

# **My Daily Dread**

**By**

**Terry Fraser**

**A Separation Recovery Ministry Manual**

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# Dedication

**This book is dedicated to the memory of my wife, to my children and to all of the family, friends, co-workers and teachers who shared with me of themselves over my lifetime. God used the resources of their experience, love, and faith to prepare me to survive this great crisis in my life.**

# Acknowledgements

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# Preface

**I have been separated from my wife for the past year. She left and my world collapsed. What I have written here is part of the kaleidoscope of feelings and thoughts which have been a part of this time of separation.**

**There were many books available on "How To Have A Happy Marriage" or "Now That You Are Divorced..." but I found very little to help me during the time of separation. It is a horrible purgatory when reconciliation or divorce are both still possible. How do you cope with this uncertainty in such a crucial area of life?**

**This book is rather raw in its emotions because that is how it feels to face this kind of crisis. For those who must face this, I hope that there will be some comfort from this shared experience. For those who as friends, family, or in ministry who are with people during this time, perhaps this will give you a glimpse into one experience of this kind of pain.**

**The mix of humor and pain is very real for me. It does not make light of the anguish but is very much a part of this process in my experience. Call it gallows humor or just a part of surviving.**

**Out of respect for my wife, I am using a pen name for this book and assumed names for her and others. What I can tell you is that I had the benefit of growing up in a good evangelical home and coming to Christ at a young age.**

**I love my wife and despite our problems, I would still have married her if I had known then what I know now. We have two beautiful preschool children who along with my wife were the joy of my life in this world.**

**This is not a book about who's "at fault". All marriages are a collection of two people's strengths, weaknesses, histories, choices, hopes, dreams, and failures. I do not believe that the notion of an "innocent party" is either helpful or honest since we are all far too experienced sinners saved by grace. I hope that you sense that this is not a book of answers or magic wands (if you do have any extra wands, please contact the publisher!)**

**I pray that this book might help you or a loved one through a tough time if that is what awaits them.**

# **In A Very Small Room Surrounded By Porcupines**

**Being alone again after a decade of marriage brings with it a strange mix of feelings. I would have thought that with the loneliness would come a great sense of freedom to do what I wanted when I wanted. My time would be my own. There would be no one to consult about plans for an evening or a day off.**

**"I can't stand still, but it hurts to move. Home used to be such a safe place."**

**To my surprise, this aloneness is claustrophobic. Everything I do hurts. When I am at home, I am smothered by reminders of her. Unpacking boxes is a never-ending task because every box contains some special pain.**

**Some, like Judy's wedding dress, are obvious. Others, such as scribbled notes to a fellow Sunday school worker, stab with surprising force. It is just a simple note to a teacher a year ago about a lesson plan long since taught. But it is in her writing. It has her name at the bottom of the tiny page.**

**I had never realized how many memories attach themselves to each piece of trinket or trash. Each represents a moment in time when things were different -- when we were husband and wife, when we were a family.**

**What was happening in our life when we bought that Christmas globe with the snowman inside that played "Frosty the Snow Man" over and over again? That's right, we were expecting our first-born.**

**I remember picking out the dishes before we were married. We were in a store with a very long row of fine china of all colours and designs. I said to my love, "Let's each look them over and see which one we would choose." With all those choices, we both chose the same pattern. Fun! But now, those dishes seem sad too. So much has changed. Everything I do hurts.**

**Others say how well I am doing. They don't know how small this house has become. They don't know that wherever I turn, a porcupine waits with quills pointed at me. I can't stand still, but it hurts to move. Home used to be such a safe place. I was comforted by happy reminders of special memories. All of those warm fuzzies now cut and sting me. I am in a very small room -- surrounded by porcupines.**

# When The Cavalry Doesn't Come Over The Hill

I used to love watching westerns as a kid. It was easy to tell the good guys from the bad -- white hats and black. The good guys would get into awful situations but you knew deep down that just before they were to be killed the cavalry would come over the hill. You could allow yourself to be really scared because you knew there would be a happy ending for the hero.

"I listen for the sound of distant horses. I long for that trumpet so that I can start breathing again."

This is a really scary time. I never liked a disaster movie or a retelling of the Alamo. Sure, there were the heroic s of facing the bitter end bravely, but bitter ends are just that. No, I preferred the cavalry charge being heard over the next ridge and seeing the bad guys wince in anticipation.

With Judy gone saying that she is never coming back, I must face the fact that in my "movie" I may be the one at the Little Big Horn. God may not send help in time to rescue my marriage. Marriages -- even Christian marriages -- do not always have happy endings. I always imagined growing old together, holding hands as we rocked together on the front porch in our nineties telling jokes and reminiscing about an interesting life. Separation and "the D word" were always out of the question. Now she is gone and so is the rocking chair.

How do I make sense out of the news that the cavalry is busy somewhere else? I have experienced the grace of God in my life. I know His power to draw me to Himself in love. I have experienced His Spirit's conviction when I have wandered away. So has Judy. Why can't the God of peace help us out of our crisis now? Where is grace? Why won't He send help to us? If not for our sake, for the sake of the children' s well-being?

I listen for the sound of distant horses. I long for that trumpet so that I can start breathing again. I want to find a mirror and look in it. Whose face will I see? Roy Rogers? Or General George Custer? I want the chance for us to have happy trails again. But I fear there will be blood everywhere and that this scalp will be hanging on Satan' s spear as a trophy.

Telegram to the Commander in Chief:

**URGENT ... STOP ... GOD, PLEASE HURRY ...STOP... RUNNING OUT OF AMMUNITION AND SUPPLIES ... STOP ... ENEMY HAS US SURROUNDED ... STOP... CAN'T HOLD OUT MUCH LONGER ... STOP ... FEAR MASSACRE OF MARRIAGE ... STOP... PLEASE SEND CAVALRY'...**



# The Sounds Of Silence

O God, I am so alone. All around me it is quiet. Not the quiet of a gentle meadow in summer but the eerie silence of a tomb. I am glad for the ticking clock. The sound of a passing car brings relief. Somewhere, something is alive.

"It is so quiet. So many hours with so few sounds."

Some squirrels have found their way into the attic. I hear their scratching over my bedroom ceiling. I try to picture them up there. Gray squirrels, I think. But then I see them together as a family. Things must be tough -- I am jealous of the squirrels.

I do not hear her singing any more. Oh, she wasn't the type to always go around singing, but I do remember her singing. Once she was happy. Now she is gone. Is she singing at her apartment? I miss the sound of her voice. It was gentle but clear. Judy always reminded me of Karen Carpenter. She is gone, too.

Hearing Judy talk was special. I can still imagine the sentences she would form. It's like Mr. Spock's creating the captain's voice on the computer on "Star Trek". I imagine hearing

Judy speaks again to me with kindness and love. But then silence invades and stops the voice.

Where is the sound of my children? Their laughter and tears and their joy of life fill my soul. But today they are just echoes of other times. They are coming again next Thursday. I can hang on another week. I miss you, Ted and Michelle. It is so quiet. So many hours with so few sounds.

I can remember times at home when I went to the study for some quiet. It is a strange thought now. Now I try to think about where I can go for some noise! Many evenings, just to be around people I have gone to sit in the stands at a local baseball or hockey field to watch teenagers play. I can see why nightclubs and bars are favorite places for singles and singles again. You can drown out the silence.

Worst of all is God's silence. Oh, I know about Schaeffer's book telling us that "He is there, and He is not silent." But He isn't saying anything to me right now. It feels like a very big, cold shoulder.

**I can imagine someone else praying for me right now. "God in heaven, I want to pray for Terry. He is really struggling..." Then God interrupts. "Who?" The friend answers, "Terry -- Terry Fraser. He was our pastor once and his wife left -- You know?" God might then say, "Terry Fraser? ... No, I can't say that I ever heard of him..."**

**Maybe it is the child in all of us that needs God' s reassurance. We need to be held and comforted by God. I remember when I felt so close to Him. What is different now? God doesn't move. Are You there, God? Only sounds of silence answer.**

# When Friends Throw You Anchors

**My universe has shrunk quickly. As though it had been swallowed in a black hole, all light in my life has disappeared, and so much of what was my life is now gone. Where are all my friends ~ points of light in my night' s sky?**

**Some are still there. Thank God for them. But some of the people who were so important a few months ago have not only gone but have hit me with some parting shots.**

**"But some friends cannot cope with your distress. Some actually look to you for comfort."**

**Like a drowning swimmer, I need a life preserver. Some friends throw them to me. A couple overthrow by giving me all of the quick answers about how God is working all of this out for my good. Others underthrow with a simple "T 11 pray for you" followed by definite withdrawal. Others miss the mark. "She isn't coming back -get on with your life," or, "if you have faith, God will bring her back."**

**As a lifeguard, I was taught the rules: "Reach, throw, row, tow, and go." That was the sequence of rescue to be followed when someone was drowning. The last thing that you do is to make contact, since the drowning victim might drag you down, too. Good advice for lifeguarding but a tough way to help someone who is separated.**

**The key for the rescuer is to keep talking to the drowning victim. He must be reassured that he is going to make it. It is hearing that strong voice that helps the person at risk to begin to trust. Without trust, there can be no rescue. The lifeguard knows that ultimately the swimmer must make a decision to trust him. Then begins the long swim back.**

**But some friends cannot cope with your distress. Some actually look to you for comfort. They want reassurances that this could not happen to them, too.**

**The most painful rescuer to cope with is the friend who has been waiting for a long time to tell you all that is wrong with you. Since your spouse now agrees that things are bad enough to leave, he calls with his list of points of fault that you have had. He expresses surprise that your spouse stayed as long as she did. Seeking to understand what went wrong and feeling like a failure, you encourage him to keep talking. As he rips away at you, you ask whether these are problems your wife has mentioned. "Oh, I would never break a confidence with her." It is a heavy anchor to catch while you are busy drowning.**

# Honest To God

I might have titled this chapter "Cursing God -- and Not Dying -- More Foul Luck," but "Honest to God" is probably apt, too. I hope that what I write here does not disturb you too much. But I suspect that if you are sharing this or another excruciating pain, you will know what I am saying.

We all are weaker in some areas of life and stronger in others. One of the stronger areas of self-control

"Sometimes I seem to step outside of myself and watch myself cursing and swearing."

for me was language. I did not swear, curse, or use vulgarities. For whatever reason, that was not a serious area of temptation for me. It was just the way I was, as a rule. Perhaps it was my awareness of the power of words to heal or to harm that helped me in this area.

Well, since Judy left, my dog could mistake me for General Patton. It is a strange phenomenon. I am walking around the house -- and find myself swearing. At times, my swearing is prompted by looking at her picture. At other times it is prompted by a commercial portraying a happy family or couple. I might swear for no reason at all. The anger that her rejection of me engendered -- added to my guilt and compounded by my sense of hopelessness -- does some strange things.

Sometimes I seem to step outside of myself and watch myself cursing and swearing. Blind rage overwhelms and controls me. Like a victim of Tourette's Syndrome, the disorder that makes its victims curse and insult others uncontrollably, I do not recognize myself. I just spew out like a volcano with hot lava words and phrases that scorch the air.

My anger then turns to God. My faith, theology, and experience tell me that God can intervene in our lives. I have experienced His correction and encouragement before. So had Judy. With clenched fists and face I shout my curses at God for ignoring us in our time of need. You could do something about this! I hate You for putting us all (and especially me?) through this pain. What do You want, God? Do You want me to quit? Do You want me to abandon my faith? Do You want me to promise that I will never be involved in ministry again? Do You want to see me break -- pushing and pushing until I go over the edge? You are such a sadistic God. What do You want from me? I want to see if my birth certificate was wrong -- is my name really Esau?

**Even as I write those words, I want to fill this page with "expletives not deleted." I have had some pretty convincing hate sessions with God. When God watches me explode like this, is He filled with the same mix of feelings I experience as a parent when I watch our two year old, Michelle, throw a tantrum? I feel the rage and frustration of the child. I know that she has lost perspective and is acting out in the only way she knows how. I reach out to hug her in her pain, to reassure her of my love, knowing that her yelling and screaming will not solve her dilemma.**

**I have a very high view of the sovereign position of God. I do not take lightly His power or majesty. My reverence for God is profound. But perhaps I take courage from my knowledge of the biblical characters. Many of them -- especially David and some of the Minor Prophets -- were painfully transparent with God. Maybe it is my conviction that God is love that allows me to express my pain and frustration with Him. In a strange way, I am secure enough in my relationship with Christ to let my pain speak unedited. I know that He understands my fear and my hurt.**

**The essence of being left by a spouse is rejection. Jesus experienced the rejection of the world He came to save when He hung on a cross. He even experienced God's rejection as He bore the sins of the world. There is healing in my transparency with God. I know that His love for me is unconditional. That gives me the courage to be honest to God.**

# Vows Of Silence

One of the basic characteristics of my relationship with my wife was my respect for her. I think that I would have received an A+ for honouring. A big part of that was that I was very careful never to speak critically of her to anyone else. That practice was not a pretence that she was or we were perfect, but rather it was part of a basic commitment to show my love for her by not criticizing her in front of others. When we disagreed or I was unhappy about something, we confronted the issues privately. Call it vows of silence.

Watching other husbands make their wives the butt of jokes or put them down as people was hard for me to tolerate. Didn't they see the look of pain on their spouse's face? Didn't they know what it said about them if their spouse really was "stupid" or an "airhead"?

I guess that I would make a good Republican, since their eleventh commandment is "Thou shalt not speak ill of a fellow Republican." It was important to me always to speak well of my love and praise her to other people.

Now I find myself in a process that forces me to tell counselors, social workers, lawyers, and courts about Judy's negative traits and actions. That has been one of the worst aspects of this experience. I wish I had put it on a videotape the first time and then said to all of the subsequent professionals, "I don't want to have to get into this with you -- here is my life and wife's story on VCR."

Worse yet, I am in a position where my wife must be confronted with her past and problems. I have found this so difficult that the emotions and pain have led me to do and say things that compound the problem. I soon realized that I would not be perfect in handling the matter, and so have settled for a great batting average of .400 rather than a gymnast's goal of a perfect 10.0.

It happened first the night she walked out. She drove off without warning and stayed with another couple. She made clear that she was not coming back that night, and I sensed that she was really going for good.

It was ironic that as the Berlin Wall was falling in Germany, Judy was erecting a wall between us. Crossing the line she had created would risk an exchange of gunfire. Judy allowed no truce or white flag from the beginning. All I could see was more and more machine gun turrets being erected by her. All I could do was write my graffiti of pain on my side of the wall. Graffiti she never read.

