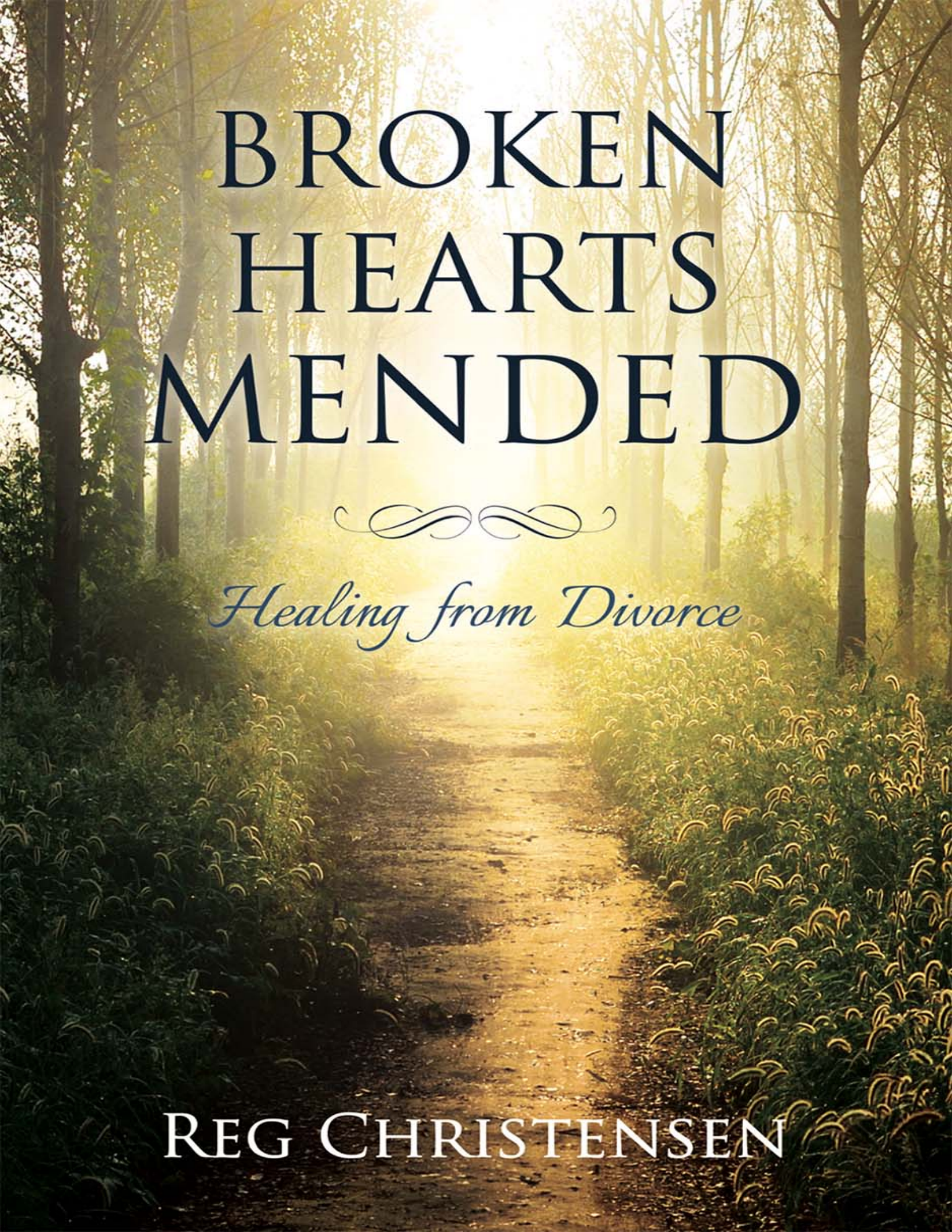
BROKEN HEARTS MENDED
Healing from Divorce
REG CHRISTENSEN

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Praise for

BROKEN HEARTS MENDED

Healing from Divorce

"This is a masterfully written book that everyone should read, both those who are going through difficult trials as well as those who are not, so that they can be more understanding and helpful to those who are. Once started, it is difficult to put down. It is based on sound wisdom and sound gospel principles. The writing style is immediately captivating and keeps the interest level high throughout."

