

DIVORCE

Divorce to Wholeness

THE FREEDOM SERIES **MICHELLE BORQUEZ**
CREATED BY



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Divorce to Wholeness

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The Freedom Series
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Sharon Kay Ball, licensed professional counselor, is an expert in divorce adjustment, having counseled many women and children in these circumstances. When the trauma of betrayal and infidelity rocked her own world, Sharon's own divorce resulted in newfound ability to blend knowledge with personal experience of divorce to help guide others through their own journeys.

Paige Henderson is sought after nationally and internationally as a speaker who loves unlocking the passion in the hearts of women. Paige and her husband, Richard, founded Fellowship of the Sword Ministries [www.fellowshipofthesword.com].

Chapter 1

Sharon's Story

By Sharon Kay Ball

I always believed life was kind of like the ocean, and I was a surfer. All I had to do was pick the right wave, stay balanced, and I would experience the ride of my life, all the while heading toward a beautiful destination. What I chose to ignore was the fact that storms can come without warning over the ocean, and lurking beneath the beautiful blue-green surface are sharks, stingrays, poisonous jellyfish, and other dangers that want to take you down.

I grew up determined to be a good girl. If I did everything right, that was like catching the right

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wave. As long as I didn't rock my surfboard, I'd stay on top of life's waves. My life would be smooth surfing, and anything dangerous would stay far beneath me. Skies would stay blue and filled only with puffy, marshmallow-white clouds, and I would glide straight into my happily ever after. Sound a bit naive? Maybe to some,

**I was a rule-follower
and a goal-setter.**

but to me this was reality. This was my dream, to have the "happily ever after." It's what we all strive for.

What I didn't know is that the picturesque ocean I had spent so long learning to stay atop would try to overtake me and eventually leave me on the shore of hopelessness when I found myself, as a thirty-something, in the midst of the greatest storm I had ever encountered. By this point in my life, I was professionally counseling others whose lives had gone topsy-turvy. Now I found myself in desperate need

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of the very hand of hope and healing I was used to offering.

My life's dream, like many other girls, was to get married, have children, and maintain a career. Pretty normal, right? I was an American woman. I was taught that I could have it all. At an early age, I began to believe that if I just followed the rules, kept on being good, and did things the right way, I would get what I wanted. I was a rule-follower and a goal-setter.

Goal No. 1: Marry Mr. Right.

Goal No. 2: Have three beautiful children.

Goal No. 3: Set up a thriving psychotherapy practice.

My focus on being good and following the rules worked at first. I received praise for being good, I liked the success that came with hard work, and I easily adapted to others' expectations. I began to define myself by my dreams and by how other people saw me, instead of seeking

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the will of my heavenly Father and desiring his approval of me.

On the surface everything was going just fine. Goal No. 1: Check. Goals 2 and 3: Check and double-check.

But after sixteen years of trying everything in my power to hold it together,

My life could not fall apart. It would destroy everything I had ever believed in.

my marriage capsized. When there had been betrayal in the past, I had patched it up, sucked it up, and gone on with our lives. Not just for me, but for our children. My life could not fall apart. It would destroy everything I had ever believed in and known to be true. But it did. My marriage washed completely away. The storm had come, and now I felt as if I would drown in my tears and pain.

We had almost divorced once before when I was pregnant with our third child, but I rode

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the wave of focusing on my marriage at all costs. I was teetering, but I was determined. I took a year off from work, he quit touring, and I kept riding the wave. Betrayal was all around me. I had to fight not to become resentful and bitter, but I knew more than anything that I had to press on ... for me, for the kids, for our families, and God.

I clung to my board even when the waves became tsunami-sized. The betrayal and lies continued, but I could not, would not, give up my dream. What would other people think? Good girls, Christians, overachievers like me did not get divorced. I was a psychotherapist for goodness' sake. Couldn't I get to the bottom of the issues in my own marriage and fix them? The weight of the waves crashing over me began to wear me down. I grew weary by the day. Can you relate? If you have experienced divorce, I am sure you can.

As weak as I was, I continued to grasp and cling

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to any ounce of hope I could find, only to feel as if my head was being pushed under the water over and over again. Papers in hand, attorneys present, I no longer could live in denial. This was my life. This was real. It was happening to me and there was absolutely nothing I could do. My children's tears, the hard reality of my new life as a single mother, quickly jolted me out of my dreams and made me realize that life as I knew it for sixteen years was over. No more happily ever after. I thought in that moment I had lost it all: my marriage, my children's innocence, my chance for love. All gone. All washed up.

God never promised us a perfect life. What he did promise me was that he would never leave me nor would he ever forsake me, even in my darkest moments, my tsunami storms. This was the hope I had to hang on to. The deep blue ocean I had once only known from afar, thinking that avoiding its predators—the sharks, the poisonous jellyfish—would keep me safe

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and happy, was now the very thing God was using to teach me. He taught me that in the depths of the ocean, in the midst of the pain and trials, the things life brings to destroy us are the very things he uses

When my despair could go no deeper, I surrendered.

to reveal his bountiful love for us. No longer would I fear the ocean and its darkness. Instead I have allowed it to wash over me, cleanse me of my own sin, my own prideful nature, and show me that my value is not based on my performance, but it is rooted in Christ's deep love and acceptance of me just as I am.

