



Telling...

A conversation with Sharon

Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes
grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief.

—PSALM 31:9

Bedtime—how I dread it. It reminds me that I am utterly alone.

I pile several books and my Bible on *his* side of the bed, hoping to somehow diminish the sense of the vacancy there. It does help a little. Lifting the covers, I climb between the powder-blue sheets and arrange three large pillows behind me. “You nestle into the covers like a cat,” my husband used to tell me. It’s at night when I miss him the most, when the thoughts I have kept at bay during the day start shouting and become impossible to control.

Reading the Bible helps, so I open to the Psalms and chew on a few. I underline and highlight a few verses. I draw stars and teardrops in the margins.

I’ll journal tonight, I decide. It helps to put things in perspective. In fact, I’ll write about seeing Lisa Hayes at the Christian bookstore today. It was extremely awkward, and I can’t get it out of my mind.

And so I begin.

Oh, no! You see me and head my direction, smiling. We haven't seen each other for a long time, and you have no idea of the tragedy in my life. You might ask me how my husband is. What will I say? How will I start?

"You haven't heard?" or maybe just, "We're not together anymore." Or how about, "Our thirty-year marriage just ended. It's a terrible thing." I would rather keep it a secret—no explanations, no history of events, no words spoken, no hint of my devastation interlaced with shame.

But that wouldn't be fair to you, would it? You knew us as a solid, forever couple. We smiled in public, went to church, led Bible studies, and showed just the right amount of relationship. No one would have guessed there was a crisis in our home.

So now I have to watch your face change from a smiley, "Hello, so nice to see you," to palpable shock and disbelief. You won't know what to ask, and I won't know what to tell you. "Say as little as possible," I think to myself. I know you admire him—maybe more than you admire me.

Yes, your world will be rocked by this furnace blast of truth, and you might even think, "If it can happen to them, it could happen to me." And then, despite everything I have suffered, you will want me to comfort you.

"Grief work is exhausting," I tell myself as I change my position in bed. I set my pen and journal aside so I can tuck myself in under the quilts. I have discovered that a person needs several blankets when they sleep alone.

It must be getting late. I have been journaling for a long time. I crank my neck to look at the clock, and the red neon numbers tell me it's after midnight. I wish I could sleep, but there is no use trying yet—not with my mind still obsessing about today.

Lisa and I once went to the same church, but she moved away. A few years later I also stopped attending that church—too embarrassed to face people after the divorce. My husband and I had been members for more than ten years. Established as leaders, we had multitudes of friends. He taught adult classes, and our kids attended Sunday school and youth group. I was the music director, among other things, and over the years the choir grew in number from thirteen to thirty-eight.

But everything changed when the news hit that we were getting a divorce. If a bomb had exploded in the center of the sanctuary, it would not have been more of a shock. People were incredulous, and rightly so. We never let on that there was trouble. We had not dared; it wasn't the acceptable thing to do.

I have since taken a job as organist in another church because I desperately need the money. That means I'm committed on Sundays, and it's just as well. Not that anyone would have gossiped or thought ill of us. Their concern is genuine, but they have no way of knowing what is true and what isn't.

And perhaps I'm a little paranoid too. I think of the psalm that says, "If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God" (Ps. 55:12–14).

Telling is perhaps the hardest thing a person who is going through a divorce has to do. No doubt it is difficult for the widowed too. It is one thing to cope with the trauma, but having to inform your friends adds another whole level of excruciating pain. Someone should write

a book about what people go through when they suddenly find themselves alone.

I glance at the clock again. It's 1:00 a.m., and sleep still eludes me. Did I just lose a whole hour staring into space? Evidently.

I close my Bible and with a loving caress, hug it to my chest. There has been a physical ache inside me for months, and holding my threadbare Bible close feels like getting a heart massage—as if the words within are warm, alive, and medicinal. “It’s not a cliché,” I tell myself. “God’s Word really does soothe the weary soul.” I decide to sleep with my Bible again tonight.


But I’m still wide-awake. Maybe I’ll get sleepy if I write some more. So I pick up my journal and retrieve the pen from the folds of the thick blue bedspread. OK, where was I? Oh, yes... Lisa.

“You are a dear friend,” I say to Lisa, “but I haven’t told very many people. Please don’t be offended that I didn’t call.”