—David J. Ridges, best-selling author of the Gospel Studies Made Easier series and *100 Signs of the Times*

"Reg's book is a wonderful study on how one can deal with and successfully move ahead in life and in the gospel after suffering the devastating experience of divorce. His counsel is the same counsel everyone needs in overcoming that or any other trial we face in life. He teaches us how to live the gospel to the fullest, be forgiving, keep our covenants, love with all our hearts, and to always look forward with faith rather than backward with bitterness and regret. I recommend this tremendously spiritual book to any and all who need to be lifted from despair and heartache of any kind."

—Clair M. Poulson, Latter-day Saint author and justice court judge

"*Broken Hearts Mended: Healing from Divorce* will bring hope to one of life's most difficult challenges. Reg Christensen's personal experience, his spirituality and keen writing ability will bring peace and understanding to the troubled soul. I highly recommend this work to anyone who needs direction as they come to understand and navigate the trials and heartache of divorce."

—Ed Cox, general manager and president of CentraCom and a former Sanpete County commissioner

"The heartache of divorce touches nearly everyone in some way. There are few books that give concrete steps to finding healing and comfort in the Savior and His gospel following divorce. This one does. Brother Christensen writes from experience—sensitively guiding the reader through pain, sadness, and loss to the peace and joy Christ offers. I highly recommend it!"

—Rosemary R. Lind, wife, mother, grandmother, and former teacher and editor

"Despite making vows and covenants, the love story ends, and marriages are terminated in divorce. The resulting shock, pain, uncertainty, and fear of the future leave families with hands hanging down and knees that are weak. Reg does a marvelous job of leading the reader through God-given and time-tested steps to not only survive divorce but to find the joy and happiness that we previously envisioned when we shouted for joy at the opportunity to come here! There can be wonderfully bright days ahead! Days filled with marvelous relationships, stability and peace of mind for all who will trust in the Lord with all their hearts and let him direct their paths! You will want to read and reread this handbook for dealing with divorce."

—Tom Boyer, national and international agricultural leader and consultant

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Acknowledgments

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Also by
Reg Christensen

Fear Not: *Messages of Hope, Healing, and Peace in the Book of Revelation* (2010)

Worthy is the Lamb: *Scriptural Insights of Peace and Joy from Handel's Messiah* (2012)

Joyful Apocalypse: *Unveiling the Messages of Joy and Hope in the Book of Revelation* (2013)

Unlocking Isaiah: *Lessons and Insights that Draw Us to the Savior* (2013)

Regular: *The Saga of a Regular Guy from an Extraordinary Place* (2014)

Essays from the Garden:
Living Water for your Soul (2022)

Preface

Broken Hearts Mended

"I'm just livin' the dream" was the timeworn cliché I recently heard a young store employee say to a customer. I hope he is living his worthy dreams.

A few decades ago, I felt I really was living my dream. I had a blessed childhood, followed by military and missionary service and college education. Midway through my college days, I met a young lady of strong pioneer heritage. We fell in love, married in the temple, and moved to a new place to complete a college degree. Before graduation, our first son was born. We then moved again to begin my desired profession of teaching released-time seminary. We soon purchased a small home on a large lot in a great neighborhood and, with the arrival of three more children, invested our sweat equity by doing almost all of the work ourselves in more than doubling our home size. As I sawed every board and hammered every nail, I did so with the sweet faith that our home would continue to be a refuge for our family from the storms and trials of life.