When my despair could go no deeper, I surrendered. I could not make my marriage work. I could not fix the heartache my children were going through. I had to stop fighting the waves and allow them to wash over me. When I finally did, I was weak and shaken to the core, but in my weakness God became strong. My

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trust had to be in him. I learned to entrust my future to him. I didn't understand it. I couldn't fix it. I didn't feel it was deserved, and yet I have entrusted the outcome of my life completely to him—and this is not a one-time act of surrender, but a daily revelation.

I slowly learned to accept that... my value is not measured by my failures or wounds.

It wasn't instant or easy. As I grieved over the next couple of years, God slowly showed me how to be kind and gentle to myself. I grieved deeply over my shattered dreams, yet he began to reveal the high cost my soul had paid for clinging to what I desired instead of asking my Savior what his plans were for me. I wanted the special man, kids, and career; and maybe God wanted that for me too, but not in my own strength. Not on my terms. Not when I based my success and self-worth on the approval of everyone but him.

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Tenderly, Jesus showed me that I had limits and wounds. My wounds needed to be tended to, but accepting that I was wounded was hard. I saw wounds as failure, and failure deserves punishment. Over time, God taught me through his Word, prayer, and wise counsel how to grieve my losses without taking them out on myself. I slowly learned to accept that bad things do happen to good people and my value is not measured by my failures or wounds.

It's amazing how you can teach something, help other people find those answers, and yet until you experience the depths of trials yourself, you are unable to truly understand what it means to press through to the victory. I am not a victim. I could not control the choices of someone else. I did not want a divorce nor did I want to ever be a single mother. This was not God's will, but God does not force his will on others. He is a gentleman and allows people to make choices. I just never realized someone's choices could impact my life so deeply that it

would change it forever.

I remember my spiritual counselor asking me to close my eyes and tell her where I pictured Jesus. Was he in

**Through this
surrender, I could
finally see that
Jesus had not
abandoned me.**

the room with me or outside the door? Weeping, I responded that I saw Jesus on a boat in the ocean, leaving me as I sat on the beach. That was where I saw Jesus in my life. I felt completely abandoned and alone. This wasn't fair. I had tried to do everything "right." How could he let it all go wrong? In my heart, Jesus had bailed on me. He left me in my darkest hours. He left me because my "right" wasn't good enough for him. I wasn't good enough for him.

What I longed for deep in my soul was Jesus to have rescued me from the tsunami. Where

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was he in the tsunami? Why didn't he save me? I longed for Jesus to hold me and whisper to me, "You are loved and you are beautiful to me no matter what storms you have had to battle through." I didn't feel lovable. I didn't feel I deserved to be loved. Most of all, I didn't want Jesus to abandon me like my husband had.

God's journey of grief for me started out as my enemy but grew to be my closest friend. Grief took me to dark places I feared, but then God used grief to show me he was strong enough to handle it. Grief stripped me of all my "right" ways of doing life so I could learn to let him do it his way.

Through this surrender, I could finally see that Jesus had not abandoned me. He was with me in the waves, watching over me; he was the gentleman giving me space to come to the end of myself. During many dark nights, he watched over me. When I called to him, he would quickly come ashore and join me on

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the desolate beach.

“You are loved, you are beautiful, you are wanted,” he told me again and again. He told me to rest in him. He called me his “good and faithful daughter.” Jesus knew exactly what I needed to hear.

Eventually, my wounds began to heal, and the healing continues. Yes, they left scars, but those scars are good reminders that I don’t ever want to surf under my own strength again, and eventually even scars fade. They are also evidence of the newfound strength I have in him. The strength to be weak, the strength to give up everything so I can have it all, the strength to lose my own grip on life so I could gain it, and most of all the strength to not resist the waves in life that appear to overtake me, because they won’t, not with him carrying me through.

My divorce left me abandoned and alone on the beach of desolation, but Jesus would never

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leave me there. Once I looked to him, he led me back down to the water's edge. And as long as I stepped out humbly and let him lead the way, this time I would walk on waves of living water. My steps were tentative. It's tough to be humble, but I learned to reach out and

When I let go of my dreams, I experienced a reawakening of my soul.

ask close friends and my church for help when I needed groceries. I learned to reach out to my dad at three o'clock in the morning and

be vulnerable enough to just weep over the phone, sometimes unable to articulate anything. In my weakness, God was made strong in me.

When I let go of my dreams, I experienced a reawakening of my soul. I even became grateful for those tsunami-size waves (although truthfully I'd prefer not to be battered by them again) that tried to take me down to the depths. That's the paradox of the gospel, isn't it? When

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we come to the end of ourselves, when we are washed up on the dry beach of desolation, he is always right there, ready to comfort, ready to heal, ready to stretch out his mighty hand and pull you gently back out to sea.