**Our first experience in court over the children represented a limited nuclear exchange. I am sure that she saw the court process as threatening and offensive. She used the occasion to say in her affidavit all of the things about my past that would be harmful to me. It hurt to read that document. It hurt to know that on the public record was a list of my sins and past failures. It hurt that none of them had any relevance to the children' s issues, the reason we were there.**

**Custody problems drag on. The prospects are that a judge will order the usual psychiatric assessments of each of us to determine what arrangements will be in the best interests of the children. I do not look forward to yet another person' s learning my view of my wife' s problems as they affect the children. I hate it.**

**How do I handle the overt and implied questions in peoples' words and eyes? I want to help, not diagnose. I don't want to hurt her. Lord, I don't want to break my vows of silence.**

# Your Dog As Analyst

**My poor dog. It is a wonder that she did not run away, too. After nine years of friendly people being around and more recently a couple of enthusiastic children, now she has to put up with a deranged master. She would not have recommended a dog's life to you at my house.**

**"I sat by the fireplace in our bedroom and talked to the dog for hours on end."**

**In the beginning of the separation, Toffee howled incessantly. I appreciated her empathy, if not the noise. She moped around looking forlorn. Gazing out the window by the children's play table, she watched the road for some sign that her mistress and children would come back. It was a lonely vigil.**

**With no one else to talk with, I hired my dog as my off-hours counselor. I sat by the fireplace in our bedroom and talked to the dog for hours on end. That might suggest I could become Prime Minister of Canada. As I understand it, one of their longest-serving leaders, Mackenzie King, used to talk with his dog at length (although I believe that his dog was already dead -but I digress). I suspect that the dog went to a school where the Carl Rogers' non-directive method of counseling was taught. In the face of all my questions, comments, and observations, that dog was able to avoid giving me any answers. I am sure that her professors would have been proud of her self-discipline. There were times when I thought she was going to say something. Then she would lower her head and sigh. I think we called them "eloquent grunts" in communications class.**

**She did have ways of effective nonverbal communication that were unmistakable. When we left the matrimonial home to move up to a rental house in the town where my wife had moved with the children, the dog became very explicit. I could regularly count on her having intentional accidents in the house no matter how often she went outside. I have an excellent gag reflex that works very well any time a clean up is required. On more than one occasion, I have had to remove my mess as well as hers.**

**On one weekend when the children were with me the dog made three "statements". The first was in front of our five-year-old son, Ted, who was standing by the open door, coaxing her to leave. A couple of hours later, Toffee repeated the performance. Overnight she made the third deposit by the door. Ted woke me up with the news. I picked up the small mat with the deposit on it and set it outside the door to be cleaned after our morning showers. I had no sooner finished my shower and dressed then there came a knock on the door. A young aggressive salesman had arrived to sell encyclopedias. After three firm nos, he realized that there would be no sale today. He turned and walked away. As I looked at his shoes, I smiled with the knowledge that the salesman had at least taken a "deposit" with him.**

**Yes, my dog has influenced many people over the years. If she only knew how close she has come to a final visit to the vet. But I guess that is a typical reaction all patients have from time to time to their analysts.**

# **But What If She Were In A Hospital?**

**All sin is a form of sickness. C.S. Lewis sometimes used the word "bent" to visualize sin. Sometimes sin leads to physical, emotional, or mental sickness beyond the spiritual disease.**

**When someone is ill from a disease, car accident, or other tragedy he or she is usually hospitalized. It is easy to understand that the person is sick. Even though he may have caused his problem through carelessness or abuse, we think of him as legitimately sick. There is a great deal of compassion for him and his family. We have a compartment in our mind for people who are not well and have developed customs to deal with them socially.**

**I look at my situation. There is a part of me that wants to "get on with my life" (whatever that means). The pain of trying again and again only to be rejected once more by her is crippling. Should I hold her accountable for her decisions? Is she responsible for her actions?**

**Her choices and other factors argue that there is much more at work here. She is different in so many ways. What is involved seems to me to be much more than just a broken marriage with the typical painful consequences. I want to confront her adult to adult for what she is doing to me, to us, to the children, to so many people. I want her to stop it. I want to shake her and wake her from this bad dream.**

**But then I am reminded that the evidence is that maybe Judy is not well. How would I treat her if she were hospitalized? How would others treat us if she were "officially sick"?**

**I am especially torn when I swear at her picture or the thought of what she is doing to us. There is a real sense in which I do not hold my wife accountable for what she has chosen to do to us. I believe there may be some underlying cause. All broken relationships are sick but my perspective draws me toward the conclusion that Judy is reacting to unresolved issues from her past that perhaps are surfacing now.**

**When my grandfather started to deteriorate mentally in his mid-eighties, I remember my grandmother's frustration. My grandfather would put the mail in the breadbox and leave his watch under the sofa. He once gave my grandmother twenty dollars and thanked her for cleaning the apartment. She would from time to time get angry with him for doing these things. Then she remembered that this was not the Jack she had known as her husband for sixty-plus years.**

**I look at Judy and have many of the same conflicting feelings. It is as though the "Invasion of the Body-Snatchers" has taken place. She looks like my wife. She sounds like my wife. But she is not the woman I have known for over a decade. Someone has captured her. I wait for the ransom note, which, no matter what the price, I would pay. But it never comes. There is no way to reach her.**

**Since she is' not institutionalized, people are not sure how to relate to her or to me. It is hard to describe. If one of us were in the hospital, others would be over with casseroles or dinners. A whole different support system would be put into action. Instead, we are a threat. If she were physically disabled, I would be angry with God for allowing that to have happened to her and to us. But eventually there would be some sense of "this is God' s will for us." I could hang on so much better because there would not be the sense of her rejection of me. I ask myself again, "But what if she were in a hospital?"**

## **Sorry I've Got To Play It Again, Sam.**

**I am surprised by how much I have needed to talk to people. I knew before that conversation was a way of releasing stress. That, combined with all of the unanswerable questions brought on by this kind of problem, has turned me into a chatterbox. I keep thinking about that old proverb about empty vessels making a lot of noise.**

**When my crisis broke, I knew from my experience in working with others that I would be a basket case for quite a while. My need for people to talk to meant that I would require both time and energy from others.**

**Since most people already have a busy life, I chose a group of eight friends for support. I called them or got together for coffee on a regular basis. Most of them had experience in dealing with people in crisis and understood the cost of sharing someone's pain.**

**As a new crisis would emerge or I would have a strange encounter with Judy, I would need to talk to someone. More than that, I would need to talk over and over again. It was very repetitious. There was something in the review of the small event over and over that helped me to cope. Most of the time, no magical answer or even logical explanation of the event was produced. But the process of talking helped to relieve some of the tension and to serve as a reality check for me.**

**Early in the pastorate, I had a young husband come to me after his wife had left him. I spent hours and hours with him as I listened, comforted, and prayed with him. It seemed to me that it took an incredible amount of time and energy. With all my other ministry load, it was threatening to burn me out. I realize now how little help I was compared to how much he needed to talk. The truth is that he needed eight of me to help him cope during his crisis. As with any grieving process, in a divorce or separation there is the need to revisit the loss over and over. That is why I decided that I would reduce the risk of burning out my relationships by leaning on a bunch of friends rather than just one or a few. Even so, it has been stressful for them.**

**There have been times that I have sensed (or imagined) that some have pulled back for a break. I am sure that seeing a phone message from Terry doesn't always bring them joy but they keep listening, praying, talking, and caring. They have invested many hours, cups of coffee, phone bills, and emotions in sharing my burden. I thank God for them. I worry about other people who face a crisis with fewer resources than I have. How do their friends cope? How do they survive?**

**When I call one of my group, at times I want to start off my conversation with "Sorry, I've got to play it again, Sam."**



## **"Count Your Blessings" And Other Nauseating Songs**

**When Judy was pregnant, she experienced some surprising changes in what foods she liked and disliked. She didn't have the proverbial cravings for chocolate-covered pickles or pizza and ice cream, but some of her favourite foods turned her off. She had a new appreciation for other foods. Her most requested craving was easy to order -- Chinese food.**

**"Songs I used to enjoy or that at least never bothered me now make me ill."**

**My separation has had a similar effect on my taste in music. Songs I used to enjoy or that at least never bothered me now make me ill. One of the worst offenders is a song that never bothered me before "Count Your Blessings." In some cases a song distresses me because of the words but in this case it is the music. The words speak of being tempest tossed, discouraged, thinking all is lost- sentiments of people in pain. But when those words are linked with a bright and peppy tune it all sounds trite.**

**There are some songs of victory that give hope. The positive message is rooted in the final outcome of eternity. Hymns that recognize the pain, suffering, and injustice of the present evil age speak with a reality that people who are suffering know first-hand. But those same hymns announce that the age that is to come has begun and will ultimately triumph. It is that apocalyptic view that allows people to trust God in their pain.**

**In this society which looks at everything from a personal point of view, it is difficult not to see one' s problems in isolation. It is no comfort to realize that the statistics suggest that what I am going through is typical of people my age. I would have preferred to think that my marriage would be immune to the pressures of our time. I have thought about diseases. Christians run the same general risks of getting cancer, Alzheimer's or heart disease as the population in general. That is part of being human, living in a world of sickness and disease. Though we would like to think of ourselves as immune, godly people who take care of their bodies still suffer disease and death.**

**We would hope, however, that our principles and perspectives would allow us to avoid the trends in divorce and other social ills. But the sad truth is that, as human beings living in this present evil age, we are just as vulnerable to the sickness of sin.**

**Although some songs have become repulsive in my present condition, others have become special friends. Songs such as "Be Still My Soul" and "Tears Are a Language God Understands" speak to me in my pain. "It Is Well with My Soul" is another hymn with a combination of honesty about suffering and ultimate victory. In a world that knows so much personal tragedy, we have an obligation to give a clear message of hope for eternity that does not minimize the sadness of the journey. "I Am Willing, Lord" and "Meet Me Here" reflect those profound emotions and contradictions.**

**Perspective on the entire picture, including the dark colours and the shadows, adds the dimension that enriches our ability to truly count our blessings.**

# Body, Soul & Spirits

I broke a toe in high school when I was playing soccer. I didn't notice it when my foot collided with the other player. But as I went back to my position, my toe shouted "injury" to me. Soon I couldn't walk. Then I couldn't stand. When I made it home, I felt like my whole body hurt. Extreme pain does seem to focus our attention.

My theology understands human beings as body, soul, and spirit.

"It was much like playing a video game when the joystick is off-center."

Sometimes in sports or in writing music one experiences a unity of being. All that one is, flows in harmony, and there is a great sense of wholeness.

As I have gone through this separation, I have expected to get really sick. The stress, depression, anger and pain have been so intense and constant that I figured I would be a great candidate for all kinds of-viruses. (Then again, in my present state bugs might not dare come near me!)

Early in the separation, I went to see the doctor to have my blood pressure and heart checked. I also talked to him about the sleepless nights since Judy confirmed that she was not moving back home. He prescribed some sedatives to make sure that I had some sleep but was concerned that I not become dependent. The sedatives helped for the immediate weeks of the crisis. My counselor and doctor both said that the pain could only be deferred. I would have to face it at some point. The sooner that I allowed the suffering to do its work, the sooner I would begin to recover from the initial separation shock. I was able to throw away a few pills in that unfinished prescription. As the counselor and the doctor predicted, the pain was waiting for me.

Whether it was good genes or the extra adrenaline from stress, I did not feel physically terrible most of the time. This was in spite of too little sleep, lack of appetite, and personal turmoil.

Maybe it is the sense of helplessness that is the worst for me. I have only two choices: to act out against Judy or tolerate my circumstances as best I can. I have had sufficient grace from God in my contacts with her to avoid the scenes that so often characterize separated spouses. But the powerlessness is so strange.

**Once during my nightly phone calls to the kids my son, Ted was crying and upset. He was reaching out for me to help him. Here I was, five minutes away by car but as good as worlds away. Ted and Michelle seemed like hostages who also had no choices. He was hurting and I could do nothing to help him. Why should he suffer? Judy' s words about how this separation was the best thing for the children as well as her and me echoed in my mind. What kind of father was I? My five-year-old son was suffering because of us and I could do nothing to help. I felt like a failure.**

**I went out and bought a bottle of fine red wine. I popped the cork and sat down and polished off the bottle in half an hour. I had never been drunk before. Apparently a good wine will have the same effect as a bottle of the cheap stuff. Either way, that bottle will not be remembered as vintage of a good year. After falling asleep right away, I woke up a couple of hours later. It took about half an hour to figure out how to stand up. Once up, I couldn't stand for any length of time. It was much like playing a video game when the joystick is off-center. Every move I thought I was making in one direction did not get me there. I have a new appreciation of where the walls and furniture in my house are. My dog saw my strange gait and decided that it was good to hide under the bed. After a visit to the washroom, I sat back down in my chair. I was physically helpless.**

**But my body was not without its options. I felt a sudden rush from the center of my being and watched as I projected my thoughts all over the floor. What a mess.**

**After a couple of more hours and a few more "demonstrations", I got upstairs to bed and spent the night feeling like I was going to die - or worse, that I wouldn't.**

**When I awoke the next morning my body had a new appreciation of how my soul and spirit had been feeling since Judy left. It is not a recommended way to find out.**

# Cliches, Platitudes, & Other Ice-Breakers

One of my friends, Kenny, and I have a standing joke about clichés and platitudes. Whenever we are together for our weekly coffee, he will always find a spot or two to throw in a truism. We both laugh.

Kenny knows that clichés are an attempt to answer questions that have no human answers. I enjoy the moment because it reminds me of how often we must fall back on trite sayings to fill the uncomfortable silences in our questions.

Unlike Kenny, other persons I know have used clichés as a goad or a corrective. When they tell me to "Just trust God", "Confess sin in your life", or "Let God get your attention." When they remind me that a husband "Should love his wife as Christ loved the church", they think they have done their duty. Now it is up to me.

Part of our reaction to people in pain is understandable. What do we say when we see people struggling?

How do we explain the effects of broken people in a broken world? We all find silence so uncomfortable.

It has been said that Job's friends were doing all right until they started to talk. There is a sense in which the silent presence of a friend during grief says much and really comforts.

Still, I value the clichés and platitudes. They are often "truth statements" that describe life and God's participation in it. There are obviously good clichés and poor ones. Some are clearly wrong theologically. But I still need to hear people reassure me of God's continuing love and faithfulness. In my pain, when I feel that God is not there or that He has abandoned me, it is the presence of His people who can speak to me.

Cliches, such as the ones my friend Kenny uses, help most when I know that the other person really understands that I am in pain and that there are no easy answers. When a platitude is not used to avoid the reality of my problem or to end that part of the conversation it can be helpful. Like all good preaching, it is a restatement of the ideal and serves as a challenge to me to keep on keeping on (oops -- a cliché slipped in there).

# Looking For The Pony

One of the Fraser regulars is Bing, a former pastor of mine. When Judy prepared and gave me a list of "your friends and my friends" to identify who was supporting us during the separation; he had the misfortune of being on both lists. It is a testimony to his people skills that he managed that feat, although it is a bit like a "good news/bad news" joke. The good news is that you made both lists; the bad news is that you have to deal with both of US.