While teaching full-time, I completed my master's degree and my wife was able to return to school to complete her degree. We gardened, camped, traveled, played in the winter and summer forests, and much enjoyed our family and friends. We struggled to pay our bills but were blessed with all we needed. We worked hard together as a family in operation of a part-time business to supplement our family economy and to teach our children how to work. We served in the Church as we were called to several organizations. Eventually, I was ordained as bishop of my ward and delighted to have our

own teenage children as part of our many youth outings and programs. I truly felt I was living my destiny as I served my family, taught the gospel to the youth of our community, and ministered to our ward members. I share this statement from my personal journal at that time:

> I will conclude the year with this summary statement: My feeling at this time was that I was right in the midst of my destiny. I had a wonderful family . . . and I felt desperately needed by them. I felt much love for [my wife] and was so grateful for our love and relationship. I was square in the trenches of war with Satan through my work as bishop and as seminary teacher. I felt needed, successful, and positive about life. I often had the distinct feeling that the next four or five years of completing my service as bishop and rearing our teenagers to maturity would certainly be the most crucial and important period of my life. My only desire was to be true to my covenants and to succeed in my responsibilities.[1]

And then: "IT IS HEREBY ORDERED, ADJUDGED, AND DECREED THAT the bonds of matrimony heretofore existing by and between the Petitioner and Respondent are hereby dissolved."[2] Our twenty-four-year marriage was over. I was heartbroken—gone from my children and my home, released from my call as bishop, and dismissed from my profession. In my hour of darkness, it seemed that my life had been wasted—everything that I had desired and worked for was gone.[3]

Yes, there is a huge, gaping void here. I will omit the detail of what happened and leave it unexplained since the purpose of this book is to discuss *healing* from divorce, not to share the specifics of how we got to the point of needing to be healed. And although my story may contain many similarities to yours, I am sure there are also many differences. My desire is to share what I consider to be universal principles that will bless all of our lives, no matter what our story or circumstance may be.

Since I have already risked the use of one timeworn cliché, I will venture another—*I feel your pain*. And in this matter of suffering from divorce, for me at least, this is not a mere cliché—it is reality. I am not exaggerating as I speak of seemingly endless nights of sobbing and despair—sometimes wishing the morning would come quickly and other times wishing it would not come at

all. Sometimes I wished I could just die. I wrestled for seemingly endless hours with the repetitive questions that rolled like waves through my soul—How will I survive? What will I do? How will my children survive? Why me? What could and should I have done differently? What are people saying and thinking? Does anyone really know the truth of the matter? Where did I go wrong? Why am I so embarrassed at my status? How dare I go out in public? Why am I avoiding people who have been my truest friends? Will I ever be happily married again? Why do so many familiar experiences and associations now just bring sadness to my heart? Will I ever have an eternal family? Would death of a spouse be an easier trial? Am I losing my mind? Why do some people seem to have such easy lives? What am I supposed to learn from this darkness? Will I ever feel peace? Will my heart ever stop aching? And so on, and so on and so on . . . hour after hour, day after day, week after week, and month after month.[4]

My friend, who had completed his doctoral study on marriage and divorce, informed me that "studies show that it takes seven years to heal from divorce." At first, I did not think I would ever heal. Now that I am a few decades down the road, I wish I could have been fully healed after only seven years. I have now concluded that for me and I suppose for most, *complete* healing will not come in this life, but will, in part, be delayed until "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

However, I am happy to report that much of my broken heart has mended. Now in retrospect I see with increased gratitude the way my Heavenly Father and my Savior held onto me through my darkest days and continue to hold and guide me now as I continue my journey. As I think back to those most difficult and dark months and years at the beginning of my trial and consider with gratitude my blessings from the very outset, I realize now that I *did not* lose everything. My children were and are sealed to me forever. The light of my testimony never faltered. My temple recommend never expired. My eternal hope—although seemingly dim at times—has shone forward as a comforting, guiding, and motivating truth through the years.

If by this writing I can help to encourage you and bless your life by my sharing of true principles, then my goal will be accomplished and my reward will be complete. I hope for nothing more than for those of us who pass through this most challenging trial to hang onto our faith, keep our eternal perspective, and work toward the greatest of all gifts, even eternal life (see D&C 14:7). I sincerely hope that our broken hearts will finally be mended. I believe that they will be.

