Excerpt: *Out of the Depths: Your Companion through Divorce*

Chapters by Neil Sharpe, Devotions by Mandy McDow

Chapter 7: Emerging from the Depths

In the first year following divorce, you (and your children) may feel pain, confusion, emptiness, disorientation, or disillusionment. You will encounter many “firsts”—the first of holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries. You may hear that your ex-spouse is in a new relationship or view posts on social media from or about your ex-spouse that make you want to tear your hair out. You many want comfort—and want it now! Year one is hard.

But hold on. Year two is coming, and Hetherington and Kelly’s research says that “life” starts to emerge from the ground after the first year for those who take their advice. First, view your divorce as an opportunity to personally grow and build enhanced, new, and more fulfilling relationships. Second, in the first year of divorce, be very careful about the choices you make because many of them can last a lifetime. Third, after you have reflected on how you got to this place in life, set your sights toward the future by developing priorities and goals you can move toward. These goals are personal and can be around meaningful and purposeful life experiences through work and relationships. Fourth, take an inventory and capitalize on your personal strengths and the resources you have available to you. Fifth, roll with the inevitable bumps and detours; learn from them and discover how resilient you can be. Finally, if you feel you are trapped on the path you are on, you can always choose to travel another one.1

As you move through your journey and are having more emotionally good days than bad ones, don’t be surprised if you get ambushed by the sudden appearance of strong, negative emotions. You may hear a song, smell a familiar smell, view a scene in a movie, touch a piece of fabric, or recognize the taste of food or drink that triggers your memories of your past relationship. In a nanosecond, all of your thoughts and feelings rush forward and overwhelm you. Take a breath, and try not to worry. Our five senses invoke past memories, whether good or bad, and it doesn’t mean that you’ve had a setback. Journal about the event or find a safe friend, family member, or professional counselor to process with. View these “ambushes” as opportunity for continued growth. You have an opportunity to release the past through these emotional experiences.

Eventually, you will begin to accept what happened, reorganize your life, and recover. Acceptance doesn’t mean that when you think about it you will not feel some sadness or hurt; instead, it means the sadness or hurt will not overwhelm you when it resurfaces. In time, you will emerge from these depths transformed, living the life you never knew you wanted.

1. E. Mavis Hetherington and John Kelly, *For Better or For Worse: Divorce Reconsidered* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 108–9.

Devotion

Loneliness

*I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.*

*—Psalm 130:5 (NIV)*

While making myself dinner one night, I reached for a plate that my spouse and I had chosen when we registered for wedding gifts. These plates had been the bearers of meals for us when we had no knowledge of how to prepare food, meals for our infant children when we had no clue how to parent, meals for our guests when we joyfully welcomed them into our home. These plates were more than plates. These plates were the symbols of a common table, shared experiences, time’s passing. I felt the feeling that was growing all-too familiar: a stabbing pain in my heart as the reality of my aloneness took hold. I slowly began to realize that I had a new life-partner: Loneliness.

When I awoke on days without children in the house, it was Loneliness who walked me to the kitchen to make the coffee. When I arrived home in the evening after a long meeting, it was Loneliness who met me at the door. When I thought about what I would do with an unscheduled day, it was Loneliness who texted first to check in on my availability. The truth is, Loneliness is always available. Loneliness is the sibling of Depression, and they will show up, uninvited, and overstay their welcome. I struggled with how to break things off with Loneliness. In the midst of a fist-shaking prayer to God, the resounding answer came, a deep awareness of God’s abiding presence with me: “I am here, dear one. You are never alone.”

*Holy and Ever-Present God, Help me to remember that you love me*

and that you are always with me. You, alone, are enough. Amen.