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## *God Our Caring Parent*

*I*'ll never forget Tom's eyes.

The day my ex-husband left we had another one of those discussions that frequently occur in marriages in which one partner pursues and the other distances. Tired of arguing, I asked the generic question I knew would bring us back to the same page and wind things up.

"C'mon, honey, this is ridiculous. I know we can work this out. After all, we're both in this for life, right?" I'd asked this question a million times, and I knew what he'd say. His shoulders would relax, he'd give me a warm look, we'd hug, and we'd make up. Instead, he didn't answer.

I waited for what seemed like forever and then repeated, "For life, right?"

He looked straight through me with those green eyes that normally sparkled, but which now were dark and cold, and said flatly, "No."

I panicked. "What?" I thought maybe he was just trying to scare me. "What are you saying? That you don't want to be married?"

Still staring at me, his jaw set squarely and his white smile gone, he repeated that one word, "No."

My throat tightened and my stomach knotted as I heard the clear, simple truth in his voice. Tom got up and walked away, and within minutes he was out the door.

Shocked and scared, I paced frantically around the house and then threw myself on our bed. I didn't know what to think. Part of me was gone. I felt like someone had just shot a cannon ball through me, blowing a huge hole where my heart had been.

Do you remember the day your marriage ended? It doesn't really matter if you left him after years of frustration and broken promises, or if your husband left you. Most of us feel some relief to be away from the nightmare we called marriage, but we also experience the big black hole. That's why we need help.

In choosing to read this book, you've taken a giant step forward in your own healing process. Congratulations for knowing that help can come in many forms! Come with me now and explore how God, as a caring parent, worked in my life to bind up my wounds, and consider how he can work in yours.

## *W*hy Divorce Is Like a Big Black Hole

When I was six years old I suffered another painful hole, but that time it was in my tooth. My mother suspected a cavity and took me to the dentist. I hated the antiseptic smells, the stark white office, the high-pitched machines, and especially Dr. Worsely. When he came at me with the drill, I squirmed and squealed. Then he slapped me. Subdued and crying, I sat in the chair while he filled my tooth. Even with the Novocain, I felt every bit of the sharp, shooting pain.

Mom consoled me afterward, advising me that if I took good care of my teeth my filling should last thirty or forty years or more. I hoped to be an old lady before I ever had to go to the dentist again, but it was less than four years later when I lost my filling.

I was walking to school and about halfway there, at the crosswalk of our neighborhood's main street, I felt something strange rolling around in my mouth. I pulled out the silver filling. I was

shocked! How did that happen? My tongue darted immediately to the spot where it had been and found a large, gaping hole. Shock turned into terror as I realized I'd have to return to the dentist who slapped me.

I stood stuck at the crosswalk, my mind racing. I couldn't go back home because Mom and Dad were at work. I couldn't go to school in this condition. What if my whole tooth fell out? What if all my teeth fell out? Anger mixed with my fear. This wasn't fair! The filling was supposed to last practically forever! Dr. Worsely was supposed to have been a good dentist. I hated him for failing me and making me face pain again.

I started crying. I scanned the sea of cars driving past to see if someone would help me. As I blinked back my tears, I looked at the man in the car right in front of me waiting for the light to turn green. It looked like my dad's car, and the man looked like my dad. It *was* my dad! I screamed as loud as I could, "DA-DD-Y!"

My father heard me, pulled over his car, and scooped me up in his strong arms. Shaking and sobbing I buried my head in his shoulder and clung to him tightly, the silver filling still clutched in my fist. When I finally caught my breath and tearfully told him my tale, he said, "Don't worry, Rosie, everything will be all right. I'm here." I felt calm and safe in his arms.

## *T*he Pain of Divorce

My experience with the lost filling reminds me of divorce. When we first married, we were convinced we could trust our husbands. We expected our marriage to last a lifetime, but when it came loose and fell apart, we were frozen with fear, worry, or anger. Sometimes we want to go back, but we can't, yet we can't move ahead either. We may hate our spouses for leaving us, for passively making us leave them, and for the future pain we know we will endure. Our emotions can overtake us, keeping us stuck at the intersection between the hope of dreams and the pain of divorce.

But remember, someone out there will help us. We need to take a deep breath, blink back our tears, and look straight ahead into the face of our Father. Seeing him is not enough though. We must call out to him—scream if we have to—and then submit to his embrace. Real faith is knowing that he will take us into his arms and make it all better.

