

Finding Hope After Divorce



Kay Arthur

4minute
BIBLE STUDIES

Finding Hope After Divorce

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PRECEPT MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL



WATERBROOK
P R E S S

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This small-group study is for people who are interested in learning for themselves more about what the Bible says on various subjects, but who have only limited time to meet together. It's ideal, for example, for a lunch group at work, an early morning men's group, a young mothers' group meeting in a home, a Sunday-school class, or even family devotions. (It's also ideal for small groups that typically have longer meeting times—such as evening groups or Saturday morning groups—but want to devote only a portion of their time together to actual study, while reserving the rest for prayer, fellowship, or other activities.)

This book is designed so that all the group's participants will complete each lesson's study activities *at the same time*. Discussing your insights drawn from what God says about the subject reveals exciting, life-impacting truths.

Although it's a group study, you'll need a facilitator to lead the study and keep the discussion moving. (This person's function is *not* that of a lecturer or teacher. However, when this book is used in a Sunday-school class or similar setting, the teacher should feel free to lead more directly and to bring in other insights in addition to those provided in each week's lesson.)

If *you* are your group's facilitator, the leader, here are some helpful points for making your job easier:

- Go through the lesson and mark the text before you lead the group. This will give you increased familiarity with the material and will enable you to facilitate the discussion with greater ease. It may be easier for you to lead the group through the instructions for marking the text, if you, as a leader, choose a specific color for each symbol you mark.

- As you lead the group, start at the beginning of the text and simply read it aloud in the order it appears in the lesson, including the “insight boxes,” which appear throughout. Work through the lesson together, observing and discussing what you learn. As you read the Scripture verses, have the group say aloud the word they are marking in the text.
- The discussion questions are there simply to help you cover the material. As the class moves into the discussion, many times you will find that they will cover the questions on their own. Remember, the discussion questions are there to guide the group through the topic, not to squelch discussion.
- Remember how important it is for people to verbalize their answers and discoveries. This greatly strengthens their personal understanding of each week’s lesson. Try to ensure that everyone has plenty of opportunity to contribute to each week’s discussions.
- Keep the discussion moving. This may mean spending more time on some parts of the study than on others. If necessary, you should feel free to spread out a lesson over more than one session. However, remember that you don’t want to slow the pace too much. It’s much better to leave everyone wanting more than to have people dropping out because of declining interest.
- If the validity or accuracy of some of the answers seems questionable, you can gently and cheerfully remind the group to stay focused on the truth of the Scriptures. Your object is to learn what the Bible says, not to engage in human philosophy. Simply stick with the Scriptures and give God the opportunity to speak. His Word *is* truth (John 17:17)!

FINDING HOPE AFTER DIVORCE

I want a divorce.” You may have heard it. You may have said it. Either way, the words speak of failure—and failure is hard to bear, hard to excuse, hard to accept, and hard to get over.

Some people say those words—“I want a divorce”—are more devastating than learning of a mate’s death. Death brings marriage to an end; there’s no recourse, no reversal. But in divorce, you both still live. And you have to live with that!

If the words came from your mate, then more than likely you feel faulted, rejected, scorned, cast away.

Questions flood your mind: *What am I going to do? How will I survive? Who will take care of me? What about the children? Whose side will they take? What will people think of me? What does God think of me?*

When you try to look ahead to the future, all you can see are more questions:

Am I doomed to be alone forever? Damaged goods?

Will God ever again use me in ministry, or will I always wear a scarlet D in Christian circles? What will people in the church think? How will they treat me?

And what about our friends? Whose friends will they be? Will aloneness define my life?

We could fill pages with question upon question—some rational, some irrational. Questions that keep you awake, that won't go away, that keep you wondering how you will ever get out of bed and do life in the morning.

So how can you get through this? Live with it?

First and foremost, you need to know that if you are a child of God, believe it or not, you are beloved of God. He says it over and over again in His book, the Bible.

And if you're not His child yet, then the reason you have this book in your hands is because God wants to lavish His love on you. He wants to call you *beloved*, even though you may feel there is nothing lovable about you.

Second, you need to know that divorce does not take God by surprise. Because God is God, because He is omniscient—all knowing—He knew your divorce was coming. And although He does not like divorce because of the pain and damage it brings to our lives, God knows that, because of the hardness of our hearts, some will choose the path of divorce.

However, with God, that's not the end. God describes Himself in the Bible as the divine Potter, the One who is able to reshape your life into a vessel of beauty. He'll put you back on His potter's wheel, rewet your clay with the water of His Word, and shape you into a man, a woman of praise, renown, and glory if you will become putty in His hands.

In Psalm 107:20, God offers to send His Word and heal us, to deliver us from our destructions if we will listen to what He says, believe Him, trust Him, obey Him. He is a redeemer, the God of all hope.

