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corcoran

unraveling

hanging on to
faith through
the end of a
Christian marriage



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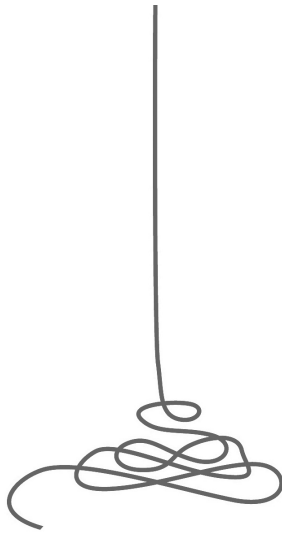
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Introduction

What you're holding in your hands is a narrative of my journey through the most difficult, confusing, and emotional season of my entire life. It is the chronicling of me bottoming out and then finding I wasn't alone when I reached my end. It is the chronicling of battling every fear and every sadness and every judgment and then realizing there was hope and light and joy waiting for me. And it is the chronicling of not knowing if I was following God's leading or walking away and then finding out that he was right there, as

close as a breath, following through on his promise to never abandon me, no matter what.

So although this is not the story of my marriage nor the story of my divorce, I do believe you deserve a brief background.

I was married for almost nineteen years. During that time, my family and I attended a wonderful church that I loved and where I even held a staff position for several years. I am so grateful for the pastors and other people who served in leadership there. Around year sixteen of my marriage, I asked our church leadership to try to help me in my faltering marriage. For the next fifteen months, a group of godly people from my church—which included one pastor, one older couple, one mentoring couple, one female mentor, one counselor, and one mediator—tried, formally, to help my husband and me reconcile. My separation officially began with my husband moving out of our home. At the end of the fifteen-month reconciliation attempt, with great sadness, my pastor and church leadership agreed that legal separation was my next logical step, if I so chose, which I did pursue. The process of divorce began when I was served divorce papers. My children and I moved into a new home several months later. The divorce became final one year after the papers were served.

What led up to that and all the details that came in between are known by God, my ex-husband, myself, and the friends and family who came around us. My marriage was very difficult, and my divorce has been very difficult. But this isn't the place for those details, and I'll tell you why.

Introduction

Because you, dear one, are living out your own story. My details might actually blur things for you. And because I am proclaiming—for the sake of your healing process and for the sake of falling lavishly on the side of grace—that I do not care how you came to find yourself separated or divorced, and therefore my specifics do not matter. What matters is the foundational truth that even in the most heartbreaking, soul-wrenching divorce, you, and I, can find peace, healing, and resurrection.

But to be clear, there are several things you should know about what I believe.

I believe in God, and I am a Christian. I accepted Christ into my heart and life when I was fifteen, and I try to follow him every day.

I believe the Bible is God's divinely inspired word to us.

I am 100 percent pro-marriage.

I believe God created marriage as a covenant to last for the lifetime of the couple.

I believe God created marriage as a breathtaking picture of how Christ loves his church.

I believe God allows marriages to end when certain sins are committed.

I believe the church is in place to protect and guide individuals and families through dark, confusing situations.

I believe God would have wanted my marriage to become healthy and remain intact.

I believe all marriages can be saved.

Yet, I believe God gives us free will.

I believe no one should walk away from their marriage without first getting as much help as they possibly can and trying their absolute hardest to keep it together.

I believe God is bringing about a different kind of miracle in my family—one of healing and resurrection and joy on the other side, and reaching out to others with the comfort we have received.

And I believe, when it all comes down, only you and God can know what you need to do.

Before we jump in, let me encourage you to feel every single feeling that you're experiencing. You must remember that you are grieving a significant loss, regardless of how you came to this point. Now is the time for the deeper works of resting and healing. Do not rush yourself through this process or through this book.

A brief note about the order of this book: you may notice in glancing at the table of contents that I talk about hope early on, for instance, and brokenness and exhaustion later, with happiness somewhere in the middle. The reason is this: although I am following a chronology of sorts as it pertains to my story, I have felt a hundred emotions in one day, and my divorce journey has not followed a straightforward path of anger, then sadness, then healing, then joy. It has been every feeling, every day, for the past few years. There is no clean-cut story arc, which is actually just how a crisis would play out, just like life. Also, the little snippets you'll find between each chapter come straight from my journals as I pull back the veil a bit more into how I truly felt while walking through all this.

