

Hope and Healing after divorce

**At age 25,
I was divorced.
How would I heal
from the pain?**

Name withheld

When I first met Andy (name has been changed), I was captivated by his charm. He was the quintessential gentleman—responding with “yes, ma’am,” opening car doors, and sending me flowers. He was funny, handsome, and a recently returned missionary. I quickly fell in love and agreed to marry him. Like many young women, I had thought often about how wonderful a temple marriage would someday be. My hope of an ideal marriage with Andy quickly shattered the night of our wedding when the abuse began.

I endured a three-year nightmare of verbal, emotional, sexual, and physical abuse. Andy controlled what I ate and isolated me from friends and family. He blamed me for most of our problems and said, untruthfully, that I was crazy, fat, and irresponsible. Slowly, I began to believe him. I thought that

if I only changed myself, he would be happy and our marriage would last. But my efforts were never enough.

I clung to the gospel, trying to do all I could to save my marriage because I didn’t realize how abusive the situation was. I prayed desperately for help and continually turned to Heavenly Father because I had no one else to talk to.

I kept going to the temple during those years, usually alone, pleading with the Lord for direction on how to save my marriage. Andy and I discussed starting our family, but then the abuse started escalating, and I discovered that he had addictions and was texting another woman. I began to see that our problems couldn’t all be my fault, as he said. I went to the temple nearly every day for a week but continued to feel overwhelmed and chaotic when I thought about whether or not I should stay in my

marriage. Things changed when I finally went to the temple with the decision to file for divorce and leave my marriage; I was filled with clarity and peace and smiled for the first time in weeks. After, I never doubted that confirmation from the Holy Ghost, even when my husband tried to convince me otherwise.

The months following our separation were filled with tears and many prayers. I had suffered so much during my marriage and needed to heal.

More than a year has passed since the divorce was finalized. I am not done healing from the effects of my divorce or my marriage, but I have come a long way from the broken person I was when I left Andy. The journey has been arduous, but as I reflect on my year of healing, I have identified seven choices that helped me reestablish hope and continue to heal.



Strengthen your relationship with Heavenly Father.

I spent a lot of time each day praying. Sometimes I prayed for increased hope, faith, and understanding. Sometimes I prayed for strength to make it through the next five minutes. Sometimes I prayed for forgiveness, sometimes to find the strength to forgive. Many times I just cried and told Heavenly Father how much my heart hurt or how angry I was. I learned that He listens patiently and with love. I was also reassured to know that I could reach Him at any time or place. Most of all, I learned that through His Son and because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can receive power, comfort, and strength beyond our own.

Stand in holy places.

I found that going to the temple was often the only way that I could feel peace and safety. Each time I worshipped in the Lord's house I received sacred, personal revelation. I also made time to study my scriptures daily. As I pondered the words I read, I found

answers to my questions and comfort for my heartache and loneliness. In my journal, I wrote down thoughts and impressions I received during my study. Writing down my experiences helped me to see vividly God's hand working miracles in my life. I also saw many parallels. I knew that, like the people of Alma, I had been delivered from bondage (see Mosiah 24:12–20). Even though I often felt out of place in my parents' family ward, I attended Sabbath meetings. Sometimes I wondered what people might be saying about me, but I went because I needed the spiritual edification and because partaking of the sacrament provided great strength to me.

Consider professional counseling.

In my case, many of my loved ones were too close to the situation to offer helpful counsel. And while I found great support and help through the counsel of my bishop, I also found that I needed the professional advice of a therapist in order to move forward both emotionally and mentally.

Concerning such situations, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said: "Seek the advice of reputable people with certified training, professional skills, and good values. Be honest with them about your history and your struggles. Prayerfully and responsibly consider the counsel they give and the solutions they prescribe" ("Like a Broken Vessel," *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 41). I had to meet with several different therapists before I found one I could trust, but counseling has helped me learn how to face and work through the trauma from my marriage. I have also gained many helpful insights about myself from attending counseling.

Establish a support group.

Surrounding myself with people who care about me has been essential to my personal healing. I was blessed to have parents, siblings, extended family members, close friends, home teachers, and visiting teachers who were loving and supportive. They listened compassionately when I needed to talk and refrained from judging or criticizing me. They helped me through feelings of loneliness and isolation, encouraging me to put one foot in front of the other when I did not know if I could go on. These friends and family members provided me with tremendous strength, even when others who were unfamiliar with my story were unkind or made



THE LIGHT OF HOPE

"There may be some among you who feel darkness encroaching upon you. You may feel burdened by worry, fear, or doubt. To you and to all of us, I repeat a wonderful and certain truth: God's light is real. It is available to all! It gives life to all things [see D&C 88:11–13]. It has the power to soften the sting of the deepest wound. It can be a healing balm for the loneliness and sickness of our souls. In the furrows of despair, it can plant the seeds of a brighter hope. It can enlighten the deepest valleys of sorrow. It can illuminate the path before us and lead us through the darkest night into the promise of a new dawn."

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, "The Hope of God's Light," *Ensign*, May 2013, 75.



who I am and how much I matter to Heavenly Father. I began by searching my patriarchal blessing for details I had never noticed. I began running, something I had never enjoyed before. When I ran, I could feel some of the heartache fading away. Running also helped me gain appreciation for my body as a creation—a temple—that

Healing from divorce is not easy, but I have learned to rely on the Lord.

the Lord provided as a dwelling place for my spirit. I decided to do things that would push me outside my comfort zone. I jumped into an ice-cold river, ran in a two-day relay, and took a road trip with some friends. I revived old dreams and set goals to see them come true.

Have courage to date again.

Before I began dating again, I identified the things that were important to me in a future spouse. I made sure to live righteously so that I could have the Spirit with me. I prayed for discernment and tried to heed any promptings I received. As I relied on Heavenly Father's help, I began to have positive experiences again with dating. I met a wonderful man who is patient and kind. And although I am still healing, I have found great

peace, satisfaction, and joy as I continue learning about commitment and relationships. Slowly, I have come to believe again that marriage can be what the Lord intends and that I will claim the blessings of a healthy eternal marriage in His time.

Believe that you can heal.

In some ways, divorce seemed like experiencing the death of a loved one. I wondered whether the possibility of an eternal family for me was now void. Sometimes I refused to acknowledge that I felt sad or angry, because I didn't want to appear ungrateful for the blessings I still had. But over time, I learned I had to go through the steps of grieving—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. I never experienced the steps in that exact sequence, and some of them still come and go, but I have faced each of them to some degree. Healing from divorce is not easy. Despite the abuse and heartache that happened in my own marriage and the shock and pain that accompanied my divorce, the learning and growth that continue to come from these experiences have been my greatest blessings. I have learned to rely on the Lord and to become an advocate for myself. And although there are still days when I struggle to look forward with faith, I accept where I am and then trust that the Lord will completely bind up my broken heart (see Isaiah 61:1–3). ■

hasty judgments. As more healing took place, I made new friends in my ward and community. I went back to school and began associating with other singles my age. I found ways to serve others, even though sometimes I just wanted to stay home.

Rediscover yourself.

I lost a large portion of myself in my marriage and subsequently through divorce. But since then I have spent a lot of time rediscovering