Having experienced personally the devastating effects of divorce and an immoral lifestyle, I can assure you that your life is not over. Damaged, yes, but not ruined if you will take God at His word and cling to Him.

The question is, are you willing to give it a try? I pray so.

Over the next six weeks you are going to learn much from God's Word and from those in your group who take God at His Word. God tells us two are better than one (Ecclesiastes 4:9), and though you've lost or are losing your mate, you are sure to find a sister, a brother to walk through this with you as take God's hand and follow His path.

WEEK ONE

Divorce hurts. Even if we pursued it, the death of a marriage just plain hurts. And you wonder, *Will I ever be whole again? Will these wounds ever heal?*

When a marriage is destroyed by divorce, you don't simply return to being who you were before you were married. God's Word tells us in marriage two become one flesh (Matthew 19:6). Divorce destroys that oneness, resulting not in two whole individuals but in one flesh torn in pieces, often leaving raw, tender wounds. Just the thought of your loss brings wincing pain. Consequently you may be tempted to ignore those wounds, to cover them up with something or someone—anyone!

But covering your wounds won't bring healing, and when wounds are not properly treated, they fester. Eventually infection will set in.

This, beloved of God, is why we must look to the Word of God for healing. And that is what we are going to do this first week. We'll look at some raw emotions, see how they are to be handled, and find hope for the rest of this day—and for all of your tomorrows.

OBSERVE

Leader: Read *Jeremiah 17:14 and Psalm 107:19–21* aloud, slowly. Have the group say aloud and mark each key word or phrase as directed:

- Underline every pronoun referring to ***the person*** and ***the people***, including ***me, I, my, they, and them.***

JEREMIAH 17:14

Heal me, O LORD,
and I will be healed;
save me and I will be
saved, for You are my
praise.

PSALM 107:19–21

19 Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses.

20 He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.

21 Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, and for His wonders to the sons of men!

- Mark every reference to **the Lord**, including the pronouns **You, He, and His**—with a triangle, like this: 

As you read the text, it's helpful to have the group say the key words aloud as they mark them. This way everyone will be sure they are marking every occurrence of the word, including any synonymous words or phrases. Do this throughout the study.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking *I* and *me* in Jeremiah 17:14?
- Why did you learn about the people—the *they* and *them*—in Psalm 107?
- What did you learn from marking the references to the Lord in both passages?

- According to Psalm 107, where does deliverance come from?

- Does that tell you anything? If so, what?

- What is your pain? Do you carry guilt because of a failed marriage? Or can you not forget or forgive the stinging words, the accusations? What do you most want to be healed from, saved from, delivered from?

***Leader:** Ask if someone would be brave enough to break the ice by sharing an answer to the preceding question. Give them a few moments. If no one shares, that is fine, as they may not yet feel comfortable with one another.*

***Leader:** Now have the group read Jeremiah 17:14 aloud as a request to the Lord.*

PSALM 88:1–9, 18

1 O LORD, the God of my salvation, I have cried out by day and in the night before You.

2 Let my prayer come before You; incline Your ear to my cry!

3 For my soul has had enough troubles, and my life has drawn near to Sheol.

4 I am reckoned among those who go down to the pit; I have become like a man without strength,

5 Forsaken among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom You remember no more, and they are cut off from Your hand.

OBSERVE

Leader: *Read Psalm 88:1–9, 18 very slowly so that God's words might sink in. Have the group...*

- mark every reference to **the Lord**, including pronouns, with a triangle.
- underline every **I, my, me**.

INSIGHT

Sheol is basically a reference to the grave, to death.

Selah is a word found in the Psalms that may indicate a pause, a crescendo, or a musical interlude. When you see it in a psalm, take it as a reminder to pause and consider what you just read.

Leader: *Read through the verses again, slowly.*

- *This time, have the group place a check mark like this ✓ over any words or phrases that relate to them, that describe how they feel.*

DISCUSS

- In what ways, if any, can you relate to the experience of the person speaking in these verses?
- Who is the psalmist talking to, and why?
- What does this tell you about the psalmist's beliefs about God?
- Does this shock you? Does it bring questions to your mind? If so, what are they?

6 You have put me in the lowest pit, in dark places, in the depths.

7 Your wrath has rested upon me, and You have afflicted me with all Your waves. Selah.

8 You have removed my acquaintances far from me; You have made me an object of loathing to them; I am shut up and cannot go out.

9 My eye has wasted away because of affliction; I have called upon You every day, O LORD; I have spread out my hands to You....

18 You have removed lover and friend far from me; my acquaintances are in darkness.

INSIGHT

When you study the Old Testament, you encounter scripture after scripture that testifies to the sovereignty of God, to the fact that God rules supremely over all. In Deuteronomy 32:39 God says, “See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me; it is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, and there is no one who can deliver from My hand.”