Introduction

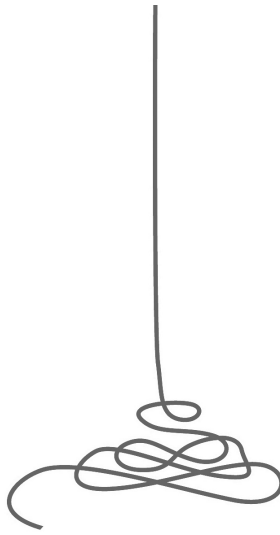
And finally, before you begin, I want you to do me a favor. Put the book down, close your eyes, and say the following out loud:

God, I am precious and honored in your sight.

You love me no matter what.

Now repeat this mantra as often as you need to as you let God walk you through this unraveling season. Let him walk you through your unraveling. And let him begin the work of putting you back together again.





Raw

From my journal, on a random day of being separated:

I am in a raw place today. I am swimming in the icy cold waters of defeat, but the worst part is that my emotions are numb and I am now used to this temperature. The water doesn't feel icy anymore. It feels like home. It feels like the water has caught me by the shoulders and is looking me in the eyes and is making sure it has my full attention to tell me, "You're not going anywhere—you belong here in this dark place. This is just where you should be, and you do not deserve for this to ever end. Get used to the cold; get used to the dark. Say good-bye to the possibility of ever being loved, of ever really loving."

Unraveling

I cannot stand what I am feeling today. In part, because I have felt this way on so many of my days over the past twenty years. It is a swirling deep inside that I can't stop. My reality today is that I feel like I am trapped in partnership with someone who cannot stand me, and I feel that I am not allowed to sever this crumbling relationship without being ostracized in my community and, worse, without losing the favor of my loving heavenly Father.

So yes, I feel trapped today. I am breathing shallow breaths. And I am not seeing even one sliver of light at the end of this tunnel that is constricting around me. And I am lonely. And I am bitter. And I am angry. And I want to run away and never come back. And I am cold.

OK, so I just laid myself open for you, all vulnerable and open and leaving no feeling unsaid. Can I just say how completely freeing that was? I have kept these thoughts inside me for more than fifteen years. In other words, for most of my adult life, I have acted differently than I have felt. How heartbreaking.

Dear friend, I know I don't know you. And I don't wish to presume that our situations are identical, because I know that they are not. But I know that if you love Jesus and if you have been in a difficult marriage, those two things seem diametrically opposed. I know that you have probably felt emotions that were the complete opposite of what you thought you were *supposed* to be feeling, maybe for a very long time. And when you keep something like that to yourself, and when you allow it to finally see the light of day, *raw* is the only word to describe it.

No one likes to feel like this: exposed, defenseless, emotionally naked. But once you have gotten to this place of being able to speak your truest feelings, maybe after all these years, you will be ready to begin to be healed. God won't bother trying to paint over your pretenses. Instead, God will put forth amazing amounts of effort to take your wide-open, unguarded self and recover you, rebuild you, restore you. He can heal those emotions that feel so horrible and blackened and unspeakable. Do not be afraid. God is right there with you, able to handle whatever it is you've got buried deep inside.

A Prayer

Father, please enter in to my rawest places. I cannot even believe I feel the way I feel sometimes. I feel broken by my circumstances, and if I'm completely honest, maybe a bit abandoned by you. But I am choosing to believe that you're with me as you say you are, and I am choosing to trust that you want to bring me full healing. Amen.

A Next Good Step

Be honest with yourself. Stop acting as if everything is OK when it's not. If you're a mess, let yourself be a mess. If you need to yell, go sit in your car and yell as loud as you need to. If you need to cry, hide yourself in your bathroom and sob until the tears run dry. If you need to put words to feelings, journal it out or find a friend you can trust. But don't hold it in;

do not pretend. Simply push through your fear of what's inside and get it all out.

A Way Forward

You get us ready for life:

you probe for our soft spots,
you knock off our rough edges.

And I'm feeling so fit, so safe:

made right, kept right.

(Psalm 7:9 *THE MESSAGE*)