Notes

1. This statement comes from my personal history, Volume II, Page 6, written at the end of 1995.
2. This citation is from my personal Decree of Divorce from the Fourth Judicial District Court for Utah County, State of Utah.
3. I always knew that the policy of the Church Educational System was that someone divorced could not be employed to teach full time—I just never thought it would apply to me. Also, once we were well into the depth of our struggles, I could no longer function effectively as bishop. The decision for my release came as a mutual agreement between me and my stake president.
4. Even though my marriage was over, I continued, as I had always done, to believe in the principle of marriage, and I actively sought a new companion and married; I will share more details in a later chapter.

One

All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience

Divorce is one of the more severe trials of mortality. I have a few purposes in making such a statement but will first offer a qualifier.

Because we have unique personalities, circumstances, and capacities for learning the lessons of mortality and for bearing trial and pain, we really cannot compare *ourselves* one to another. Our journey through our mortal probation is a highly customized and personalized excursion.

Now having stated that, I repeat that, in my opinion, compared to other *trials*, divorce is one of the more severe trials of mortality. I say this to hopefully elicit a greater degree of empathy from family and friends toward those experiencing divorce. Please be loving and patient for the short and the long terms. I also make my declaration as a sort of preparatory "heads up" to those who may be new to this trial—prepare yourself for the long haul. I have often referred to divorce as "the gift that just keeps on giving."

Although I feel that my own heart is well on the way to being mended, I have also concluded that many heartaches will continue with us until an eternal day beyond our mortal lifetime. For example, the joy you feel for a couple celebrating their golden wedding with all of their happy and well-adjusted children worshipping together in the temple just may also serve as a bitter contrasting reminder of the sadness you may feel at the thought of your own fractured family. You may as well get used to it—it is part of the journey.

I know a young mother of three children who lost her husband to a terrible accident when their youngest daughter was just four months old. She rose above the ashes of despair and married a man who was divorced and had one child. As they are working to blend themselves into a new family, they are experiencing the bitterness of divorce and child custody issues. On multiple occasions, she has lamented to me that the sorrow and challenge of their current trials seem far more severe than her trial at the death of her husband.

I know a woman whose husband abandoned his gospel covenants and left her and their children. Of the dark trial of her divorce, she has remarked, "Once your eternal companion betrays your marriage covenants, all else pales in comparison."

Indeed, you may feel your life is crashing down around you. On the afternoon of January 15, 2009, Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger was in command at takeoff of an Airbus A320 loaded with 155 passengers and crew. After both engines were destroyed by colliding with a flock of Canadian geese, he quickly assessed the loss of power and made preparations for an emergency landing in the Hudson River just off Manhattan. He later described that moment as "the worst, sickening, pit-of-your-stomach, falling-through-the-floor feeling"[1] that he had ever experienced. As he guided the plane into the river channel, Captain Sullenberger gave the command of "brace for impact" which served not only as instruction for the passengers to hang on, but also as code for the crew to execute emergency procedures.

I am confident we can relate to Captain Sullenberger's pit-of-your-stomach feeling. For those of us divorced or divorcing, we need to prepare ourselves for landing as we plunge into the darkness and uncertainty of our new life.

So brace yourself. You may not receive comforting words from the people you would hope to receive them from. You may be harshly judged—or at least it may feel that way. There will not be a powerful, complimentary eulogy offered you for the loss of your spouse. Your children will likely struggle in ways new to them and to you—just love them. Don't expect a lot of flowers. You will not hear the promise that "your family will be together forever because you are sealed in the temple." You will likely continue to hear the plea —and rightly so—to "remember the widow" in act and deed, but don't get your hopes up about the same consideration for those who are divorced. Don't

expect a Christmas basket. People may shun you—probably because they just do not know what to say or do. You may receive expressed or implied counsel that had you done better, this would not be happening to you. You may expect to read articles and hear talks about divorce, but prepare yourself that the message may well be "Don't do it" rather than how to heal from it.

Fortunately all of those under the care of Captain Sullenberger and his crew lived—and so will we. Our path to rescue may not be clear at present, but it will happen. So brace yourself. It will be hard and it will be scary. But your broken heart will heal in time. Hang on and hope on and pray always.