The name of God that testifies to His sovereignty is *EI Elyon*, which means “the Most High God.” This name appears frequently in the book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, after being greatly humbled by God, declared, “My reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation.... He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have you done?’” (Daniel 4:34–35).

Isaiah, led by God, recorded a prophecy written over one hundred years before the birth of Cyrus, a future king of the Medo-Persian Empire. In that prophecy he addressed that future monarch by name, once again confirming God's sovereignty: "Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His annointed..., 'I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; that men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these'" (45:1, 5-7).

When you understand that God is sovereign, you realize you are not in the hands of fate, another human being, the devil, or mother nature. No, it is Father God who holds you in His loving hands, and once you get to know Him and live accordingly, you'll experience a peace that can carry you through any and every circumstance of life—even divorce.

PSALM 6:1–10

¹ O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your wrath.

² Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am pining away; heal me, O LORD, for my bones are dismayed.

³ And my soul is greatly dismayed; but You, O LORD—how long?

⁴ Return, O LORD, rescue my soul; save me because of Your lovingkindness.

⁵ For there is no mention of You in death; in Sheol who will give You thanks?

⁶ I am weary with my sighing; every

OBSERVE

David endured a great deal in his lifetime. Trials, testings, failures (including in marriage)—as well as triumphs—marked his days both before and after becoming the king of Israel. If you study David's life, you'll see that he believed and embraced the fact that God is sovereign. Even when his enemies caused him pain, David knew God still reigned supreme. Let's look next at a psalm in which David asked the Lord for healing.

Leader: Read Psalm 6:1–10 very slowly. As you do, have the group...

- *put a triangle over every reference to **the Lord**.*
- *underline every reference to **David**—every **me, I, my**.*
- *put a big check mark by **any verse that you relate to or that you want the Lord to do for you**.*

DISCUSS

- What was David's state in verses 1–7?

- What did David ask God to do?
- In what ways do you relate to David's status and requests of God?
- What shift do you notice in verse 8? Describe the change in David's perspective as recorded in verses 9–10. What does this tell you?
- If we compare this psalm to the practice of journaling, how does the day's journal begin and how does it end?
- Many psalms follow the same pattern. What might be some of the benefits of pouring out your heart to God on paper?

night I make my bed swim, I dissolve my couch with my tears.

⁷ My eye has wasted away with grief; it has become old because of all my adversaries.

⁸ Depart from me, all you who do iniquity, for the LORD has heard the voice of my weeping.

⁹ The LORD has heard my supplication, the LORD receives my prayer.

¹⁰ All my enemies will be ashamed and greatly dismayed; they shall turn back, they will suddenly be ashamed.

JOB 1:1–3, 13–22

¹ There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.

² Seven sons and three daughters were born to him.

³ His possessions also were 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants; and that man was the greatest of all the men of the east...

¹³ Now on the day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house,

OBSERVE

The book of Job details the account of a man who suffered excruciating pain emotionally, physically, and mentally—so much so that at one point Job wished he had never been born.

Maybe you feel that way yourself. Let's see what we can learn from Job that might give you hope for a better future in spite of your current anguish.

Leader: *Read Job 1:1–3, 13–22 aloud.*

- *Have the group underline every reference to **Job**—every **man, him, his, he, you, your.***

DISCUSS

- Summarize what happened to Job in this single day.

14 a messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them,

15 and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

16 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, “The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

17 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, “The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels

and took them and slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

18 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, “Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house,

19 and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped.

- How did Job respond?

- What does this tell you about Job's faith, his relationship with God?

OBSERVE

This was not the end of Job's troubles.

Leader: Read Job 2:1–3:1 aloud. Have the group do the following:

- Mark every reference to **Satan** with a pitchfork, like this: 
- Underline every reference to **Job**, including pronouns.
- Circle the references to **Job's wife**.
- Draw a wavy line under every reference to **Job's friends**, like this: 

21 He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."

22 Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

JOB 2:1—3:1

1 Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD.

2 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Then Satan answered the

- What happened to Job's body?

flesh; he will curse You to Your face.”

6 So the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life.”

7 Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

- Was Job's wife any comfort? What did she suggest?

8 And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes.

9 Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!”

10 But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women

- To what extent can you relate?

them tore his robe and they threw dust over their heads toward the sky.

13 Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great.

3:1 Afterward Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth.

OBSERVE

Have you ever been so miserable that you wanted to die?

Leader: Read Job 6:8–10 aloud.

- *Have the group underline every pronoun that refers to **Job**, who is speaking in this passage.*

JOB 6:8–10

8 Oh that my request might come to pass, and that God would grant my longing!

9 Would that God were willing to crush me, that He would

loose His hand and cut me off!

¹⁰ But it is still my consolation, and I rejoice in unsparing pain, that I have not denied the words of the Holy One.

JOB 19:23–27

²³ Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book!