Bing is an optimist by nature. Though not as out of touch with reality as my inborn optimism makes me, he still has a bad dose of this personality defect.

During one of our conversations he recounted an old joke that has been a quintessential part of our situation ~ The story is told of a city family going to the country to visit relatives on the farm. When they get there, the tour of the farmyard begins. In the cow barn is a huge pile of manure. The little city boy runs to the pile and starts to plough through it, searching desperately.

His parents are horrified and shout, "Johnny, what are you doing?" He replies, "With a pile this big, there's got to be a pony in here somewhere!"

As the pile of life-circumstances has grown for me, I have found myself "looking for the pony" too. There is enough here to suggest that there is a team of Clydesdales present! Sometimes it is trying to see the positive in a particular development. Other times, it is part of looking for some ultimate good to come from this mess. Believe me, that takes imagination!

Another friend, Jerry, has pointed out that one of my problems is that in spite of many negative life experiences, I have not yet figured out that life is usually not a pleasant experience. I have tended to forget the bad and remember the good. In other hopeless situations I have hung on to the very end. I don't give up on important areas of life easily. Like the captain on a sinking ship already twenty feet below the surface, I have to be tapped on the shoulder and reminded that maybe it is time to abandon ship.

Part of my optimism is due to my worldview, which has hope as a major component. Maybe I am optimistic because I have seen many "impossible" problems solved. Maybe it is my self-image. One test the counselor used indicated I was in the top three percent of the population in self-image. The test indicated that "this person's motto is -- 'If you know me, you'll like me. If you don't like me, it's because you don't know me -- but you will like me when you get to know me.'" Whatever the origin, my attitude certainly sets me up for a surprise when I am rejected.

**My optimism could come from my Scottish heritage. A king of Scotland, Robert the Bruce, and his army had endured six defeats in battle. Discouraged, the king and some of his men hid in a cave. There they watched a spider trying to begin a web by swinging across from one wall to the other. Six times the spider tried, but failed. On the seventh try, the persistent spider succeeded. Robert the Bruce took that as a sign for him to try once more to win in the battle. He rallied his men and succeeded. So maybe my optimism is a flaw in my genes.**

**Whatever the reason, I continue to look for reasons to hope. There have been no concrete signs. In fact, Judy has made it clear from the beginning that the marriage is over. To my knowledge she has not allowed herself any doubt. But I keep looking for the pony in this mess.**

# Free Will Versus The Sovereignty Of God - My Choice

Since my wife decided to leave, I have felt powerless. Judy has not been open to any discussion of reconciliation from the beginning. All my prayers have not changed her mind. I just want God to intervene. I appeal to God to exercise His sovereignty. But whenever you mention the sovereignty of God, you are quickly reminded of the balancing truth of free will. I know that God has chosen to show great respect for our freedom to choose.

Since Judy chose to leave and I have worked on reconciliation for the past year, it feels as if she has the "free will" and I am stuck with the "sovereignty of God". I wish it were the other way around. Oh, I could have exercised my free will in being miserable with her or "getting on with my life" by initiating a divorce and starting a new relationship. But that is not what I really long for. I want this fracture to mend. But it has not been my choice.

As I lie awake at four in the morning, calling out to God in my tears, I want him to exercise His sovereignty.

"Now would be fine. Go ahead God. I know that You can do it. You can move mountains. You can heal the sick. I believe. Yes. I believe. No, I don't prefer a particular method -You choose, God. Uh, as long as it isn't one that takes a lot of time. You see, I have waited as long as I can. I have been very patient. No, I don't want anything really bad to happen to her. No, I wouldn't like the children to get really sick or (gulp!) die. But I know that You are not that kind of God. No, I was thinking more of a lullaby to calm her down, than a zap.

"What if your sovereignty demands more time because she isn't ready to listen yet? Could you sing to her a little louder? How about moving someone into her life who could give her a nudge in the right direction? And at least take away the people who are a negative influence. Yes, You can zap them. Oh, that's right, not a good attitude. Maybe just a little zap?

"And those people who are gloating over the 'Fraser mess' -- how about a flu bug? I know, I know. Sorry.

"Some people say that You are teaching me through this, God. Others say that you are trying to get my attention. Let me be very clear here, Father. I think you have my attention. This is as focused as I can get. I didn't sign up for a grad course in suffering. I knew I spent too much time in the epistles of Peter. What's worse, I am not suffering 'for Christ' s sake'

—

**I am just suffering for being a sinner.**

**“Now there's a scary thought. What if this is to prepare me for something tougher? Oh, boy. Was that the other idea? Was it because you didn't trust me? Or am I supposed to learn what an emotional straitjacket feels like? I wish the walls were at least padded here, God, I keep bruising myself.**

**"Your sovereignty is real, God. But I am still trying to figure out -- is this Your discipline for me as Your child or am I just a victim of the' percentages? Is it both? I wish I knew for sure whether it is really over. At times, my head is quite sure that she is never coming back to our marriage. But I am not sure.**

**"I need to know how this will turn out. You can give it to me straight, God -- is it terminal? But I suppose that even if You said yes, that would not preclude the possibility of a resurrection.**

**"What does Gothard call it -- death of a vision? Oh, oh. Maybe I haven't let go enough and trusted your Sovereignty. How do I let go?**

**"But if our marriage is like Christ and His church, You never give up on us. You keep loving Your church in spite of our unfaithfulness. It doesn't help that I am a hopeless romantic and optimist, God. What a terrible time to be idealistic.**

**"Well, You know, God, how I am feeling. Thanks for this talk. I guess I should remember that my free will is to submit to Your sovereignty as best I can. And Your sovereignty will ultimately overrule Judy' s free will. But if I could make just one more suggestion..."**

# The Faithful Few

**It takes courage to help people in pain. Doctors, nurses, and counselors all know the cost of giving as part of their job. A special kind of commitment and willingness to take risks is necessary.**

**I will be eternally grateful for the people God has used during my crisis. Someone in this degree of turmoil does not make for pleasant or easy conversation. This is the one section of the book where I am tempted to name the people who have hung in there with me. They are all "hall-of-famers". It has been interesting to see the mix of this group. Some, like Charles, my roommate from college, or my business partner, Jerry, have been the "thick and thin" kind of friend. (I am still not sure whether this is the thick or the thin -- probably both.)**

**Others include a former pastor, a professor from college, a pastoral colleague, a current pastor and denominational leader. Then there is a couple of old friends from my teenage days at a camp and a friend from the church I had pastored.**

**Family have been there in a different way. Judy's brother, who was a childhood friend from camp, has maintained regular contact.**

**As soon as my crisis broke, I immediately called a number of these people and asked for their help. With my experience in the pastorate helping people through this type of crisis, I knew the enormous drain that a person in need could be on others. Too often, people turn to one or two friends and bum them out in a short time. I have said to some in my support group that they should imagine my level and frequency of contact with them and multiply it by eight to know something of the amount of time and patience I have used up. The cost to them in time, strength, coffee, and phone bills is humbling. (I should have bought stock in the phone company when this started.) They are a powerful reminder of their love and God's love for me.**

**All in their own way have kept me going through this time. I would like to share some of the many things they have done that have helped me.**

**Unconditional acceptance of me as a person has been a common denominator. This is not to suggest that my friends believe that "I'm right and she's wrong" or that Judy and I have not both contributed to our problems. In some cases, I have shared the gory details but in others I have shared less of our past. All in my support group have had in common an approach that looked not so much on the past but on what I was willing to do in the present. In counseling, that seems to be the bottom line. The past can help someone begin to understand the history of the problems but it is all irrelevant if a person is not willing to work on the future. An appropriate joke is, "How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb? One ~ but the light bulb must be willing to change." Caring unconditionally has given me the courage to keep talking.**

**Regular contacts have been essential. In the loneliness, isolation and confusion of this time, the willingness of my friends to have that weekly or biweekly coffee or phone call has made all the difference. I thank God for the faithful few.**

# Learning How To Fall

Our five-year-old son, Ted, has been learning how to ice skate. It takes a lot of courage for him to try it and for me to watch it. Those thin blades are supposed to keep him up. One wonders about the sanity of the person who invented the sport -- probably a frustrated engineer seeking revenge on the masses.

After a few crashes, it is time to talk about falling. As in most sports, Ted will fall down. How he lands can make a big difference. It is hard not to associate skating and headaches when you fall.

So we spent some time practicing how to fall and not bump your head. "Keep your head up once you feel like your going to fall. Let your shoulders feel the ice. Don't be afraid to roll a bit. Most of all, get back up. Daddy will be there to help pick you up."

After practicing a few times, Ted started to "fall better". It was easier to get back up because he was not crying from a bumped noggin. He became more willing to skate harder and longer because he wasn't afraid of falling.

As I watched, it occurred to me that we do not learn how to fall spiritually, mentally or emotionally. We teach the fact that we will fall often, but we spend little time understanding what to do when we are falling to minimize the damage. I know many people who never seem to get back up after a fall. They broke too many "bones" when they went down. Who is there to help them get their balance again?

How do we fall spiritually? How do we keep our head up when we are going down? Why do we get back up?

Having watched others go through the experience of separation and having had other failures in my life experience, I had learned a few things about falling. When my wife left, I felt myself losing balance and I knew that I would be grounded very soon. For that reason I sought out friends to help me get back up. I told them I was falling. That honesty was necessary for me not to hit the ground with full force. The arms of my friends helped to break my fall a bit. It also helped to decide to be honest with God and myself by admitting the pain and the emotions. I was not going to pretend that I had not fallen.

I eliminated all areas of ministry as quickly as possible. That was primarily to restate to my wife that my priorities of God first, family second and ministry third really were my value system. Working out our marriage problems would get full attention. A second benefit was that it allowed me to deal with my pain honestly. Although it was tempting to keep doing ministry with all of the support systems involved, that would have led me to deny the extent of the problem. I was going to need to be a taker and not a giver for a while, and that was OK.

**Ultimately, I had to be willing to get back up. There is a lot of risk in doing that. Getting back up means that you can fall again. It is hard to fall off the ground. But there are other dangers to staying down. Like my son, who could be struck by another skater if he stayed down, I would be vulnerable if I gave up.**

**There are times when I wonder why I keep trying to stand again. I have hit the ground many times while getting back on my feet. Perhaps it has been my hope in God or His grace at work in me that has made it possible for me to keep making an effort. The support of friends who believe in me and have encouraged me to get up was real. Maybe it has been wanting to be there for the children. Or maybe it has been a true love that wants to be ready for reconciliation if that is possible. I am sure that I will continue to have more practice learning how to fall.**

# Beware Of Master

Some canines can be excellent watchdogs. Other dogs, like mine, have a very precise contract. Toffee barks and protects the house if one of us is home. Otherwise, she hides under the bed. When our matrimonial house was for sale, many real estate agents said that they were relieved that the listing was wrong. When I asked why, they told how they were afraid of dogs and expected to meet one at our house. I told them that there really was a dog but that she barked only when we were home. It was not in her contract to protect the house alone.

As I go through this time of separation from the woman I love, the many moods and emotions I experience make me wonder if the dog ever needs to do the barking.

There are times when I do not want to answer the phone. A knock at the door makes my heart race. Is it a process server with the divorce papers from her? Is it a visitor who can accept me and my new "single-again" house as they find it? Will they judge me because it is not the spotless, beautifully decorated home that Judy always kept? She had such great taste. It felt so secure to know that one area of my life could be ordered, no matter how confusing business or ministry might be.

Now, in a split second, that knock reminds me of all that is not and may never be again.

I long to be with caring people. But my reserves are so low. Will I have the energy to face someone I have not seen for a while? I wish people would call before they come over. Even five minutes would do. Part of it is to fix up the house, but part of it is to fix up my emotions. I spend so much time thinking, crying and praying. But I don't want them to avoid coming over. There have been so few people. It reinforces how much has changed.

My mind races to the many times when my anger has seethed when I am downtown. As I think of my circumstances, it would be the wrong time for a mugger to choose me. Come on -- give me an excuse to fight. I wonder how many of the members of the French Foreign Legion had joined to forget a woman? No wonder they fought so well.

O God. It is another knock. It is 8:30 in the morning. I have been up all night tossing and turning as I have wrestled with my demons. They knock again. I come down from upstairs. Toffee is barking. I have not showered. I am wearing a bathrobe. As I look through the opaque glass I see two shapes. Oh, no -- police? Process servers? I can't take any more stress. Why do they have to invade my life right now? Why so early in this already long day? I open the door unconscious of how I look. I figure it must be quite a sight by their reaction. These two ladies say good morning. It's the cults! Ugh! Just what I don't need this morning!

**The one woman begins her machine gun speech. Imagine these words said without a pause or breath taken. "Do you know that many people believe that there will be peace in the world and there will be harmony but that there will never be peace and the end of the world is coming in ways and sooner than anyone can imagine but we know what is going to happen." I asked her, "What religion are you?" She answered with her group' s name.**

**In happier times, I would have identified myself as a pastor of my denomination. That would usually finish the conversation quickly. Instead, I borrowed from J.R.R. Tolkien's description in "Lord of the Rings" of the time Gandalf met the evil Balrog. I raise my hands and look into her eyes and say in ominous tones, "I am a servant of the secret fire -- you cannot pass." A dread swept over them. They turn and run down the sidewalk. I imagine what their sharing time will be like when they report to their group the bizarre experience they have had with the strange man in the old house.**

**I think then that I should buy a "Beware of Dog" sign and cross out the word dog and make it read, "Beware of Master -- Separated From His Wife".**

# Alzheimer's Please!

When Judy and I finally reconcile, we are walking by the sea on a bright summer day. Hand in hand we laugh and talk. We are one. There is a new depth in our being. There is a richer quality to who we are. I love her so much and she loves me. Our separation is a faded mist. I am so thankful God has done this miracle. Thank you, God. Thank you, God.

I sit up with a start. O God. No, no.

It can't just be a dream. It is so real. Let me sleep, God. Let me return to my Loth Lorient where there is no time or evil. I begin to shake. I can't stop. I sweat. My eyes well up with

tears. I begin to sob. I can't stop crying. God, where is the hope! Why do you have to torment me like this?

How often have I drifted into the world of dreams with us together this year? Sleep is not a safe place anymore. It is a time when memories become dreams. Dreams become hope. But hope is shattered by reality.

I remember when I used to sleep well. Eight blissful hours beside her. Peace. Contentment. Comfort. Oneness. Safety. Now those same hours haunt me. I am visited by my demons each night. They torment me. They prod me. They slice me. I am not sure which dreams are worse. Some dreams are of reconciliation. Others are of Judy's being with another man -- some I know, some I don't. I even had a dream where I was attending her wedding. It repeated three times that night. O God, it hurts.

Memory is one of God's greatest gifts to us. It can also be one of His greatest curses. So many happy memories together can bring a smile and a tear at the same time. So much has been lost. When will this bleeding stop? O God, it hurts.