She still will not be dissuaded, and she forces me to give her an explanation. As I speak, I wonder how much I say is too much. Do I sound bitter... angry... resentful? Do I appear unreasonable or wrong... crazy, out of whack? Is my narration believable—or not?

The more I say, the worse it sounds. How little can I tell and still pass your exam?

After a while, I stop talking and look down at my feet. You stare at me long and hard, and you look as if you’re wondering many things. I must hurry to a conclusion, I decide. I need to be done with this recital. Remembering has made me feel dreadful—my stomach hurts, my mouth is dry, my knees are wobbling, and I can tell the blood has drained from my face. It will take several hours before I feel normal again.



I stumble to an end and hope I said enough. I wonder if I have shown the right amount of grief. Do I dare let you see how I am beginning to heal? Probably not.

We say good-bye, and as you leave, I become aware that I wrecked your cheery mood. You walk away toward the checkout near the door. As you go, I wonder what judgments you will decree...whom you will tell...what you will say.

There! I got that out of my system and onto the page. It feels good.

I glance at the clock and see it's 2:30 a.m. No wonder I'm tired! I lean over, turn off the light, and get cozy under the covers.

"Thank You for getting me through the day, Lord," I whisper over and over to Him. I pray myself to sleep.



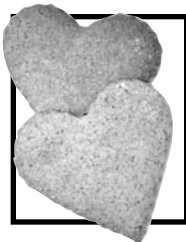
Guiding Principles

A Pinch of Salt

- ▶ Read Scripture, read Scripture, read Scripture. Cling to God's truth, and revel in His comforting love. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28–30).
- ▶ Journal, journal, journal. It's very therapeutic to get your thoughts and feelings out of your head and onto

the page. “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7).

- ▶ Be careful whom you tell about your situation. Try not to get swept away by your emotions and say things that should be kept private.
- ▶ Ask God to forgive you for places where you failed during your marriage. None of us are perfect, even if we like our friends to believe that we are. In turn, guard your former husband’s reputation, and be careful what you say about him. We are to forgive others in the same way that we have been forgiven. “If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matt. 6:14–15, NLT).
- ▶ If you are the friend of someone who is grieving, be careful not to grill them for details. Offer understanding and unconditional love instead. In the case of divorce, don’t make judgments about who was right and who was wrong. (Life usually isn’t that simple, and it only leads to gossip.) Offer your condolences and specific assistance if it’s needed in some way. And remember to pray for your grieving friends; they need it!



Homemade With Heart

One of Sharon’s Favorite Recipes

A warm bowl of soup is the perfect solution if you don’t have much of an appetite. During the months I was grieving, I often ate soup. It’s easy to make, reasonable in cost, and nutritious. This recipe is

quick because you don't have to chop any vegetables, and since it makes a large batch, you can freeze some for later.

Savory Vegetable Stew

- 1 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 Tbsp. minced garlic
- 2 lbs. stew meat (or round steak)
- 2 qts. V8 100% Vegetable Juice (low sodium)
- 1 pkg. (16 oz.) frozen vegetables
(such as carrots, green beans, mixed garden vegetables)
- 2 cans (15 oz.) diced potatoes, drained
(or peel and dice 3–4 medium potatoes)
- 1 envelope dry beef-onion soup mix
- 1 Tbsp. dried parsley
- ¼ tsp. crushed red pepper (optional)
- Black pepper to taste

Heat olive oil and garlic in a six-quart saucepan. Cut stew meat (or round steak) into one-inch cubes and add to saucepan. Sauté until meat is brown.

Add the remaining ingredients to the meat mixture. Bring to a boil. Cover and simmer for 3–4 hours, stirring occasionally. Serve hot with crusty bread.

Freeze portions in small containers for later use.



Now for an Update

With a Cherry on Top

While keeping a journal, Sharon discovered she liked to write. She joined a writers' group and started publishing articles in Christian

newsletters and magazines. Despite her previously held belief that the stigma of divorce would ruin any future plans for serving God, she has a speaking and writing ministry today that offers help and encouragement to many. Sharon is very active in her church in deliverance and marriage ministries and is past president of the Minnesota Christian Writers Guild. Visit her Web site at www.sharonknudson.com.

Sharon has two grown daughters, three grandchildren, and a wonderful son-in-law. Her story called “Those Cherry Macaroons” (see chapter 6) talks about the unexpected way that God blessed her with a husband. Now God is using her days of “telling” to help and strengthen others.