²⁴ That with an iron stylus and lead they were engraved in the rock forever!

²⁵ As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth.

²⁶ Even after my skin is destroyed, yet

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking the pronouns that refer to Job? What did he want God to do?
- What was Job's consolation?
- What does that tell you about Job?

OBSERVE

Job's pain was unsparing, yet he would not take his own life. Why?

Leader: Read Job 19:23–27 aloud. Have the group...

- underline every reference to **Job**—every **me, I, my**.
- mark every reference to **Redeemer**, including the pronouns **He** and **His**, with a cross: †

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking the references to Job?

- What did you learn from marking references to his Redeemer?
- Was there hope for Job? If so, from whom or what?
- Is there hope for you? If so, in whom or in what is your hope found?

OBSERVE

We always want to know how a story ends, don't we? The final outcome makes all the difference. Surely after divorce, you've wondered what will become of you, of your family? If you have hope, if you know there's a future, it's easier to persevere.

So what was the end of Job's story? Why did God put it in His book, the Bible? What is His lesson for you?

from my flesh I shall see God;

27 Whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes will see and not another.

JOB 42 (SELECTED VERSES)

1 Then Job answered the LORD and said,

2 "I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted....

6 Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes."...

10 The LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the LORD increased all that Job had twofold.

11 Then all his brothers and all his sisters and all who had known him before came to him, and they ate bread with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversities that the LORD had brought on him. And each one gave him one piece of money, and each a ring of gold.

12 The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning....

Leader: Read aloud the selected verses from Job 42 and have the group...

- underline every reference to **Job**, including pronouns.
- put a triangle over every reference to **the Lord**, including pronouns.
- draw a cloud around the word **purpose**, like this: 

DISCUSS

- What had Job learned about God, and what did it prompt him to do?
- What did the Lord do on Job's behalf, according to verse 10? When did God do this? In other words, what preceded His action?
- Have you prayed for your former spouse? (If not, read Job 42:7–10 sometime soon.)
- Look at all the places where you marked references to the Lord. What did God do for Job?

- How does the end of Job's story compare with the beginning? What or who brought about this outcome?
- What, if anything, have you observed in this true account that might give you hope after divorce?

OBSERVE

Are you thinking, *That was Job's end; what about me?* Let's read what the Bible says to you through the apostle Paul's words in Romans 8.

Leader: *Read Romans 8:28–31 aloud. Have the group say aloud and...*

- *underline every reference to **those who love God**, including all the **those, these, we, and us**.*
- *mark the phrase **according to His purpose** with a cloud.*

16 After this, Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons and his grandsons, four generations.

17 And Job died, an old man and full of days.

ROMANS 8:28–31

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the

image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

INSIGHT

The term *called*, in Romans 8:28, 30, is synonymous with being saved, being a follower of Christ. Those God calls He justifies—declares righteous—and glorifies. They will live with Him forever and ever in their immortal bodies.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking the references to “those who love God”?
- What did you learn from marking *purpose*, both here in Romans and in the previous passage, Job 42:2?
- Did Paul say all things are good? What exactly is the promise of Romans 8:28?
- Would this promise cover even our wrong choices and the consequences they bring? What does the word *all* include?

- Who can claim the promise of Romans 8:28? Is it for everyone, or are there qualifications? If so, what are they?
- Sin brings a consequence, but how might God use the consequence to conform us “to the image of His Son”?
- What if you made a mistake and got a divorce when you knew you shouldn’t? Does this promise still apply to you?
- How can your divorce be used to conform you to the image of Jesus?
- Does Romans 8:28 provide an excuse for sin? Why or why not?
- How does it change our perspective to think that God in His sovereignty might have a purpose in allowing something as bad as divorce?
- How might this give you hope?

WRAP IT UP

What kept Job alive in his pain was the knowledge of his Redeemer. Job's Redeemer lived, and Job knew he would someday see Him face to face in his brand-new resurrected body. Glorification was coming. That is why Job was able to exult in pain unsparing, why Job determined he would not deny the words of his God (Job 6:10).

Because Job persevered, he came to know God and himself even better. And God blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning.

And what about you, beloved of God? How will you handle your pain? How will you get through your divorce? Will you believe God? Will you cling to His promise that this will work together for your good and His glory as you are conformed more and more into the image of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ?

If you are God's child, His promise is yours. If you are not His, He wants you to be. This is why God sent His only begotten Son, born of a virgin, born without sin, into this world to pay for your sin in full by dying on a cross. Jesus came to redeem you from sin and death and offer you forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. Think about it. Talk to God about it—and don't miss next week's study.

In the meantime, I invite you to visit our website where we've set up a special page for this study: <http://precept.org/divorce>. There you'll find an online community where you can participate by sharing with others the hope you're finding in God's Word and by praying for other individuals who are enduring the pain of divorce.