There are the memories of her as she was -- happy, caring, taking, giving. The sparkle is in her eye. That was her nickname, you know. I called her Sparkle. Her eyes danced like a fairy princess. I love to look into her deep brown eyes. They were so expressive and soft. They

were bright and alive. Her smile would warm all who saw it. She had a magnetism and a virtue that radiated from her. People were put at ease and knew that they were important. She was someone who expressed hospitality and mercy with such ease and grace.

**One of our friends described her as a "storybook person". She went on to describe how Judy was such an interesting person to be with. She was so effective in ministry. She could express herself well. Organization came easily to her. Although very much her own person, she was a great wife, mother, homemaker. Superb in business settings, she could mix with the pauper or the elite on Wall Street. Young or old, learned or fools -- all experienced her sincere love and care. I was so proud of her. I often called her my better "three-quarters" instead of my better half (which with her slim figure could only be interpreted one way). I felt so blessed that we were married and in love.**

**My last conversation with my grandfather as he neared death while Judy and I were dating was on how much he liked Judy. "She's a good one -keep her." Oh, Grandpa - what should I do? I want to be a little boy again going with you for a walk by the harbor and watch the ships. Oh, Grandpa, tell me what to do. Please fix it for me.**

**Waves of memories flood over me. I miss her so much, God. Now she hates me. I want to forget. But they were good times. No matter what she says. But it hurts to remember. Maybe memory loss is a blessing when you get old. That' s it. I have a new prayer request. I'll order up a disease. God, Alzheimer's please!**

## The Right & Left

Those who do the leaving have a very definite set of explanations and rationalizations to show that they are right in their choice. I call these the "Rights". They will tell you how much better life is for everyone, including the spouse who has been left. In my case, Judy says "maybe Terry will meet someone who will make him happy." There seems to be very different worldviews and reactions. When I meet someone who is separated or divorced, one of the first questions that comes to mind is, "Are they the Right or the Left?" I have little patience with the Rights.

I have observed that Rights have some common themes: marriage was death; divorce is freedom. The religious leavers also find all sorts of "proofs" that God agrees with their decision. In Judy's case, she cited that God blessed her decision by giving her a friend's home to live in (thanks, friends), an old car from her sister (part of the "our family doesn't have any problems"), a job as a day-care worker (in a job market crying for day-care workers), a new church (a new group of caring people and friends who take her story at face value) and eventually an apartment. Since God had provided this new world, God supported her decision to leave.

Over the year, she has had a very difficult relationship with the family that initially took her in, totaled the car, is apparently not getting along well at work, and is in the process of finding a new "caring" church. Somehow, the same theology that "proves" that God is blessing is not applied to even the same things when they do not support one's choices. That is not unique to leavers; we all do it. But Rights have a lot to justify; so they are especially practiced at it.

The Lefts seem to have different reactions to the rejection that is the basic message given by their spouse who has left. In my case, I alternate between feelings of terrible guilt and righteous anger at Judy's injustice. The guilt comes when I think about all of the times and ways I let her down. I could have been a better husband and father in so many areas. The "if onlys" play over and over. At other times, the horrible sense of unfairness takes over. It was not so bad. In fact, she had it pretty good. I was a good husband and father. How could she do such a thing to me?

While there may be cases where a person must leave a relationship, that decision should be made with some outside help and perspective. It certainly is never an easy way out. Separation will not solve any problems. Unresolved issues will like barnacles come along to the next relationship.

**I suppose that, as is the case with most people, the truth for me is somewhere in between. I had and have weaknesses as a person, husband and father. I believe that I have used this time to improve myself in all those areas. As a husband, I have been limited in how I could express that to Judy. In the other areas, she probably does not know (or care?) about the progress I have made. She was not willing to give me a chance. As she said in her affidavit, "His promises were hollow and insincere." For that statement and the attitude it represents, I can and will be justifiably angry with her. But the circular arguments we make to ourselves but never to each other is part of being in the crossfire on the Left and the Right.**

## **In-Laws & Out-Laws**

**Family systems are extremely complex. In dealing with a marriage breakdown, there are in-laws or out-laws. The marriage of two people joins two families. In our case, there were many similarities when it came to spiritual values and commitment. But the ways that the families interacted among their members were very different. Those differences were accentuated by the separation.**

**Many truisms, such as "Blood is thicker than water," express the fact that each of us gives allegiance to his or her own family. I understand that.**

**Those support systems help us define ourselves and cope in times of crisis.**

**In our crisis, I have seen a wide range of reactions from both families. It is not an easy time for the extended families in such turmoil. There is the natural wish to believe the best about one's own child and to doubt one's child-in-law. Particularly when the separation occurs in a religious context, all the stigma felt by the separating spouses now attaches to some extent to the families. Some parents begin to question what role they had in the breakup. They feel it personally.**

**Since the separation, I have only had contact from one of Judy's family. We have continued to have some business projects together and have kept in touch. It has been tough for him since Judy has insisted that people make a choice between their relationship with her or with me.**

**My brothers both tried to reach out to Judy. My parents also tried to express their interest in Judy by sending occasional cards, and spoke with her by phone a couple of times. In our family's case, they are grieving their own loss of a family member. In our family system, Judy was never a hyphenated relative. She was valued and accepted as a member of the Fraser clan. They have gone through the stages of separation trauma, as they have had to watch me and the children struggle.**

**I have experienced my own sense of loss from her family as well. It makes one question what kind of relationship existed before the separation. What kind of relationship exists between the other in-law children and the family? My attempts to reach out to Judy's father have been unanswered. I believed that we had enjoyed an excellent relationship. I had respected him very much.**

**There is no question that in times of crisis, it is normal and helpful for families to close ranks to support a wounded member. No one would expect a parent not to support their child. Yet I question whether it is right in all circumstances for that line of support to be crossed to the point that the child believes or is told that his parents agree with whatever choice he makes, or is automatically told that his choice is justified. Surely there are instances where a parent needs to rise above the fray and make clear that though he loves his child unconditionally, he opposes his decision. Certainly a parent should hear both sides of the problem before making any pronouncements. Ultimately, grown children make their own choices and face the consequences. Often parents can do little more than listen and pray. But perhaps those are the best responses.**

**I do not envy parents and other family members who try to cope with the separation of their children. Perhaps those wonderful qualities of grace and wisdom need extra attention during this stressful time, as they must encounter their own emotions and their strong feelings of their children, too.**

**Separation does not just rupture a couple - it explodes two families. It may be uncomfortable for parents and siblings to reach out to "the other side" but life seldom gives us easy choices. For the sake of the children who are also grandchildren and great-grandchildren of a relationship of which they are a permanent reminder, everyone needs to be in-laws, not out-laws.**

## **Mirror, Mirror On The Wall, Who's the Craziest Of Them All?**

**As I have heard Judy and others describe her view of our marriage and my relationship with our children, I figure that one of us must be crazy. The marriage and husband that she describes are not the ones that I knew.**

**I know that two people often have different perceptions of what happened in their experiences. Especially traumatic situations seem to amplify our differences. But I find it troubling that many of our friends have expressed confusion when they have spoken to Judy and me. Some believe that one of us must be lying. Others have given up trying to figure out the "truth". Many would just rather not hear about what happened.**

**It has been frustrating for me to sort out. I have tried to assume that I did not understand Judy. My heart wants to believe that she is wrong. My head tells me that we all have blind spots and misperceptions. I really want to know what upset her so much that she believed she needed to leave.**

**From the beginning of the separation, Judy would not talk to me about the marriage. She did not want to reconcile, so why talk about all our decade together? As the year has passed, Judy has on a very few occasions talked about her perception with me. More often, that information has been conveyed through third parties that have filtered her comments through their grid.**

**When people ask me about specific things that Judy has said I never quite know how to respond. Do I say, "There is her view, my view, and the truth?" Do I try to give my version of events or statements? How do I give my view without their then asking how I account for the differences in her story and mine?**

**With very few exceptions, I believe that Judy believes what she is saying. She says what she does with conviction. She is sincere. My dilemma is that I believe that she is sincerely wrong with regard to many of the "facts" she reports. On things that were not matters of perception (where people would always differ) but of fact, I have tried to do some reality checks with people who were present or knew firsthand.**

**I certainly can see that there were many things that Judy felt or believed that I did not understand. I wish that I had been more perceptive. Did she really try to communicate them to me? Was I so slow to hear? Perhaps the best perspective came from Bobby, one of the "Fraser regulars" who said that he did not care to know about all of the issues of the past. To him what was important was what Judy and I were willing to do from that point on. There are times that I expect to hear a voice saying (with the appropriate background music), "Terry Fraser has gone on a journey. It is to a place where there is no time or space ...where the world of nightmares has become reality...He has entered the twilight zone." Rod Serling, is that you? Mirror, Mirror on the wall, who's the craziest of them all? I guess the answer is that we both are. You have to be crazy to be in this mess.**

# The World Through Smoke-Colored Glasses

When I was in college, I was required to take a couple of courses in science. I chose geology. I had not studied it before and thought it would be an interesting change from the other science courses I had taken in high school.

It was fascinating. So many things that had been all around me but that I had only been vaguely aware of now became clear. I had begun to understand why things were the way they were. A new appreciation began of the forces at work in shaping and changing the world I saw. Peneplains and extrusive rocks there -- I had just never noticed.

Since Judy left, I have come to see the social world around me in new ways. Unlike the sixties' perspective of looking at life through rose-colored glasses, my lenses are now smoke-colored. I had thought of myself as a sensitive person who was perceptive of other people's pain. But now I realized how little I really knew.

My education began with visits to the park on a Saturday with the children. We had gone there many times before the separation. But now, as I looked around, I saw the people in the park with new eyes. They were parents with children. But they were also more specifically single parents with children.

As I talked with different individuals, I found that almost all of the parents were separated or divorced. They were having their access time with their children. On their faces was etched an all too familiar pain. They were trying to cope. They were fighting not to become merely "significant others" in their children's lives.

How blind I had been. I guess we all see the world as we see ourselves. My thoughts went back to the many times I had been to the park. As I reflected, I had rarely seen two parents with their children. It is true that some of the parents were married, but most of them were probably struggling with a terrible loss.

Now, as I drive on a Saturday or Sunday, if I see a father with children, I no longer assume that Mommy is at home reading or baking pies. It is more likely that the father is one of a growing number of people who have the horrible disease of being single again. Few of those parents seem to be happy with their fate, even those who have been able to "get on with their lives".

**Our oil furnace needed some work. The technician came over during a day when the children were with me. He asked if I was baby-sitting. I explained that my wife had left. He began to pour out his own tale of his fifty-year old wife' s leaving him after thirty years of marriage for a guy who was his son' s age. With the usual blend of anger and sadness, he told of the damage her decision had made in their family. Looking away, he spoke of how many friends he had known who had been divorced and how often he had told them to "get on with your life."**

**Only now did he understand how lonely life could be. Even after two years, he struggled with what he had said to those ú friends. He said that his wife had tried to come back, but he could not stand the fear of losing her again. He told me that he had met a great lady and that they plan to be married in the summer. He ended by saying, "But I can't help still loving my ex. I do love her still".**

**There is a common bond and sensitivity for those touched by my affliction. You can't look at the world the same way again. I am doomed to see the world through smoke-colored glasses.**

# The Worst Kind Of Heart Attack

I grew up in a home where my mother was a nurse. For a number of years, she worked in coronary and intensive care. I remember her description of the effect of a heart attack on people. During their recovery and even years later, many of these people who had experienced that terrifying "kick in the chest" had real changes in their emotional make-up. Those changes often lasted throughout the rest of their lives. Men who had been very traditional and out of touch with themselves emotionally found it easy to cry. They could empathize and reach out to others in ways that they never could before.

It seems that the life experiences that we face tend to either soften or toughen us (or maybe a combination of both). We are softened toward the pain of others and are toughened in our own suffering.

This separation is that kind of experience for me. It is the worst kind of heart attack. My heart is broken and continues to hurt without any relief. I remember over and over the kick in the chest that I felt the night Judy left. Even after all this time, the pain is just as intense whenever I think about it. In the earliest weeks, all I could think about was that pain. Now, it is never far away and can burst uninvited into my thoughts and feelings. It is like removing six layers of skin as a way of developing sensitivity. It works, but it is not a pleasant method.

I have faced new depths of emotion that are hard to describe. Before the separation I would not have described myself as an emotional person. Now new openings have been cut into my being and have given me a new understanding of who I am. The range of emotions has also been strange. I can go from feelings of euphoria to despair in a matter of moments with no particular cause.

Many people who have had a counseling or people focus in their ministry experience have the counselor's paranoia. It is based on 2 Corinthians 1:3-8. In that passage, Paul begins with an exhortation and blessing which praises "the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort others" with the comfort we have received. It is hard for people in counseling not to wonder that a given experience of personal pain is not part of the equipping to be more effective in ministering to others. It makes them want to say to God, "No. I don't want to learn what this feels like."

I hate what this separation has done to me. I feel as though I continue to bleed all over. Cruelly, rather than letting me bleed to death, someone keeps giving me transfusions. It means I must keep going. The pain just keeps coming.

**I am a more emotional person now. I hope that this experience does not eventually harden me into a bitter person. I worry about that. It is tempting to allow my anger to take over and cauterize my feelings toward Judy. I know that process can work. But it seems that I would have to give up a lot to make that exchange work.**

**I guess that I must keep facing the pain. Like the heart attack victim in the hospital, I have to. start walking around again and rebuilding my strength. Some days seem better. Some are definitely worse. I don't want to give up hope. But there is so little that is hopeful here. This is the worst kind of heart attack.**

# Beggars Having The Rich To Dinner

Imagine a scene where a poor man invites a wealthy landowner for a meal. Think of the contradictions. What could the beggar offer the rich? It would be uncomfortable for the powerful to have to sit in the home of the poor. The rich man should be having the beggar to dinner.

Now carry that image from monetary wealth to social wealth. There are many poor people who have a healthy family situation. Many financially well off people are in poverty in their family life.

As I think about how often and how many people we had into our home for a meal or an evening or a coffee, I now realize how rich we were. I did not recognize it at the time because I didn't understand how few people were in an environment where they were loved and felt safe. We had so much to give. Yet in spite of how much we shared, there were many people we missed.

Now I am in the social poor house. I sit in my silence and pain so all alone. As with most singles, widowed or singles-again, I don't fit the social mix. People find it uncomfortable or unnatural to be around singles. They assume that singles are busy with their own activities.

In the case of the separated or divorced, there is the added dimension of not knowing what to say or do. How does one relate to them? Do they want to come over to one's home? Will seeing their friends in a family setting make their pain worse? Sometimes people are just too busy to notice the separated or divorced person or even to ask those questions. It is tough enough just to survive the hectic and stressful life each family must face.

