

Divorce is Hell

I heard about a group of divorced people that meets weekly for emotional support. As much as I absolutely hate being part of the land of the divorced, I began attending the meetings, hoping for some healing in my broken heart. An older black lady named Ruthie was leading the group in a nearby church. Ruthie, a beautiful Christian woman who wanted to help others through the trauma of their divorces had been divorced many years before and was now happily remarried.

I went to the group the first time simply as an observer. I was planning to just listen to others and not share any of my story quite yet. I didn't know these people and I wasn't ready to emote all over a bunch of strangers. I knew how it worked in support groups. When it's your turn to speak, you have the prerogative to take a pass. And that's what I fully intended to do.

But when it was my turn, I took a breath, fully intending to exhale saying the magic words, "I'll take a pass this time. I'd like to observe tonight if you all don't mind." Problem is, when I exhaled, the words that came out were not really anything like what I had planned. Instead of a *pass*, I blurted out my misery in bullet point form. Someone said something about how focusing my attention on my work might help, to which I responded, "I lost my job at the same time." To this Ruthie exclaimed, "Oh, my God!" She then asked me what I did for a living. I told her that I had been a pastor for the last 30 years. She cried out again, "Oh, my God!" She tactfully inquired about how long we had been married. "Thirty-three years." "Oh, my God!" Ruthie said again in pain. Another member tried to be encouraging, "Well, at least you have your health." I was afraid to say anything more lest Ruthie have a heart attack right in front of us. But I said, "Well..." I paused. "Well, actually I've broken my neck and they are testing me for cancer." I thought, now I've done it. Ruthie's gonna keel over on the spot and it'll be my fault! I came to this meeting to observe, and now I'm killing this sweet old lady. She moaned out a final, "Oh, my God!" and mercifully we moved on to the next miserable divorcee.

Ruthie survived and I kept coming back to the group. I felt an odd camaraderie with these other sufferers from their failed marriages. We watched videos of psychologists telling us how to survive the storm of divorce. They assured us that we could recover even if it took us another lifetime or two. Forgive, deal with your own stuff, don't date too early – they said. All good advice. Mostly it just felt good knowing that I wasn't the only one with this mortal ache inside. Ruthie and the other group members knew what it was like being torn apart from half of yourself. I found comfort in that.

Journal entry:

Yesterday was the final day for the Divorce. The days leading up to it and that day were terribly, terribly SAD! What a waste of a life and marriage. What a waste of all that we had invested. What a waste of all the work we put into being *one*. What a defeat, a failure, an embarrassment. How *just like* the world around us and how *unlike* the Kingdom of Heaven. How unlike *you*, Lord. How sorry I am for it, Lord. If I could change it, I would. If I could've changed it somewhere back there, and I didn't, I'm terribly sorry. Please forgive me for failing you, failing the Body of Christ, failing my kids, and failing the on-looking world. Somehow recover our lives in such a way as to squeeze some more of your glory out of us, these broken and damaged vessels. Use us in whatever way you choose – if only as an example of what NOT to do.

I truly plan to live the rest of my life (however long it may or may not be) to bring you praise. Feel free to do whatever it is you need to do to get the glory you so deserve from me. If I'm veering, bring me back. If you can't bring me back, take me out. I DON'T want to finish poorly! I DO want to finish well!

Losing my wife has been the most painful thing I've ever been through. And don't forget, when I say this I'm including the agony involved in a broken neck and bone cancer. To me, those pains (chemo, radiation, surgeries...) are minimal in comparison to losing my life's partner. It's worse than a death,

because when someone dies they're gone. But when you divorce, they're still alive yet you can't have them in your life anymore, at least not nearly in the same way. It feels like a hell to me.

You'll notice that I refer to having "lost" my wife. That's really what happened. I lost her. I didn't do what it took to keep her. I've heard people talk about the *guilty* and the *innocent* parties in a divorce. I don't know if there are such things. Nobody's really "innocent" in a marriage failure. We all make mistakes - lots of them over many years. It might be more accurate to use the words, "faithful" and "unfaithful." But even then, though I never cheated on her, I wasn't entirely faithful to the vows I made to my wife. I failed on many levels. Bottom-line, I "lost" her. I lost the most important person in my life and I'll never be able to recover her again. It doesn't mean my life is over (though that's the way it felt at first). It just means that my life with her as my wife is over and I really hate that!