I have learned a great deal about meeting the trial of divorce with faith and courage from Emily Hill Woodmansee, who was born in England in March of 1836. She was the youngest of eleven children and enjoyed the favor and privilege of her good parents—until she received a testimony of the restored gospel. At the age of twelve, she was allowed to accompany her cousin six miles away to the adjoining village of Chalford to hear the preaching of the Mormon elders. Emily received a witness of the spirit that the gospel message was true and, upon returning home from the meeting, she informed her family that she intended to join the Mormons as soon as she was old enough. From that day forth, her parents allowed her no more association with the Mormons and she was left to pursue her newfound faith mostly in private. Finally, in March of 1852, at the age of sixteen, Emily was baptized, along with her sister, Julia.

The girls longed to immigrate to Zion and pursued this goal for the next four years, finally receiving the opportunity to sail on the ship *Thornton* in May of 1856. They left England with mixed feelings of joy and excitement at the prospect of gathering with the saints but with continued sadness and a bitter parting from family and friends who had consistently continued to reject their new faith. The girls traveled under the leadership of Elder James Willie. Upon arrival in America, they found their way to Iowa City and were assigned to travel with the famous ill-fated handcart company led by Captain Willie.

Emily and Julia were party to the full spectrum of hardship and suffering experienced by the Willie handcart company. Fatigue, illness, cold, and hunger were their traveling companions. Sorrow and longings for family along with the peace, joy, and hope of the gospel were undoubtedly their emotional partners on this heroic trek. We can only imagine the relief and gratitude they

felt at the arrival of the rescuing parties. Although they still had a long journey ahead, and many hardships yet to endure, they were on their way to Zion.

After a brief time in the Salt Lake Valley, Emily and Julia each married men who had been part of their rescue party. Julia's marriage was successful and happy. Emily, however, had more dark clouds on her horizon. After the birth of her first child, her husband went to England on a mission. It was all she could do in his absence to provide for herself and her child as they existed on the constant brink of starvation. And then, four years after her husband had departed, he sent word to her that he was not intending to return. He had abandoned his faith and his marriage covenant. He had betrayed her. Emily shared the following:

> After I had worked upwards of four years to maintain myself and little one, my husband himself sent me word that he never intended to set foot in Utah again. And here I must be allowed to say in behalf of myself and other true women who have endured such separations, and to whom, perhaps, it is counted as nothing, no one can realize what such an ordeal is, unless they have passed through it. *All that I had hitherto suffered seemed like child's play compared to being deserted by the one in whom I had placed the utmost confidence,* who himself had fixed an impassable gulf between us by ignoring the very principles by which he had obtained me, leaving myself and little one (for all he knew) to sorrow and destitution. (emphasis added)[2]

Although I cannot relate to the physical sufferings experienced by Emily, I well know the emotional trauma. My friend and bishop, who replaced me as bishop at the time of my release, counseled me that I would someday be grateful for my trials because I would learn so much from them. I was skeptical of his words then but have since realized the prophetic truth he shared with me. And although I do not say or feel that I am grateful that I got divorced, I can say that I have learned by my own experience the truth of his message. I have learned much and gained great empathy for all who suffer divorce. And I feel that the Lord, in His own way, has often orchestrated my healing from divorce and knowledge gained through this trial to the encouragement and

blessing of others. I just know in my heart that the path to eternal life is true and that full and complete healing eventually comes to those who seek it.

I also know that, even though I doubt few, if any of us, would choose divorce as a mortal trial, we are also entitled to the promise of the Lord to His suffering prophet Joseph in Liberty Jail: "all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good" (D&C 122:7). I believe that, if we are faithful to gospel covenants and commandments, our opportunity for growth and development will be commensurate to the depth of our trial.

Notes

1. Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger, interview by Katie Couric, *60 Minutes,* CBS, Feb. 8, 2009.
2. Edith Ivins Lamoreaux, "Sweet Singers of Zion: Life Sketches of Emily Hill Woodmansee and Julia Hill Ivins," *Relief Society Magazine* 8, no. 10 (1921): 565.