One solution is to establish support group ministries to help them. Although the single or divorced person may value opportunities to meet with people facing the same crisis and may find it useful to discuss unique or common problems with people in similar difficulties, support group ministries are not the only answer. They are not substitutes for being accepted and included as a person. It is hard when not to feel as though others are treating you like a castaway your spouse has rejected you. When you are no longer included in their social life, it hurts. It is tough enough during the typical days, but at holiday times it is especially tough. This year instead of receiving five or six invitations to Christmas or other parties I had one. It is difficult to believe that that was a coincidence.

Perhaps the best help that can be given socially to the separated is to give him options. Give him the chance to say, "No thanks, not tonight." If you hear it once or twice, don't give up. It is probably not a statement about you or your hospitality. It may just be one of those days when he needs to hide in a bunker because he is feeling shell-shocked.

**You cannot help everyone. But perhaps you can help one broken person during his time of despair. I don't expect that those who are there for me have any magic answers for my problems. I don't always want to discuss my separation, but sometimes I do. I value those friends who have given me the privilege of having the choice. Sitting with a family at their dinner table does bring pain. But it also reminds me that there are still families who are together. It says that I am OK enough to be included.**

**I have reached out to a number of people. Some have come to my home for dinner or have come to a restaurant or coffee shop. I wonder about all of the hurting people who cannot reach out. I am thankful for the friends who have been willing to come to visit. But let's not only make the beggars have the rich to dinner.**

# **Lepers Without A Leper Mission**

**My grandmother was a godly woman. She was always involved in our lives, daily praying for us and loving us. In a variety of ways, she served in her local church and always had a keen interest in missions.**

**An early memory I have of her at home was the sight of her knitting long, narrow, white strips of material. I remember asking what these were for. She said that they were leper bandages that she was knitting for a leper mission in India, which, as she explained, was far away. How interesting, I thought, that here in our city was a grandmother knitting these long bandages for leopards over in India. I knew that leopards were different from tigers, but I did not know that they would need bandages. Maybe they were like the lion with the thorn in his foot. I wondered where this leopard mission was.**

**I came to realize later that lepers were different from leopards. But I still marvel that half a world away people were making an effort to help people with a dreadful disease.**

**I now realize that there are some diseases of the spirit that are worse than leprosy. After all, leprosy is not something that one typically gets by sinning. Separation is. Regardless of who leaves and what the ratio of my failures/your failures might be, in a separation both parties have failed. The separation was not a matter of random chance, even though the statistics say that the odds favor marriage breakdown. There was always sin. One could have been more kind, sensitive, caring. A death can be explained away by saying, "This is God's will for us," but a separation is always just a mess.**

**Worse yet is the label "outcast" applied to separated and divorced persons by many religious circles. We all have lists of bad sins and worst sins. Separation is one of the worst. It is easy to see why. If the person who knew one the best, who vowed to love one unconditionally forever, for better or for worse until death, leaves, what value does one have? Judy's walking out on the marriage shouts to all that I am not worth it. People are reluctant to disagree with Judy. After all, she knew me best.**

**Lepers had colonies in which to live. Where do the separated go? The natural answer is to go to church. But there is a high price in going to church when you are separated. It is organized on a family and normative basis. The separated are a perceived risk to both the marrieds and the singles. No one knows what to say to them. Yet those who have been left are usually the strongest advocates of the value of marriage a church can have. We can assure people that the grass is not greener and that working out your problems is the best answer. It is hard for religious people to deal with sinners like the separated.**

**Maybe it would be easier if they remembered that we, the separated, are just sinners saved by grace that are very conscious of our sinfulness. Maybe if when I was married, I had been more aware that I, too, was always just a sinner saved by grace, I might have been a better help to the separated I had known. Lepers have a mission reaching out to them. Whose task is it to reach out to me in my pain and sickness? I am a leper without a leper mission.**

# Patient Terminal - Do Not Revive

Despair is a strange experience. It is a time when your world gets smaller and smaller. Options narrow and you feel trapped. You experience a feeling of hopelessness and grief, which is bigger than dreams. It wells up from deep within and encompasses my entire being.

Faced with the silence of God, you reach a point of utter darkness. What is real? What does it mean to be alive? The room is so dark, and you stop groping for the door. You ask, "Does light exist at all?" You recall the brightness and warmth of God's light. But was that real? It is so dark now -- was there ever any light?

In the terror that grips me when I ask that question, I want to run. I must know. Is God there? Was He ever there? Where is He now? I have spent a lifetime knowing Him. I have known countless others who know Him. But what if He is not there? What if He never was there?

My theology screams back all of the biblical truths and constructs. Of course He is there. You have experienced His presence and His grace. But where is He now? Why is He silent? How much grief does He expect me to endure? Where are you, God?

I trusted in the love of my wife. I was secure in her love. Yet she has told me that she is not sure that she ever loved me. She is sure that she does not love me now. O God, it hurts. It hurts so much. I was sure that she loved me. Had I imagined it all? It was true love -- or so I thought. But now she doesn't love me. True love is always there. It is unconditional, even when it is failed. I had prayed so much for us when we were dating. Our engagement was committed to God. Our marriage had been consecrated to God. All those people at our wedding had prayed for us. Everlasting love. This sinking feeling won't go away. If I was wrong about her, am I wrong about God too? Panic grows.

I turn to You for reassurance of love, God. Have You walked away too? Were You ever there? I don't know what is real anymore. O God, it hurts so much -- help me, God. I can't take it anymore.

Then a strange logic takes over. If I am not sure God exists anymore, I should go to where God is supposed to be. If He is not there, I might as well know now rather than live in this cursed life without God. To know for sure, I must die. So, I write out letters to my Judy, Ted and Michelle. I include extra letters for the children for when they are ten, twenty, and thirty years old.

**This is all starting to make sense. There is some relief from this doubt in sight. My plan is a simple one. I' 11 go to the cabin on this winter day. I'll not light a fire --just lie down and go to sleep in this sub-zero weather. Like the elderly Eskimo walking off into the storm ~ I'll just go to sleep and awake with God, or find out the awful truth. Either way, it is better than living out this shell of a life with everything that meant anything already smashed beyond recognition.**

**A friend interrupts this plan. I still think I should sue him for damages for all of the pain and suffering I have had to endure since he intervened! It all made such good sense. But my friend did not read my self-inscribed hospital chart: "Patient terminal -- do not revive".**

# The World Series Sitting on the Bench?

One of the remarkable images in Scripture is the occasion of Moses hearing from God through the burning bush. The bush attracted Moses' attention because it was burning but was not consumed.

The separation has had many strange effects on my thinking. I find myself thinking about the bush in that story. God was using it as a means of communication to Moses. It continued to burn and burn and burn. We are not told of the condition of the bush at the end of the encounter. Did it return to its pre-burned state? Or did it finally burn to ashes? Not much is said about the bush. It is a small object in an important moment. It had significance because God used it for His purpose. What good purpose is God using this painful experience to accomplish? Am I a burning bush?

As human beings, we understand that we have value because we are created in God's image. Perhaps it is during those times when we see God using us to benefit others that our faith seems most alive. In spite of my theology, I have felt more spiritually energized when I have been able to give of myself to others. When in the process of serving the needs of others I have seen God bless those people, I have experienced a great sense of oneness with God. I have been a child of God's grace.

In my situation now, I feel as though I have been benched by the Manager in the World Series. You know the cliches, "There is no dress rehearsal for life"; "You only go around once"; and "I shall pass this way but once". This is the big game. Our moments do count. So why am I on the bench? Is it because I blew it? Is it because the coach wants me to think about the game? Did I look tired? (No, this is definitely not a rest.) Or was I injured and am I now on the disabled list? What is going on here? How is this good?

Time is ultimately the most valuable resource. Life is short. As I have watched the changes in my Ted and Michelle during this year of separation, I have had the sense of being cheated because of the limited contact imposed on me by the separation and my priority to seek reconciliation. All this time alone seems so unhealthy and wasted.

The example of Moses is helpful. He went through his own periods of activity and isolation. Is this my forty years in Midian? It seemed like such a waste of his abilities. And what of the generation who suffered under the Egyptians for an extra forty years? What followed in the wilderness must not have seemed like much of an improvement to Moses. There was the high of the escape from Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea. He had the opportunity to be with God on the mountain. But the wilderness and the murmuring people lasted a long time.

**People tell me that God is using this time to mold and shape me. All good statements. They talk about Moses, Joseph, David and other biblical characters that seemed to be benched for a while. But in this separation I wonder. If it leads to divorce, will I have an experience like one of those people from the Bible, or will I like Cain, who was marked by God and had to experience being cursed all of his life? Am I an Ishmael who will be sent away from my people because of my new status?**

**I feel God' s fire right now. Is it His refining fire or the fire of His judgment? Or is it just the heat of being in the kitchen of life? It would help if I could believe that I was the burning bush m it' s hot, but it' s OK because God is using me in this. I wish I knew.**

**Coach, can you tell me why I am on the bench? Will I get to play again? I want the team to win because this is important -- eternal destinies are in the balance. If it is best for the team, I guess I can sit it out. Don't be mad at me, Coach. I have blown it lots of times. But I tried, Coach. I really tried. Talk to me, Coach. Help me understand. I just wish I knew.**

## Love In Any Language

Judy enjoyed singing solos in churches and in other ministry settings. I always felt a special glow when it was a Sunday I would be preaching after she sang. She was very effective. She communicated.

Remarkably, she has been soloing in churches and other settings since she left. One of the songs she has been singing is "Love in Any Language." What does she mean when she sings those words? What does love mean to her? What language of love is she hearing or speaking in her choices?

Where is the love that I thought was ours? We had talked about love ultimately being an act of our will. It was our whole being joined as one. Two individuals complementing each other and serving each other blending into an image of Christ and the church. Ultimately, it was the same unconditional love of God for us.

Now I hear her say that she does not love me. She is not sure that she ever loved me. Judy has said that she knew the day after she was married that she had made a big mistake. The marriage was death for her. Now she has freedom. Her emotions can be expressed without my interference. She does not care what anybody else thinks or what effect this has on anyone else. She is taking care of herself. That is most important.

What do I make of all of this? Did she never love me? Did she fool me for all of those years? Was it just an act? How can I trust her about anything again? How can I trust anyone again?

Or is she looking in the rearview mirror and reinterpreting the marriage to fit her new decision? Is she stringing the tough times together and presenting that as the picture of our marriage? Am I stringing together the good times and saying that was our marriage? Am I ignoring the experiences of rejection by her? Was it as bad as she thinks or as good as I remember? Is it the simple answer of somewhere in between?

Judy has been unwilling to meet with me to talk about repairing the marriage. We did meet one evening when she told me that she was not coming back. With all of my heart, I reviewed with her at the restaurant together my failures and weaknesses. I had been thinking about those things for the month since she had left. I assured her that apart from sacrificing my personal relationship with God, I would make whatever changes were necessary to heal our marriage. I outlined changes I had already made. Whether it was a geographical move, change in occupation, a new lifestyle -- everything was on the table. She was the priority.

**I saw how she interpreted that meeting when we went to court five months later. In her affidavit, she said that I had made commitments to change but that the promises were "hollow and insincere." She damned me with that sentence. She stabbed me with a knife that continues to turn in my heart.**

**What did she mean with those words? It is as though the Judy I knew died the day that she left. What if she does divorce me? What is my responsibility? I don't want to choose to stop loving her. What is right? What can I live with? O God, it hurts.**

**What view of love does her actions communicate to the children? They know that Mommy does not like Daddy anymore. They know that Mommy does not love Daddy anymore. They are worried that if Mommy could stop loving Daddy, maybe she will stop loving them, too. They test me. Do I still love Mommy? Do I still love them? Will God always love them? What can I do? O God, it hurts.**

**Did she ever love me? I am not satisfied with love in any language. I want it to be love in God's language. Anything else has too many loopholes. O God, I miss her.**

# **Life In A Minor Key - I Hate Key Changes**

**It has been tough to be in the middle of such a negative experience for so long. I have a new appreciation for some of the minor key psalms, black spirituals, and country hurtin' songs. They are all full of the emotions of helplessness and hopelessness. Even in the psalms of pain, the hope often is eternal rather than in this life. Gone is my basic positive life view. My life is now in a minor key, and I hate this key change.**

**When I am with friends, I am conscious how negative my words have become. The separation seems to find its way into conversation no matter what the topic. It is so overwhelming. But I don't want to become one of those cynical, negative people.**

**It seemed that I could usually find' ways to encourage others in my former life. Now it seems that the encouragement I bring to my friends is that they are not going through what I am facing.**

**How do I stay positive in the midst of my pain? Does God really want to take away all of my happiness? I am not as righteous as Job, so I know that it is probably not some divine contest. But even Job kept his wife during his suffering. I am all alone. Why were things so bad that Judy had to leave?**

**Ugh. I hate being negative. Will I become like Charlie Brown m awaiting the next disaster? I wouldn't want to be around someone like me. How much more do I have to take, God? "A little more" is not a very encouraging answer.**

**I am so weak, God. Even the prospect of heaven does not bring a sense of joy. My spirit is battered and tom. I used to be able to sing "If Heaven Never Was Promised To Me". I could say that the difference of Christ in my life has been significant enough that even if there were no heaven, it was worth it. My separation forces life-wrenching questions to the surface. God, with friends like You, who needs evil? Where are you, God? Did I ever know You? Was it all in my imagination? Was Your love a phantom just like Judy's? What do I really know?**

**There I go again, being negative. Life in a minor key -- I hate key changes. I hope that there will be at least one more. I long to leave these death dirges and get back to a positive major key again soon.**

# Learning To Walk Again

**It is such a strange feeling to be so emotionally and psychologically paralyzed. It is though I have broken my neck or back and must spend a long time in a hospital bed. Initially, I could do nothing. It was clear that it would take me a long time to learn to walk again.**

**My work is a form of self-employment. Many days I wished that it were sweeping floors. This job requires me to make things happen. For the better part of a week after Judy left I could do nothing at all. I could not even make the phone calls to cancel my schedule. Fortunately, I had an associate, Jerry, who was there to run interference for me as I sat in shock.**

**My energy level had gone from a sixteen-hour day to nothing. It was frustrating, but there was nothing I could do about it. After a few weeks, I could progress to special events or speaking engagements. I dreaded the moments up to when they began. Then I had the energy for the time needed. Moments afterwards,**

**I collapsed and needed to go home. What a basket case!**

**Somehow, when the children were with me, I could rise to the challenge -- even for a week. Perhaps it was the sense that their need was greater than my need. Perhaps it was just God's grace for them.**

**So many days it has been like lying face down in three inches of water. It was as though I was drowning but could not find the energy to turn over or stand up. I was helpless.**

**As the first months have passed, I can sense some improvement. I am able to do more for longer periods of time. I am taking those first tentative steps again. Oh, I feel so weak. My balance is so uncertain.**

