that the lessons I learned in my first marriage prepared me to be a better husband.

So ... for those out there who wonder, "Will there be life after divorce?" The answer is, "Yes!!!" I am living proof of that statement.

Divorce opened my eyes to have a more enriched experience with life. I have a good relationship with my new family, new friends, along with embracing new experiences. Most importantly, I have a better life. It took investing time in being alone and 'divorcing' myself from the pain of such heartache.

Back in college, I studied on the Kubler-Ross model detailing the five stages of grief. They are; denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

Divorcees go through all five stages – if they don't get stuck in stages. There are some who are still stuck in denial. There are some who are still stuck in depression. Many times, we meet some who, like I was, is still stuck in anger.

I was stuck in anger for a while. I thought I was doing well until I had a conversation with my ex-wife about ten months into our divorce and she said something to me that made my heart turn stony and my blood become cold. I walked around life for the next year transporting poison everywhere.

It is not fun to deal with loss and grief of any sort. We were not created, to be stuck in a devilish holding pattern – plain and simple.

It is painful to witness is a man/woman going through a divorce – and the wound is still fresh. A friend of mine was convinced, in one season, that he would regain the love, trust, respect and honor of his estranged wife, the next season he was convinced, that she was something completely derogatory.

In short, we don't want to see things end.

However, in Ecclesiastes we find, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under Heaven."

I remember hearing once that people like to place lifetime expectations on seasonal characters. My hope is that, as you have read these chapters, you've gained some perspective on healing, forgiveness, and love. If you do take what you've read to heart in your current season, chances are you will enjoy a season of untold joy. Your happiness can come faster than you've ever realized.

Jesus said, "Come to Me all you are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." He knows you're hurting. He knows you're in pain. Give it to Him, and then watch how your life will transform from a perpetual state of anger and darkness to one of joy and light.

The only way out of your pain is getting in a deeper relationship with the author and finisher of our faith. There is life after divorce. It starts, and continues, with Jesus. It ends ... never!

Father God, in the Name of Jesus:

I thank You, right now, for the person reading this book. Let the test that they are in now, become a beautiful testimony for someone else, just as you did with me. Thank you for opening up the windows of Heaven and pouring blessings so heavily on them, that they would not have room to receive. Thank you for rebucking the devil and his hate, fear and lack. Replace these things with your love, peace and provision. Your Word says that "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." Thank you for that joy this morning, and in all the mornings to come. Thank You for Your healing ... in Jesus' Name – Amen!!!

To the person reading this. God really does love you, and I do too.
Cole

About the Author

Cole Johnson was born in New Orleans and reared in Houston. After serving in the Army, his renewed faith enhanced his gift for writing.

He hosts a popular sports podcast at ColeSportz.com and has been featured across the country.

Along with the 10 Scriptures series, he has been a contributor to several publications, works at USA Today and lives in Nashville, TN with his wife, Michelle.

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