Two

Always Keep Your Eternal Perspective

A few weeks prior to our current service assignment in the Holy Land, I contacted a friend of mine and scheduled a breakfast meeting to see how he was doing and to say goodbye. He is a very intelligent man, holding degrees in theology and formerly serving as the pastor of a large congregation in our area. Our friendship began when a mutual friend introduced us. I then accompanied our missionaries for over a year as we taught him. He continues to pursue a serious-minded analysis of our doctrines. At our goodbye meeting, he informed me that he had been contemplating the economic principle of *added value* and seeking to draw a parallel to the possible benefit or added value he could gain from baptism into our Church. He announced that he had drawn a conclusion. I excitedly asked, "And what have you concluded?" His profound but simple answer was, "eternal life."

The Lord said, "And, if you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God" (D&C 14:7). One of my favorite descriptors of eternal life is given by the Lord as He offers a statement of blessing to those who accept and live His gospel: that they go "to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever" (D&C 132:19). "Seeds" refers to posterity—our eternal family.

"But my eternal family has been fractured" may be our lament as we divorce. A friend and former teacher of mine sensed that I may have been feeling that way. When he heard of my divorce, he took time to write me a meaningful and encouraging letter in which he said, "I want to share with you something I heard a member of the Quorum of the Twelve share recently with someone going through a similar struggle— 'Always keep your eternal perspective.' "[1]

As with so many trials and heartaches, if we apply an eternal perspective to them, they become much different than they may seem as we are experiencing them. Yes, the dissolution of your marriage may be final—you and your former spouse may not be together forever in eternity. But with an eternal perspective, we come to remember and better understand that, in due time (whether short or long), eternal life may include a true eternal companion. And we also remember that we are sealed (and if not yet, we may be) to our innumerable ancestors. And we remember that we are sealed (and if not yet, we may be) to our vast line of descendants. And we may remember and understand the capstone sealing of all—that we are sealed (and if not yet, we may be) to our loving Heavenly Mother and Father and unto life eternal, the type of life that They enjoy.

I believe that each child of God has a natural, innate connection to Heavenly Father and a longing for eternal life—life forever with our Heavenly Parents and with our beloved friends and family. As I am writing these words, I have within my view the old city of Jerusalem and the revered sites of the major religions of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. In our assignments here, we interact daily and personally with members of all of these faiths. Like my mother before me, I am a natural "people watcher." I love observing culture, human nature, and personal interaction. I am humbled and grateful for the many expressions of faith that I see—whether it be the elderly woman crawling on her knees to the stone in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, kissing it through her tears because she believes Christ's body was prepared for nearby burial there; or the devout Jew reverently placing his written prayer in the stones of the Western Wall; or the Muslim man humbly responding to the call to prayer by rolling out his prayer mat and prostrating himself before God. My sense is that most of these humble people only desire lasting peace and eternal friendship with all of God's children. (And, granted, there are some seen on the

evening news who pervert their meager understanding of religion to cause harm one to another, but most of the people I see here live in peace and mutual respect).

My heart has been warmed as I have been privileged to see the personal interactions of our employees here at the BYU Jerusalem Center. For example, my soul smiles each time I see the parting embrace and traditional kiss on the cheeks of our two administrative assistant young ladies in the front office—one Jewish and one Palestinian. And I think I have enough experience in people-watching to know that their expressions are heartfelt—they really do love and care for each other. I believe that we as mortals generally innately care for each other and that the better acquainted we become, the greater is our desire for eternal friendship. I believe that most people have a natural, eternal bond to all of their brothers and sisters in the family of God.

I have also been intrigued by those who come to the Holy Land hoping to exactly pinpoint the historic and sacred sites. People ask me, "Was Christ crucified and buried at the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher or at the Garden Tomb site outside the city walls?" I smile and motion toward the more general panorama of Jerusalem and reply, "It happened right here—in Jerusalem."

Let us view our own personal trials in this broad, more eternal way. As we find ourselves deep in the hot flames of the great chasm of despair, feeling that we have failed because our marriage to the one we loved and trusted has ended, we need to "stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord" (Exodus 14:13) and seek understanding of His eternal perspective. Yes, our former spouse may be gone from us, but we have our families, our friends, our broader human family, and our God and our Savior always with us in eternal bonds. And we have a hope of complete healing of our broken hearts and a prospect of eternal life with multitudes of the righteous forever after. Because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ (that happened right here in Jerusalem), we may be rescued from our pain and suffering with assurance that the terrifying gulf between our mortal misery and our eternal felicity is bridged.