**As much as things are better, I am still subject to easy setbacks. A tough word from a friend, financial pressure, and especially any negatives from Judy can set me back weeks. I have had to learn that my recovery is a zigzag and not a straight line. It has been tough to get used to that sense of vulnerability. It is hard to feel certain. It's hard to feel safe.**

**I remind myself to beware of the Lilliputians. In Gulliver's Travels, Gulliver is held captive by the little people of Lilliput, who use tiny ropes to hold down the sleeping giant. I must watch for a series of little stresses that combine to pin me down. Being around critical or uncaring people is a sure way to become trapped. Sometimes I have to take the tougher initial action of saying no to negative encounters rather than trying to cope with their aftermath.**

**I worry that people will think that I am like the comedy character, Guy Caballero, in the TV series SCTV. When Joe Flarehty played the title character, a station manager, he drove around in a wheelchair. Everyone knew that he could walk. He would walk in some scenes, but he was normally in that chair.**

**I hope that I know when it is time to get up and walk without my crutches or wheelchair. Many people tell me how well I am doing. I have to remind them that I'm not doing well. I am an emotional wreck. I am still crawling, not running a one-hundred-yard dash.**

**But I am learning to walk again -- one painful step at a time.**

# **It Was The Worst Of Times It Was The Worst Of Times**

**Dickens' "Tale of Two Cities" begins with the statement, "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times." My tale of this separation is that "It was the worst of times. It was the worst of times."**

**My inner world and my outer world were both in shambles. In one fateful decision by Judy, I had been destroyed. The old Terry had been killed just as quickly as by an assassin.**

**I had been Judy's husband, lover, friend, partner and soul mate. Now I was her mistake.**

**Our ministries together -- past, present, and future -- were unalterably changed. The little church begun a year earlier with two other families had started with Judy's enthusiasm but died within a couple of weeks of the separation. Our group of thirty-five nonbelievers had many that I believe were so close to salvation. They were cut adrift -- too few believers to form a nucleus for others to continue.**

**My roles in the denomination ended with my resignations. I wanted there to be no doubt to Judy that my priorities had been and always were my personal relationship with God, my family, my ministries and then my jobs. She said that she knew that and that it was not a lack of time with her and the kids. If she divorced, I could anticipate no ministry opportunities in our denomination.**

**I lost all of the opportunities for fellowship and growth that those experiences provided. I faced a huge vacuum. There was no church to retreat into for healing. I was all alone.**

**My business depended on my ability to communicate effectively and confidently. How could I appear confident when my whole being had been ripped away? I couldn't, and the business floundered in what were already tough times in a deep recession.**

**Our new home, which could have been the place we lived from then to retirement, was forced to be sold by Judy. She had moved north with the children. To be near them, I moved into that community as well. I felt like a P.O.W. I was behind enemy lines in her world. There were no support systems in this town for me. I was the outcast. She was the one in control.**

**To finish me off, she decided to publicize with friends and others my many weaknesses and failures. The dark side of all intimate relationships, where we are transparent, is one of the first weapons used by a vindictive spouse.**

**It was the worst of times. It was the worst of times.**

# Life As A Jukebox Stuck On B-17

It used to be that when I heard sad songs on the radio, I would think of teenagers who had fallen out of love. It never occurred to me that the songs probably were about lost spouses and broken marriages. Now I know why Olivia Newton-John asks the man not to play B-17. I am stuck on B-17.

It seems that the radio is haunted. Christian or secular artists all cause me pain because of my association of that music with Judy. I was never a big fan of country music. It always seemed too cloying and artificial with all of the hurtin' songs. More often than not, they are songs of the separated. They are almost always written by the "Left". They are songs of pining and despair. But the songs are honest in their pain. I hear the words in many old songs with new ears. There is much pain out there.

There are so many things in our world to stab the separated. It can be a sermon illustration on families. It can be a TV commercial picturing a couple walking hand in hand.

Anything that shows what life used to be like savages me. Even when I drive by some children in a daycare, I am reminded that I cannot go today to see my children because they are with Judy. O God, it hurts.

I pass the apartment building where Judy was living when I proposed to her. I go by the exit for the road where we used to live a few months ago. All around me are memories of what was.

Our lives were so integrated. Food. Music. Sports. Travel. They all have some memory of her. How do you rebuild a life when everything prompts a memory of her? I wonder if any of the inhabitants of medieval monasteries were trying to forget? But I know that the silence is no friend, either.

When I take the children to a restaurant the waitress asks whether I want to wait until my wife arrives before ordering. I often answer that the restaurant will be closed before she arrives, and none of us can wait that long. It is tempting to answer that my wife died. Given the changes in Judy, it seems that the wife I knew died on that cold night when she drove away.

The pain is all around me. Waves of nostalgia, memories and despair can be triggered without warning. There is no defense against it. I just must tell people that I'm sorry, but I am stuck on B-17.

# On The Yellow Brick Road

**One of my favorite childhood stories was the Wizard of Oz. It was such a rich tale of imagination. In it were good and evil, hope and despair, friend and foe.**

**I have often thought of the song sung by Judy Garland, "Somewhere over the Rainbow". In the middle of my tornado it is pleasant to think of a place where happy little bluebirds flying together**

**It is curious that Dorothy never received much real help or advice from the characters in her story. Some were there at critical moments, and brought encouragement, but more often than not Dorothy was left to make her own choices.**

**She was told that she should head to the Emerald City to see the Wizard of Oz. She also learned that she should "Follow the Yellow Brick Road." But apart from that, there was precious little guidance for her on her journey.**

**In one scene, she comes to a fork in the Yellow Brick Road. She asked aloud which way she should go. To her amazement, a scarecrow speaks, "Some people go this way. Some people go that way. And some people go both ways!" Ultimately, she chose one of the forks for no particular reason.**

**The Bible seems to focus more on who we are to be and how we are to be rather than on which choices we should make when there is no obvious answer. At so many tough points in this separation journey, I have been faced with crucial decisions for which there were no clear answers. There were no handbooks written for this set of circumstances. If a book were to be written about it, it would be so unbelievable that it would have to be in the fiction section.**

**There have been very few points where others could really give me clear advice. As with most of life, the tough choices have been mine to make. But it has been especially difficult, because I no longer trusted my judgment. After all, if my past decisions have got me into this mess, how can my future choices not make it worse?**

**Friends have helped to clarify my thinking and check my attitudes. But at most of the forks in the road, I have had to make a gut decision and trust that God's sovereignty would over-rule.**

**It has been helpful in making those choices to face as honestly as I can my memories of life with Judy. With a decade of marriage and three years of dating, there were many from which to choose. Six months into the separation, I made a trip back to my alma mater. I walked around the campus. So many pieces Judy and I were in those happy days seemed to mourn with me. So much had changed. But I felt safe. It still felt OK. Those had been good times. The campus was still real. Life could go on. Life as a student seemed far away. But there was comfort in even that long ago.**

**I have gone on some nostalgia drives. They have taken me by old places we used to live and play in. Dad always used to say, "Face your fears." I had to confront those ghosts and let them stab me. Then they would not have the same power over my future.**

**Like Dorothy, I am afraid that if I did reach Oz and meet the Wizard, there would be nothing in his bag for me, either. There certainly is a shortage of magic wands. I must walk on this journey and face my enemies of doubt and fear. Others may travel with me, but no one else can show me the way back to my Kansas.**

**I want to go home. I miss her so much. Maybe if I click my heels together three times...**

# Out To Pasture With Nebuchadnezzar

When Nebuchadnezzar fell under God's judgment, he went insane for seven years. Insanity drove him out to pasture to eat grass. What a strange sight to the people of his nation to see their former king acting like an animal.

I struggle with whether I am under God's judgment or whether my fate is part of living in a sin-sick world. What I do know is that, like Nebuchadnezzar, I am out to pasture. And the grass doesn't taste very good! I don't know how conscious the king was of his actions or the people around him. I am painfully aware of this great sense of failure and despair.

There are times when I feel that even when I am alone, I am in bad company. This separation is a form of insanity. What do my friends think as they look at me? What about the people we had served in ministry? Do they gloat? Does it shake their faith? O God, this damages so many people. Why won't You stop it? Like the deadly cloud following a nuclear blast, the death drifts in so many directions. So many people beyond those close to the explosion are affected.

It is as though I have been buried alive - above ground. I can see Judy. I can see all the people around me. But I cannot breathe. Won't somebody help me? I'm dying, God. I'm losing my mind. This has been the year of the living dead. I feel like a wraith.

Everything is out of control. I am on the end of Judy's yo-yo. She is pulling and pushing when it suits her. She can let out more string or pull me in at will. I just keep spinning. O Lord, how long does this have to last? When will You rescue us from this misery? Does she realize what she is doing?

What would it be like to be hospitalized? How can I keep from cracking? The pressure is so intense, and it is going on and on. I can hang on if I know it will have a happy ending, but I know that divorce is an incurable disease. Will people understand if I do crack? I've got to hang on for the kids. What if all of these character-building experiences are to prepare me for something worse?

Oh, well. Spring will be here soon. Maybe I can find some nice spring grass. Then I can be out to pasture with Nebuchadnezzar.

# **A Friend In Need Has Few Friends Indeed**

**We're steering clear from you for the next while until things get cleared up. It's nothing personal. You know that it is nothing personal." This was from a couple of my closest friends who did not want to be caught in the middle of our war. They had been out of touch for a few months since the separation in spite of my efforts to reach out to them. I finally received some honesty from them. What is left of a friendship like that after a war is over? Not much. What was there before the separation? I don' t know. People have such different reactions to the separated.**

**Some of the reactions probably are a statement of what the relationship really was. Other responses may be a way of coping with their confusion or disappointment in seeing friends split up. Who wants to choose sides?**

**Initially, I did not want people to choose sides. Judy made up a list of my friends/your friends. Some declared themselves early to be supporting her. Some flied to keep up contact with both. Others flied to reach out to her and were rebuffed because they did not support her decision. They stopped reaching out and were written off by Judy as victims of Terry' s manipulation.**

**One of my friends reflected how when he has been off the path, he has been grateful that God has not taken the proverbial two-by-four to him to get his attention. I responded by saying that if I am doing as much damage to as many people as Judy is by her choice, I hope that God would take a two-by-four to me. (Having said that, I wonder if this separation is the two-by-four. Ugh.)**

**It is tough to maintain the status quo in our relationships at any time in life -- they are always changing. When there has been a breach like this, it seems friends have to choose which side of the crevice they will stand on. Judy has said that most of our old friends have stayed with Jim. It would come as a surprise to her how few have stayed with either of us.**

**One of the most useful roles that friends have played is to talk about our past. When they reflect ways that Judy and I positively influenced their lives or life in general, it really helps. During a time when you doubt every aspect of who you are and who you were, those reference points are so encouraging. At that point in time, it was good. I do not have to buy into Judy' s reinterpretation that it was all bad. My life did have meaning. We did make a contribution to someone else. Maybe there will be a future when I can benefit others again.**

**Two of my friends upon hearing of Judy' s separation came to visit. Both were friends from college days. Each traveled at different times across the continent to spend some time with me. In those early days, those and other emotional paramedics helped me survive. As we sat in my half-empty house, they grieved with me. There were no easy answers. But by being physically present, Charles and Jared gave me hope.**

**It is shocking how few friends any of us really have. Judy and I have nurtured many relationships over many years, but most have evaporated. That refining process has helped me value the golden friendships that are there.**

**Acts of kindness have shouted hope to me in my silence. All of the prayers, phone calls, cups of coffee, dinners, cards, letters, notes, tapes, and visits have said to me that there can be life after Judy. And that is the awful question that the separated must face every day. Those friends in deed have been a crucial part of this friend in need' s survival. I thank God for them.**

# Ravens In The Backyard

**Elijah had just faced down the faithful King Ahab and had announced God' s judgment on the land. A terrible drought was to begin to bring repentance.**

**The problem with judgments is that they usually affect many lives beyond the ones who have made the choice to rebel against God. But in spite of the hardship that came, the heavenly Father showed mercy to His servant Elijah. The prophet was sent to the brook of Kerith. By faith, Elijah went.**

**There God provided him water to drink from the brook while the drought spread and devastated the land. God sent a raven with food for Elijah. Those were still tough times for the prophet, who did not have the freedom of movement and variety of food he had enjoyed before. He was imprisoned by the circumstances created by the king' s rebellion. It was very unfair. But God sustained His servant through the crisis. There is no record that Elijah benefited beyond his needs for that day. But those needs were met.**

**My financial circumstances have gone from a platinum credit rating to the edge of fiscal oblivion. The economy, the emotional collapse of the separation, the legal fees, and the custody battle zapped me. My income, which had fluctuated in the six-figures while I was in business, now had five-figure losses. I was approaching the GDP of some third world countries. The decline was steeper than any roller coaster ride at Great America.**

**Try as I did, it was impossible to make money. My business required confidence and sparkle. Now I was only confident that my sparkle had gone. I had gone as a person from a growth stock to a penny stock. (And the shares were all on margin with the loan about to be called.) Why did I have to face bankruptcy as well as separation? Those were Judy' s choices, not mine. Why can' t I prosper at least in this area when everything else has been taken away from me? Like a wet towel, everything in my being was being twisted and squeezed.**

**As much as we would pray or wish for God to intervene in a crisis by taking us out of it, sometimes His answer is to help us survive it. I prefer deliverance, but as God has chosen to respect our free will, which sometimes means that the choices of another person change my life. We live in a broken world of broken people marred by sin. God' s love has always been in spite of sin. Until the "age which is to come" completely replaces this "present evil age" there will be many choices and relationships in need of redemption.**

**Like Elijah, I would relearn that God cares for me a day at a time in all areas of my life. Regardless of the size of my bank account, it is always just a day at a time.**

**In the darkest times of financial need, my faith allowed that God would send the ravens to sustain me during this drought. I could imagine our old backyard filled with a month' s supply of ravens all waiting for me there. I do hope that they received the change of address notice.**

**At the outset of the separation, I sat in tears and yielded everything to God anew. I went through a long list of what was my life and gave it all back to God. Whatever it takes for me to be what You want me to be, I will by faith yield. Marriage, custody, health, ministry, reputation, home, money -- all were forfeited. The sifting began and continues to this day. All of the above except my health have been lost. But I have gained a faith I could never have known at all if those good things had remained. I recommend the outcome, but I would not recommend the route.**

**God has sent the ravens to me. I have had just what I needed at that time and usually only at the last moment. Those ravens have taken the shape of family, friends, church, denomination, and even an IRS refund (God does have a sense of humour). Almost always it was help unlooked for and given sacrificially beyond their resources. I am still not comfortable receiving -it is easier to give than to receive. But I am learning. Excuse me, I see a raven coming.**

# My Love, My Enemy

**My love, my enemy. How can both statements be so true of one person at the same time? Only in this contradiction called a marital separation can it be so.**

**No one has loved me more deeply. No one has wounded me so severely. No one brought me greater joy. No one has brought me greater sadness. I had known her unconditional acceptance. I now know her uncompromising rejection.**