## *W*hat If Your Dad Was Not There for You?

Maybe, as a child, you didn't have a loving father on whom you could rely. Your dad was never there for you, or there only part of the time. He may have emotionally, physically, sexually, or verbally abused you. Our image of God is always colored by our relationships with both parents. Our attachment to our mothers began in the womb and may have grown through nursing and nurturing. The bond with our dads, whether healthy or not, was built over time. Similarly we have a natural tie to our Heavenly Father, but we may need to build, or rebuild, our emotional relationship.

Randy Carlson, the popular "Parent Talk" radio talk show host, in his book *Father Memories* advises:

"Fathers leave a lasting impression on the lives of their children. Picture fathers all around the world carving their initials into their family trees. Like a carving in the trunk of an oak, as time passes the impressions fathers make on their (daughters) grow deeper and wider. Depending on how the tree grows, those impressions can either be ones of harmony or ones of distortion.

"Some fathers skillfully carve beautiful message of love, support, solid discipline, and acceptance into the personality core of their children. Others use words and actions that cut deeply and leave emotional scars. Time may heal the wound and dull the image, but the impression can never be completely erased. The size, shape, and extent of your father's imprint on your life may be large or small, but it is undeniably there."<sup>1</sup>

Although I had a warm and loving father, he worked long hours to support a wife and eight children. As the oldest, I had to help my mother with the rest of the kids. I often felt that, although Dad loved me, he'd left me alone to take care of myself. My mother was bright, beautiful, and highly educated, but did not connect emotionally with her children. She and I had opposite temperaments, and she could never understand me or meet my emotional needs.

Although I always loved God, I entered adulthood—and my marriages—with the thinking that God loved me but expected me to be a big girl and handle as much as possible by myself. I trusted him to take care of me materially, as my parents did, but not emotionally, as my parents could not. In dating and marriage, I tried on my own to get all my emotional needs met, leading to disaster after disaster, divorce after divorce.

## *G*od Cares

Because we're women, because we're human, and because our emotions have been damaged (especially through divorce), we can tend to draw away from men. Many of us loathe to see God as father because of our own fathers' failings, and we even resist seeing God as a man because of the obvious hurt, abandonment, or rejection we have felt. For the past thirty years, women's groups (fueled by genuine and perceived hurts) have caused further harm by nursing a sinful bitterness toward a male-dominated society and a patriarchal church.

Some sisters are more emotionally comfortable with the image of God as mother. From early centuries, a damaged view of men has driven women to worship female deities, the Divine Feminine, and most recently the New Age Goddess within. Women today spend billions of dollars on books, clothing, artifacts, and accessories to connect with the female side of spirituality. They tune in

devotedly to Oprah and embrace the not-really-new feminine religion, trying to free themselves through their own inner power. Unfortunately, their genuine desire for a higher power is often laced with the arsenic of female pride and ego.

Both men and women were wired by the Creator to desire him. Most of us acknowledge the One True God, although some of us have difficulty putting a masculine face on him. Yet there is no separate Divine Goddess. There is one God who possesses all the strengths and none of the weaknesses of both powerful manhood and spectacular womanhood. We were all made in his image. When we reject the masculine, we reject God.

This book is intended to help heal emotional wounds so that hurting little girls in grown-up bodies can climb into their Father's lap. God is like a caring parent, with all the loving female and male strengths; he is warm and soft, strong and powerful. He *can* meet all our needs, and he *doesn't* want us to do it alone.

## *A* Father's Love

I've opened each chapter with a "love letter" from your Heavenly Father. His letter, written just for you, is based on his comforting words found in Scripture. He wants to help you through the ups and downs of divorce and of being single again. In my own journey past divorce and into his arms, I have found that he is calling us all to himself, first as *Father*, then as *Healer*, and finally as the ultimate *Lover* of our hearts and souls.

Because we often respond to our life circumstances according to our damaged emotions rather than according to what we know or believe, I've ended each chapter with a reminder to replace our fear with our faith. This always helps bring me back into my Father's arms. I hope it helps you, too.

*W*hat Does My Fear Say?

*No one will help me through the turmoil. I'm scared, I'm hurting, and I just know it's going to get worse. I feel all alone.*

*W*hat Does My Faith Say?

*My Heavenly Father is always there. He knows exactly what I need and he will help if only I will look up through my tears and call out to him. Whether I whisper or scream, he will hear me, any day, any night, any time at all.*