Elder Bruce C. Hafen taught, "Sometimes we say that no other success can compensate for our failures in the home. And while it is true that no other success of ours can fully compensate, there is a success that compensates for all

our failures, after all we can do in good faith (see 2 Nephi 25:23). That success is the Atonement of Jesus Christ. By its power, we may arise from the ashes of life filled with incomprehensible beauty and joy."[2]

Although our hearts may seem, at present, to be breaking completely apart, let us hold on in faith and always keep our eternal perspective. Our God who knows all knows us—and He will never forget nor betray nor disappoint.

Notes

1. I still have this letter in my file and in my personal history. In respect of the privacy of my friend, I will keep his name anonymous.
2. Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart: Applying the Atonement to Life's Experiences* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2008), 26.

Three

Honoring Agency

Just as eternal life, or the type of life enjoyed by our Heavenly Father, is the greatest gift of eternity, the gift and exercise of agency is one of the greatest gifts of mortality. These two gifts are inseparably connected to our mortal and our immortal lives.

Thoughts of eternal life can and should inspire us but may also discourage us, since, as with mere mortal perspective, it may all seem so distant. And it may at times seem so unattainable, particularly as we struggle to keep our heads above the flooding waters of despair as we deal with the sorrows of divorce. God's gift of agency, when properly understood and applied, is a life preserver to lift us from our despair and guide us safely forward.

Often in my teaching years, when a student would suggest that an individual could lose his or her agency through poor choices, I have thrown out a challenge for discussion: "Is there anything you could do to deprive me of or to restrict my agency to choose to follow Christ?" Answers have included beating, defaming, imprisonment, deceiving, kidnapping, and even murder. I have not yet received a convincing response. Any or all of those things could restrict my *freedom to act* as I so desire, but not my *ability to choose* what I believe and who I follow. Even in death, it is our gift to continue to follow our Savior and His gospel.

The prophet Lehi taught, "Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to

choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil" (2 Nephi 2:27). Our God-given agency is precious and eternal. It cannot be taken from us. We may not take it from others. "We cannot pray away another's agency."[1]

A few decades ago, my former wife and I, along with two of our children, went on a four-day river trip down the Colorado River. Most of the river is calm and easy, and life jackets are not even worn except in the whitewater. The most treacherous of the whitewater consists of three sets of rapids, appropriately named Big Drop I, II, and III. At this point, the river constricts into the narrow Cataract Canyon as it dramatically drops in elevation. The water rushing down this channel provides one of the most exhilarating whitewater adventures on planet earth.

We did just fine on Big Drop I. However, on the very first wave of Big Drop II, our boat was pushed straight up in the air and back down again—upside down—throwing us out of the boat in all directions.[2] I was thrown far from the boat, so I began to work my way back to it. I did not see my wife, though I later learned that she had surfaced underneath the overturned boat and had then struggled to find an air pocket. As I finally reached the boat, a feeling of terror hit me as I discovered my ankle was caught in its rope. As I frantically worked to free myself from this potential hazard, the force of the waves and the draw of the currents were so powerful that the only way to even hope to keep my head above water was with the help of the life jacket—I know that I could not have survived without it.

As the overturned boat exited the rapids and began to swirl in a side eddy, a few of us worked together to flip the boat upright so our guide could navigate it to the beach. Once on land, we rested and shared our individual experiences and feelings.