**My loving partner who with me created two wonderful children is now my adversary in their custody. So much pain. So many who suffer. No winners. Only losers.**

**It is as though I am being carried along by a great wind against which I have no strength. I don't want to see her hurt. Does she know what she is doing to me? Does she know what price our children are paying and will pay for the rest of their lives? How can one who was so good become so bad?**

**I miss my love. I don't know who this person is. She looks like Judy. But she is not the Judy I knew.**

**I have heard how tough it is for a police officer or soldier to shoot an enemy dressed in his own uniform. He can't shoot one of his own.**

**Judy likes to talk about how the church has failed her since the separation. She describes herself in the imagery of the song "Wounded Soldier". That song appeals to God not to let another wounded soldier die. To me, it seems as though my Judy has shot others and herself and is now complaining that fellow believers are not reaching out to her. She does not seem to realize that she continues to fire her gun at all who approach. She seems unable to see that her choice to separate is a great wound inflicted on me and others. Certainly she has been wounded by me, by people we have served in ministry settings, and by life in general. But her choice to separate will only make her wounds fester more.**

**I must leave Judy's fate in God's hands. I will not act against her regarding our marriage. He has a much greater love for her and a deeper commitment than any human could have - even a husband. O God, I want to trust You to help her. But it has been so long. There has been no improvement. It all seems so hopeless.**

**But what can I do about Ted and Michelle? I must protect them. Do I now have to see my love as my enemy in this? I can't let them continue to suffer. Judy seems unable to see what their needs really are or the effect that her problems are having on them. O God, how do I choose between my wife and my children?**

**It is all so wrong. But I am helpless to change it. All of the time I have given to allow for healing has just been time for the rupture to grow. Now there is a great gulf fixed between us. We need a bridge. So many key people have worked against us to support her decision to leave. So many others have reached out to her to heal this breach. All efforts have failed. My love. My enemy. God alone can help us now.**

# Epilogue

**This book was written during my separation period as an exercise to explore the feelings, contradictions and confusion of that time. I hoped that it would also serve as a way of sharing with our children when they are grown what it was like for me.**

**Obviously, this is not the "whole story" of our relationship or of the separation period. Almost a decade of marriage and very diverse experiences would fill many books. Nor is this a book in which you will know all there is to know about me, my wife or our marriage. I have chosen to disclose only some of these feelings and experiences as seen through the separation. The focus is descriptive, not prescriptive. Obviously, it is written from my perspective.**

**The suggestion has been made that it would be helpful to share some of the "why's" of our marriage's failure. Some might take comfort that because our set of circumstances and choices were different from their own - a breakup could not happen to them. Let me stress that we were not on anyone's list of "ten couples most likely to divorce". We had the heritage of a rich Christian experience. I am convinced that no one is immune. That may not be a comforting thought, but it should lead each couple to value the relationship they have and not take anything for granted. Ultimately, although it takes two to be married, it need only take one to divorce.**

**It is easy to look back with the benefit of hindsight and identify symptoms of problems. I can take some guesses about potential root causes, but it is impossible for me to be definitive. In the end, it boils down to the fact that Judy did not want to continue the marriage. I am convinced that, as our counselor said early on in the separation, "There is nothing here that cannot be fixed." This was not some kind of statement of the miraculous, where all things can be repaired. It was made from the perspective of having heard each of us describe the issues important to us. But the fact was that Judy did not want to fix the marriage.**

**Why did she believe that the marriage was not worth any more effort? Why did she believe our marriage was beyond hope? I don't know. We have never had a conversation in which she has told me. I can certainly see many things that I would do differently. I can see little moments and big ones in our marriage that I would gladly retrieve. I wish that I could package it into a neat equation identifying that this need plus that need combined with our genetics divided by our environment equals a separation. Perhaps some marriages can be diagnosed. I have not seen many that can be.**

**Our history included the opportunity that I had shortly after to meet with her once again to ask for and to receive her forgiveness for my failures, insensitivity, and selfishness toward**

her. I had kept short accounts with her, but that final restatement was liberating for me in dealing with the past.

Although I sensed tension before the separation, I had no inkling that she was going to leave. If someone had said to me even the night before that she was going to go, it would have been news to me. We had experienced ups and downs along the way, as do other couples, and with a tough time in business, there were lots of stress points. But we had endured and grown through those before. They certainly were not directed at Judy personally. But something did snap, and once broken was beyond my ability to fix. I could speculate about the past and the future, but it would only be that -speculation.

I have had to relearn how little any of us has true control in life. We are all so vulnerable to the choices of others and to circumstances. My experience has been a painful reminder of how careful I must be in the big and little choices we make since they can affect so many others for good or for ill.

My separation experience has been a refining process. It has melted away many nonessentials accumulated over half a lifetime. It has forced me to challenge my basic understanding of who I am and what I believe. That refining process is a typical, if painful, common denominator of all suffering. It is difficult to get worked up about traffic jams and cars that break down when one' s whole life falls apart. Suffering gives one a new sense of what is really important.

# Beyond Hope

**This book is not a pretty picture. Thankfully, God's grace does not end with a marriage failure. I trust that as you read these chapters, you saw that my struggle with God was for me a desperate act of faith as I endured my pain. Malcolm Muggeridge spoke at a college chapel service when I was in school. He spoke of how much of a benefit we all had coming from a Christian heritage since no matter where life would take us or how far we might wander from God, there was always a reference point to which we could relate.**

**Marriage, like anything in this life, is ultimately a risk. There are no guarantees of long and happy marriages. We live in an age that seeks miracles. In my third year of marriage, I preached a sermon in which I said that if we wanted to see a miracle, we should look to those believers who have been in love and married for fifty years. In our society, that constitutes a miracle. I expected to enjoy one of those miracles, too. Little did I realize how the world would look for me seven years later. Sadly, we must return to the principal message of Christianity: There is only One whose love endures forever and will not let us go.**

**I am much closer in my relationship with Jesus Christ since the separation began. My faith is much deeper and I trust more mature than where I was two years ago. My loss of a wife has reminded me that even as profound a relationship as marriage can be is only a gray image of who we are in Christ. It has forced me not only to acknowledge but also to practice my dependency on Christ in all areas of my life since I could do nothing on my own so many days during this crisis.**

**If you have or are experiencing this kind of agony, I would encourage you to seek a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. God alone can meet the deepest needs of the human spirit. It is not an easy life. Being a Christian is a tough experience. But it beats all of the alternatives in this world and for eternity. I took great encouragement from my faith. It was tested and challenged beyond anything I could have imagined.**

**On the other side of this great valley in my life, I am thankful that I did not face it alone. The presence of God and his grace and the help received from people He sent to stand with me in my pain got me through even the unhappy ending I now write. God continues to work with me and on me. I am slowly being molded and shaped into what he wants me to be. It will take my whole life to get where I need to be. Ultimately, I will only catch up on the remaining rough spots at the end when Christ takes me home to heaven and I am changed. I look forward to heaven where God will wipe away my tears.**

**My faith has been stretched beyond hope.**

# **In A Very Small Room Surrounded By Porcupines**

**1. The author writes about feeling trapped in his separation. In what ways do you feel trapped by your circumstances?**

**2. What items are painful reminders of your marriage?**

**3. How do you feel about your separation right now?**

**4. How do you handle scheduling your free time?**

**5. In what ways do others in your life not understand what is happening to you?**

# **When The Cavalry Doesn't Come Over the Hill**

- 1. The author is disappointed that God has not rescued him from the separation. What is your feeling about God fight now?**
- 2. What role do you believe God has in solving our problems?**
- 3. Why might God not have changed your circumstances yet?**
- 4. How do you deal with your fears that this will never get better?**
- 5. What would be "Happy Trails" for you?**

# The Sounds Of Silence

- 1. What do you do with your alone hours?**
- 2. What are the worst times of the day or week for you feeling alone?**
- 3. What routines do you miss from your marriage?**
- 4. In what ways do you feel God is silent toward you?**
- 5. What do you think God' s view of you during your separation is?**

# **When Friends Throw You Anchors**

- 1. In what ways have your friends changed toward you since your separation?**
- 2. Who have you lost as friends?**
- 3. Are there some friends who have surprised you by their extra care?**
- 4. What have friends done that have hurt you during your separation?**
- 5. What do you think makes your situation difficult for your friends?**

# Honest To God

- 1. In what ways are you angry with God?**
- 2. What does God think about your anger?**
- 3. Is anger a normal reaction? In what ways is it either good or bad?**
- 4. In what ways is God responsible for your pain?**
- 5. What has this experience taught you about rejection?**

# Vows of Silence

**1. What was your way of dealing with disagreements when you and your spouse were together?**

**2. How do you react when someone puts their spouse down?**

**3. What has it been like for you to talk about your spouse 's failures?**

**4. How do you feel when you disclose your own shortcomings?**

**5. How much should you reveal to others about the details of your marriage?**

# **Your Dog as Analyst**

- 1. How do you cope with the need to talk when you are alone?**
- 2. Do you have a pet? What role has your pet played?**
- 3. What are your strange thoughts when you are alone?**
- 4. Are there any humorous moments?**
- 5. What changes in your routines has the separation caused?**

# **But What If She Were In A Hospital?**

- 1. What part does sin play in a straggling relationship?**
- 2. How do you find that you are treated differently because you are separated?**
- 3. Where does personal responsibility fit with problems from a person's childhood or life experiences?**
- 4. Why is there some comfort thinking that there is an underlying sickness in our spouse?**
- 5. How could other Christians and friends be more helpful in reaching out to the separated?**

# **Sorry I've Got To Play It Again Sam.**

- 1. Who are the people who are your support system?**
- 2. Do you ever feel that you have overloaded a friend? What are the signs?**
- 3. What do you do to balance your need to talk with your friends' need for space?**
- 4. How do you reach out to others when you are struggling?**
- 5. How does repetition help you in coping?**

# **"Count Your Blessings" & Other Nauseating Songs**

- 1. What hymns or songs have encouraged you in new ways since the separation?**
- 2. What songs have you found nauseating?**
- 3. If you grew up in a Christian context, what impact do hymns or songs from your childhood have now in your life?**
- 4. What messages from Christian music make more sense to you now in your separation?**
- 5. Did you feel that you were just as vulnerable to bad things happening as anyone else? How has this view developed in your thinking?**

# Body, Soul & Spirits

**1. In this chapter the author shares about getting drunk. What was the basic struggle he was facing?**

**2. If you have children, how are they doing with the separation changes?**

**3. What role does pain have in our sense of loss?**

**4. How do you balance facing the pain and taking breaks from it?**

**5. In what ways do you feel helpless right now?**

# **Cliches, Platitudes, and Other Ice-Breakers**

- 1. What are some of the cliches that people have told you regarding your separation?**
- 2. What causes people to use standard phrases?**
- 3. What might people be avoiding by using such platitudes?**
- 4. Do you have any friends who can handle the awkward silences? What do they do well at those times?**
- 5. What do you wish you could tell your friends to make your conversations easier?**

# Looking For The Pony

- 1. What role does optimism play in your survival?**
- 2. Who are the positive friends in your life who might lend you some optimism when you need it?**
- 3. What do you hope for following your separation?**
- 4. What things do you do to keep yourself motivated?**
- 5. What are the negative influences or people in your life who steal your optimism?**

# **Free Will Versus The Sovereignty Of God -My Choice**

- 1. What is God's role in people's choices?**
- 2. If you left, what led you to that point? If you were left, what were some of the reasons?**
- 3. What do you wish God would do in your separation fight now?**
- 4. What changes in your view of prayer has the separation caused?**
- 5. What do you think God wants you to do about your separation?**

# The Faithful Few

- 1. Who are your faithful friends?**
- 2. What has made them special to you?**
- 3. In what ways have you told them how they have helped you?**
- 4. What have you done to reach out and create a support group?**
- 5. How have friends demonstrated unconditional acceptance of you?**

# Learning How To Fall

- 1. Did you know how to fall when your separation began?**
- 2. How do you handle failures?**
- 3. What failures on your part contributed to your separation?**
- 4. What failures on your spouse 's part were damaging to your marriage?**
- 5. Why do you keep trying?**

# Beware Of Master

- 1. How have you handled people initiating a contact with you?**
- 2. What are the changes between your old living environment and the new?**
- 3. Are you able to express your feelings? In what ways do you do that?**
- 4. How do you deal with your anger?**
- 5. What is a funny thing that has happened during your separation?**

# Alzheimer's Please!

- 1. What would be a dream come tree for you?**
- 2. What are your nights like?**
- 3. What are the toughest times of the day for you?**
- 4. What do you miss most about your spouse?**
- 5. How does your spouse interpret your marriage? How do you?**

# The Right & Left

- 1. Who initiated the separation in your marriage? Why?**
- 2. Was the partner who was left surprised and shocked? In what ways?**
- 3. In what ways do people who leave seem to need to justify their action? Why?**
- 4. Should the person who was left have been more in touch with the marriage? Do people just leave?**
- 5. What are some circumstances where leaving would be wise? How can this be genuine rather than an excuse?**

# **In-Laws & Out-Laws**

- 1. What was your relationship like with your in-laws while you were married?**
- 2. What is it like now?**
- 3. What are the extended family relationships now?**
- 4. How have your family responded to the separation?**
- 5. How difficult would it be to repair the relationships if you reconciled with your spouse?**

# **Mirror, Mirror On The Wall Who's The Craziest Of Them All?**

- 1. Each spouse creates a story to explain what happened. Is your story similar to your spouse's?**
- 2. How do you account for the differences?**
- 3. What role do your present emotions play in your interpretation?**
- 4. What would your description of the marriage have been while you were still together?**
- 5. What difference would it make if you both had the same interpretation?**

# **The World Through Smoke-Colored Glasses**

- 1. How aware of other people 's separations were you before your own?**
- 2. Where do you now see evidences of separations around you?**
- 3. Have you ever had a close friend go through a separation? What did you learn from that relationship?**
- 4. What have you learned from family members who have experienced separation or divorce?**
- 5. What is your attitude toward others who are separated? How has that changed?**

# The Worst Kind Of Heart Attack

- 1. In what ways have you discovered new or deeper emotions?**
- 2. Are you a more emotional person since your separation?**
- 3. What are the benefits of this growing awareness of your emotions?**
- 4. What are the negative aspects of being more emotional?**
- 5. What can keep you from becoming bitter?**

# Beggars Having The Rich To Dinner

- 1. The author talks about "social wealth". What has your social wealth been like? What is it now?**
- 2. What is your experience in how others treat singles?**
- 3. Do you have a support group ministry available to you? How is it meeting your needs?**
- 4. What differences have you noticed in how you are treated since your separation?**
- 5. What have your experiences been like when you have been with an intact family socially?**

# **Lepers Without A Leper Mission**

**1. In what ways have you felt like a leper?**

**2. What do you think about the author 's view that both spouses contribute to a separation?**

**3. How is a death different from a separation?**

**4. How has your view of marriage changed since your separation?**

**5. Where can the separated go to find comfort?**

# **Patient Terminal Do Not Revive**

- 1. Have you ever had thoughts of suicide?**
- 2. What makes suicide attractive?**
- 3. Who would you contact if you were feeling suicidal?**
- 4. How do you know God is present even when you feel He is ignoring you?**
- 5. What are some reasons for you to keep on living?**

# **The World Series Sitting On The Bench?**

- 1. Have you ever felt like the burning bush?**
- 2. What difference does it make that we were created in God's image?**
- 3. How have your ministry opportunities changed because of your separation?**
- 4. What role did the pause period in Moses' life play in his effectiveness?**
- 5. What are some areas of your life that could be refined during this fiery trial?**

# Love In Any Language

- 1. In what ways does your separation not make sense to you?**
- 2. Can another person just stop loving? Was it true love if they do? Explain.**
- 3. What does your spouse feel about you fight now?**
- 4. Do you think you are viewing your marriage more positively or negatively than it really was?**
- 5. In what ways does your spouse believe that reconciliation is possible or desirable?**

# **Life In A Minor Key - I Hate Key Changes**

- 1. What new sensitivities do you have since your separation?**
- 2. Is it easier for you to become negative now? What are some of the triggers?**
- 3. In what ways is being positive a struggle?**
- 4. How do you avoid "the Charlie Brown" fear?**
- 5. What can you do to be more positive?**

# Learning To Walk Again

- 1. How are you energy levels different since the separation?**
- 2. What energy level does your employment require?**
- 3. What are some of the things that zap your energy?**
- 4. Do you get feedback that says you are doing well? What might people be saying?**
- 5. What does learning to walk again mean to you?**

# **It Was The Worst Of Times**

- 1. How was your identity tied into your marriage?**
- 2. What have you lost because of your separation?**
- 3. How would you describe your priorities in your marriage?**
- 4. How does your friends, family or church view divorce?**
- 5. How is your spouse dealing with your failures and weaknesses?**

# **Life As A Jukebox Stuck On B-17**

- 1. Everyone has associations with music. What song(s) are especially tough to hear right now?**
- 2. What are some of the common themes in painful songs?**
- 3. Are there any television commercials that you find difficult?**
- 4. What are the landmarks that you have gone by since the separation? What do they mean to you?**
- 5. Were there any surprising stabs from an unexpected source?**

# On The Yellow Brick Road

- 1. What would life be like for you if you were "Over the Rainbow"?**
- 2. What are some of the tough choices that you are facing fight now?**
- 3. How has the separation affected your self-confidence in making choices?**
- 4. What role does God have in your decision-making process?**
- 5. What are the fears that you need to face fight now?**

# **Out To Pasture With Nebuchadnezzar**

- 1. What role does God's judgment have in a separation?**
- 2. In what ways has your separation damaged others?**
- 3. How do you think other people view your separation?**
- 4. Have you ever felt like you were losing your sanity with all of the stress?**
- 5. What things do you do to reduce your stress?**

# **A Friend In Need Has Few Friends In Deed**

- 1. Who are some friends that you have lost due to the separation?**
- 2. Why did you lose them?**
- 3. Do you think that the losses will be temporary? What will decide that?**
- 4. How does talking with friends about the past help?**
- 5. What friendships have benefited from your time of need?**

# **Ravens In The Backyard**

- 1. How have you seen God' s care during your separation?**
- 2. In what ways can you identify with Elijah?**
- 3. What other areas of your life have suffered during the separation?**
- 4. How does a day at a time help you to cope?**
- 5. What areas of your life need to be surrendered to God?**

# **My Love, My Enemy**

- 1. How does the contradiction of my love -- my enemy apply to you in your separation?**
- 2. How do you cope with the basic message of rejection that is at the heart of a separation?**
- 3. In what ways do you feel that you do not know your spouse?**
- 4. What possible bridges of reconciliation are available to you and your spouse?**
- 5. What would you hope that God would do?**

# Ministering to the Separated

**In your ministry role, you can touch the lives of the separated in significant ways. Your direct involvement with the separated is a lifeline for these persons. In the larger context of your ministry, you can both model and inform your ministry group on what they can do to reach out to others in your group, friends or family who are going through this all too common experience.**

**Reading the book by Terry Fraser will give you a window on the kind of experiences and struggles that we find resonate with all who are in a marital separation. It can provide you with a way to tune into these people in need.**

## Make Contact

**The first need of the separated person is contact. With the loss of a spouse and the accompanying rejection, the separated need contacts. These contacts can be simple, like a cup of coffee, or more formalized like a support group. But keep them from feeling isolated. In their overly sensitized state, they will tend to interpret many unintended cues as rejection. They are in an "I'm a reject so go ahead and reject me too" state of soul. Being there -- even with no "answers" -- confirms to the person that they are still valued. Make the contacts regular. It gives the person something to look forward too. Weekly contacts at different times with individual members of a personal support group is ideal.**

## Allow for Repetition

**As the person is processing a ton of new feelings and thoughts, the need to talk and sort through conversation is very important. You will find yourself wanting to move them on to what you have not heard before but the repetition is crucial to their healing.**

## **Create a Circle**

**These people will be very needy in the initial shock period of a separation. Most will need a close circle of friends and supporters for at least three years of recovery. If they do not develop an identifiable circle, they will quickly burn out their one or two close friends or family members (or you!) with their great need to talk.**

**Those burn outs will reinforce their worldview of rejection. Help them identify (or create) a circle of at least eight people as a personal support group. These are people who are not going through their own separation at present. It can be friends, family or people in their church who play this role.**

**They should be asked by the separated person to be part of this group knowing that the need to talk and be in contact will be there for a period of time. Assure the friends that they are one of a larger group so that they do not panic. Ask for regular contact.**

## **Network the Separated**

**Put the separated person in contact with others who are separated. This is best achieved through a support group specifically for people who are recently separated. (The needs of persons who have been separated for more than two years or who have been divorced are quite different.) If possible, connect the person with people who have gone through a separation before and have survived (regardless of whether it was reconciliation or divorce as an ultimate outcome.) The main ingredient the separated need in their new world is hope of survival.**

## **Communicate Acceptance**

**You do not need to minimize the ideal of lifelong marriage by accepting the separated person as they are with the love of God. During these times when they believe that God is silent, your voice and those of other loved ones may be the only echoes of God's voice that they hear. Assure them of unconditional love in spite of their present circumstances. This is the essential message of Christianity that these people need to have repeated often. Expect their tough questions about God's fairness. Just keep loving the separated.**

## **Encourage Reconciliation**

**You will find that people give up on their marriage quickly following a separation. This is particularly true of the one who has chosen to leave. The leaver may have thought about separation for a long time. They may have required great courage to actually leave. Now the last thing that they want to do is reconcile. But like most people in crisis, they probably have narrowed their options to only one -- in this case, ending the marriage -too quickly. Help them step back and consider all of the options.**

**The rejected partner may respond by ruling out reconciliation as a reaction to the rejection. They too need to stand back and not be hasty. There is lots of time to divorce but it is very difficult to reconcile once a divorce takes place. There may be cases where reconciliation is not advisable but that should not be assumed too quickly. Expect to have stories told to you about the marriage that will curl your hair. These may or may not be true. The characterizations are often based on what they believe that you need to hear to support their choices.**

## **Counseling**

**Everyone who is going through a separation needs counseling. It is a life-changing experience. Refer the person to a counselor who will help them with the sorting and provide a more formal outlet for issues to be addressed. There will be initial resistance by most people because the counseling process will force the person to visit the present and the past in the marriage. Everyone has moments and issues from their marriage that they would gladly relive and others they would rather forget. Assure them that this is important regardless of the prospects of reconciliation. The issue is their growth as a person either to reconcile or to move on in their new life. Either way, they need to be the "healthiest them" possible.**

## **Sensitize Your Sermons**

**In your preaching and teaching context, do not lose sight of the role you can play in comforting and challenging the separated. Acknowledging their category from time to time announces that the church knows that they exist. When mentioning families, throw in the single, single again and single parent families as part of the list. Do not preach a watered down view of marriage. Most separated people will be some of the strongest advocates of marriage because they know first hand the pain of losing a marriage. Be especially sensitive during holidays like Christmas and Thanksgiving when the traditional nuclear family is pictured and the separated feel their loss intensely.**

**On occasions such as Father's and Mother's Day, recognize that there are separated persons who are missing their children because of a broken home. Don't ignore their presence in your church or they will not be present for long.**

## **Legal Advice**

**When reconciliation seems unlikely, or if one spouse has retained a lawyer, encourage the separated person to get legal advice. Especially in custody cases, early decisions are crucial. The person who is working toward reconciliation is very vulnerable to long-term damage by their spouse's lawyer who can take advantage of the pain and confusion. Generally, the one who has been left will need to be empowered more than the one who left the marriage.**

## **Challenge the Separated**

**Give them the challenge to keep going in spite of their pain and despair. Assure them that there is a life for them after this tough time. Encourage them to eat properly, exercise, socialize and develop themselves as people. Advise them to journal their experiences and feelings. It will be a chance for reflection, a way to measure progress and another outlet. Lend them some hope.**

**You are in a strategic position for these people who are very much "wet cement". During this separation, they are open to growth and God in very special ways. They are also vulnerable to abandoning their faith as they question God' s love in allowing them to experience this intense pain. You do not need to have all the answers. Be a steady source of God' s hope and love for them regardless of the outcome for their marriage. As they survive, you will be one of those special people who was there during their Great War. It is a high honor. God bless you for your willingness to serve these walking wounded.**

# Group Leader's Guide

**As a group leader, you face a difficult challenge as you make yourself available to a group of people in pain. The only thing greater than the challenge is the reward of seeing people survive the terrible shock period of a separation. Sadly, very few people are willing to reach out to these people in crisis. By leading a group, it is a great opportunity to make a difference that will last throughout the lives of these individuals and their families.**

**You will find persons in a support group who are at various stages of the healing process. Some are still in the disbelief stage that seems to turn otherwise rational and kind people into zombies. Others will be incredibly angry at their spouse, God, friends and potentially you. This has more to do with them than with you.**

**While your group is ongoing you may witness some potential reconciliations and some who will receive their divorce papers. Both extremes may ask, "Why me?"**

**As with most aspects of the separation experience, you will find yourself giving the right answer. "I don't know." If you are a person who is used to knowing the answers, you will find that these questions do not have many answers. You don't need to have either a magic wand or book of easy answers. There are not any.**

**Focus on the big issues and on the primary relationship of the individual with Christ. Expect many questions about God that will probe the essence of our theology. Once again, do not feel intimidated by this process but join them in the exploration as a fellow traveler.**

**If you have experienced a separation yourself, think carefully about what you could or should disclose about your experiences. In general, stating that you have an appreciation of their feelings is probably as helpful as dredging up your own pain.**

**If you have never experienced a separation, you still have the same basic ingredient to offer the group. You are someone who cares and who is willing to be there. Your group will respect that.**

**Either way, use the book which is uniquely transparent to give the group a sense of shared experiences. This is valuable because it reassures the group members that what they are feeling is not unique or unusual. Use the book as the touchstone.**

**Following are some possible ingredients for you to help identify your group's purpose and to deal with some of the issues.**

# Ministry to the Separated

You may be asked to define your ministry objectives for your church or organization ... here are some sample ideas that may assist you.

## Purpose

The ministry is to assist those who are recently separated to develop an understanding of their circumstances and how to begin the process of recovery ideally leading to reconciliation.

## Focus

This ministry is to provide a nurturing environment for people who are recently separated from their spouse. It is intended to be a short term group. This is not a counseling ministry. Individuals are encouraged to seek individual and marital counseling separately from this group. A combination of group support, teaching and introspective exercises will be the major activities. Meetings are in a home for one and one-half hours on a weekday evening.

## Goals

At the end of the quarter, each member of the group should be able to:

1. Reflect an increased self-awareness by writing out their personal strengths and weaknesses.
2. List the typical emotional stages in a separation.
3. Identify needs as a person which have contributed to problems in their marriage in a workbook.
4. Name members of their individual support system and their role in the recovery process.
5. List activities and concepts to use to improve as an individual to make them a better person.

## **Leader's Role**

**The leader's role is to act as a facilitator to encourage a nurturing environment conducive to the group process while addressing basic life issues. These issues build from a healthy personal relationship with God, self-understanding, relationship with spouse, needs of their children, other family members, friends, church, employer and community.**

**There is a delicate balance in your role as a leader where you want to encourage openness without creating a dependence from members of your group on you. At this vulnerable stage of separation, there is a great need to latch on to anyone who cares. Your effectiveness will come from caring with some clear boundaries that your group members will need to know and respect.**

**The support group will function with a growing sense of trust between the members. Since the group will be talking about very personal experiences, the early task for you is to create a sense of rapport and unconditional acceptance. Here are some understandings to include as part of your group's beginning.**

- 1. This group is for people who are recently separated ~ less than 2 years.**
- 2. The role of the group leader is to assist the group in discussing the issues and experiences of a separation.**
- 3. The group is not intended to replace the need for individual counseling.**
- 4. While a member may not agree with another's point of view, members of the group will treat each other with respect.**
- 5. The group is not a place to air intimate details of the marriage or a spouse's life. The focus is on what the separation experience is like for us and our response to it.**
- 6. Members of the group agree not to date each other while the group is still functioning.**

**You may want each member to sign an agreement that outlines these basic ideas and which clearly states that this is not a counseling group with the potential liabilities.**

**Short-term groups work best both to keep the members focused and to prevent a dependence on the group. I would suggest a thirteen week approach that could be renewed if it is valuable or could move on to another group context.**

**Using the Terry Fraser book with the accompanying workbook will give a structure to the group meetings. Most of the aspects of a separation are covered in the book. The questions are designed to give the members prompts to talk both in general terms about the writer' s experiences as well as their own. That will help each member to participate at their comfort level. Once the group gets comfortable, your greatest challenge will be to keep them within your time frame.**

**Try to keep opportunities for all to participate. Like most groups, you may find it difficult to keep one or two from dominating the rest. Use the occasional "Thanks for that" interruption and immediately ask a new question or direct the conversation to a different person.**

**Finally, beware of the tendency of members to tie you up with extensive phone calls and cups of coffee. Encourage them to develop their own support network or you will be vulnerable to burnout. As hurting and needy people, they will try to make you their rescuer.**

**As someone who is willing to lead a group of people in pain, your role is very much that of the emergency room doctor. What you are doing is to try to stabilize their vital signs and reassure them that they will make it. Any major surgery and long-term rehabilitation will happen in another context. But in a supportive and accepting group, they can keep breathing. As they move along their journey, you will be one of the people that they can look back on as part of their survival story.**

**God bless you in your efforts to be there for people who are in pain.**