So what does this have to do with agency, marriage, and divorce? Both my wife and I chose willingly to go on this adventure—neither of us was pressured in any way. We knew beforehand that there would be risks and challenges, although we could not imagine how intense and frightening the actual time in the rapids would be. We gained great assurance from the skill and experience of our guides and the knowledge that a boat-flipping was a very rare event. We were properly prepared for the dangers—we heeded the training and

requirement to wear approved life jackets, properly installed. We do not know for sure what caused the boat to flip. Had we known, we may have prevented it—but it is history now and we cannot change it. Once we were in the water, if I could have seen or found my wife, I would have tried to help her, but the only thing I could do while in the rapids was try to stay alive and help those I could see. After we had rested and regained control of the boat, we then approached Big Drop III with much more experience and caution than previously applied (even though we were cautious always—but now we were cautious at a higher level of experience).[3]

We each have the absolute gift of personal agency and are free to choose whether or not to accept and live the gospel of Jesus Christ. We each choose whether or not we will marry. We are free to attempt to persuade and lead others to follow Christ, but we cannot force anyone to believe as we believe. The deepest yearnings of our soul may have positive influence with another, but God will not allow circumvention of one person's agency for the enhancement of another's. We may bind ourselves together by vows and covenants, but we continue in the retention of our individual agency. Hearts may change. We may work really hard to be worthy of and to influence the love of another toward us, but we can never force it. Love is a positive affirmation of individual choice.

If someone who knew of my described river adventure were to ask my advice about taking such a trip themselves, I could offer much helpful advice (probably beginning with, "Do not go"). But if I could only tell them one thing, it would be, "Wear your life jacket in the whitewater!" If I could only offer one statement of counsel about the journey of our mortal lives, I would say, "Wear your fine linen—it is your spiritual life jacket!" Let me explain.

In the Revelation of John, one of the most hoped-for high events of all time is described—even the marriage supper of the Lamb. Christ as the Bridegroom has prepared the way for His bride—the righteous Saints—to be united with Him in eternal glory forever in the kingdom of the Father. John states, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: *for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints*. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are

called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God" (Revelation 19:7–9; emphasis added).

The key to binding our eternal, God-given potential to our mortal, fallen lives and choices, then, is to use our glorious gift of agency to don the fine linen of righteousness—"to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men" (2 Nephi 2:27). We cannot choose for another, but we can choose for ourselves. And as we righteously do so, we may better influence and help others in making correct choices.

And although agency is a divine, eternal gift, we are accountable for how we use it. If we misuse it, we will be held responsible before God. The First Presidency has taught this in relation to families in particular: "We warn that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God."[4]

I have long appreciated the counsel of Joseph Smith as he dismissed the members of Zion's Camp after they were unable to complete their desired objectives:

> But thus it is: what men and great movements might attain to is often defeated, sometimes by the actions of enemies, sometimes by the lack of devotion and faith and energy on the part of those into whose hands great enterprises are committed. While God's general purposes will never ultimately be defeated by man, still upon each side of the general purposes of God a margin somewhat wide seems to have been left in which those both for and against those purposes may write what history they please—one that will meet with the approval of God, or one that will meet only with condemnation—herein is the agency of man. But in the exercise of that agency God's purposes will not be thwarted, for man's agency will not extend so far as that; if it did, it would interfere with God's agency and decrees.[5]

If you want to heal from divorce, it is necessary to properly understand the interplay between our agency and the agency of others. We must learn to honor the agency of others. God does. He allows our companions to deceive

us, mistreat us, fall out of love with us, break their promises with us, and divorce us if they so please.

We must also learn to honor our own agency and to accept the consequences thereof. We may choose to repent of our sins—or not. We may choose to love and serve those who do not love us—or not. We may choose to forgive others —or not. We may choose to pick ourselves up from the ashes of our broken lives—or not. Once we come to understand and appreciate the priceless gift of our agency and how to properly exercise it to effect our promise of eternal life, we are then free to experience the healing of our broken hearts.

Notes

1. Robert D. Hales, " 'Come, Follow Me' by Practicing Christian Love and Service," *Ensign*, Nov. 2016.
2. At the point of traversing the three major rapids, our two children were in a different boat than us and made it through without incident. They later jokingly complained that they had been cheated out of the full adventure.
3. One of my life mottos is *Good judgment comes from experience. Experience comes from poor judgment*. I do not know the original source of this statement, but when I heard it, I adopted it as my own.
4. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
5. Joseph Smith Jr, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1909), 2:123.

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