

In a Time Long Ago. . . But More Recent Than I Wish to Admit. . . the Following Events Occurred. . .

I'd been avoiding a certain little hatchback for several days, each time leaving just as they arrived, or arriving as they pulled away down the street. I knew from voice messages left on my phone that this person needed to see me, however I didn't want to see them. But today hadn't been so lucky. . . The package had been delivered, signed for, and I was left standing in my little basement suite kitchen staring at papers suing me for divorce and custody of my two small children!

Secretly long-held fears flooded in as it dawned on me they were about to be realized. The biggest fear to clobber me at that moment was the prospect of becoming a single mother!

A visit to a local female lawyer revealed that failure to combat these papers would more than likely default victory to my estranged husband and hand him the kids in the process. If I wanted any hope of raising my children, I needed to counter-sue.

Counter-sue for divorce. . . Now more fears rose. . . Nightmares created by teachings from the pulpit heard from the pew as a small child. . . If I was to counter-sue for divorce, the nightmares shouted, I would lose any prospect of ever engaging in ministry in God's House! No more teaching Sunday School, no more singing on the praise teams, no more kids choir leadership, no more assistance in the office. . . This nightmare whispered that I would never minister again if I sued for divorce. . . And the trauma got worse. . .

Fleeing my husband had been traumatic as it was. I was raised that marriage was for life and I'd been trying for two years by that point to keep a failing 6yr old marriage together. My ex had said if anyone came for the kids to take them away, he'd meet them with a gun, of which he owned several. . . I had learned to clean, polish, disassemble and reassemble these things, and even how to aim and shoot them. . . This was the last straw in what had become an abusive relationship. The counsellors at the women's shelter to which a victim's assistance officer had brought us, identified several areas of abuse. . . financial, sexual, relational, social, and emotional. Fortunately physical abuse wasn't in the mix, but some of the other scars I swear cut deeper and hurt

worse than physical wounds ever could! In fact I am convinced that physical wounds heal far quicker and more completely than those hidden from the naked eye.

Flight or fight syndrome had kept me going for two full weeks on extremely little sleep as I closed out accounts, wrapped up affairs at various venues and businesses around town, and prepared to get my children out of the province and back into my home province. The counsellors had never seen a woman try so methodically and deliberately to pull what pieces she could of her life together to start over. My sister made a kamikaze trip with a rented van to whisk my two small children and myself, and what few belongings we could grab from the house, out of that city! I wouldn't find out till 6 months later, that an hour after we crossed the provincial border, my ex had obtained a restraining order to keep my kids in Alberta! This piece of paper would never be produced in a court of law.

So here I was, three months into life back in British Columbia, struggling with the thought that not only had I fled a failed marriage, but I was now facing the prospect of never serving in my Lord's House again. I honestly don't know which was more traumatic, losing my marriage, or losing the ministerial giftings God had given me.

Finally I did it. . . I replaced the phone in its cradle and sat down at my desk, staring blankly into the rest of the living room. . . I'd begun the counter-sue. . . As the fall season began, I figured the one place I could still minister was in the choir. . . at least there it seemed few people asked questions and perhaps I could minister if no one knew what I was facing.

Those first three months had been a whirlwind of activity in spite of how tender my nerves were. Every minor confrontation would set my nerves to shaking like a leaf! I couldn't handle it. . . Yet I was putting myself through college to get a career to feed my children. I'd found my own place in that little basement suite. Found a car. Put my son back into kindergarten and my daughter into daycare. There was no room for tears, no room for emotional outbursts. . . Until the divorce proceedings began to jump into full swing. . .

Then it snowed. . . that particular day my lawyer seemed more upset than I was over how things were going between my ex and the lawyer he'd obtained.

Things were emotionally tense and my poor lawyer needed calming down more than I did. . . when I looked out the window and saw snow blanketing everything. . . That would be the first time I felt God's overwhelming, calming, reassuring peace. . . the first time I would solidly get the message that God had it all under control. . . There would be many more emotionally trying moments, days and weeks, and any time I would come to the end of my rope thinking I couldn't take a moment more, it would snow! Every single time dear reader. . . Right into the spring of the year 2000. As proceedings were winding down, God quelled another stressful and emotional moment with a late spring freak snowfall! I looked out my window and couldn't help laughing at the ludicrous timing of that blanket of snow near the end of March. I shook my head and prayed, asking God for a positive outcome to this nightmare.

The divorce would finalize by the end of June, early July of 2000, with the courts giving me custody of the children with no alimony or child support. For those who are curious, it was a result of calling my ex's bluff when he kept saying he couldn't afford child support throughout the divorce proceedings. When he was offered the chance to grant me full custody without child support, he signed the paper!!! I and anyone who knew me, was shocked! The judge had actually approved and my ex had actually signed!

Now I was truly on my own, two small children in tow, a personal reputation lying in so many shattered shards at my feet. . . Tears joined those shards. . . many tears. . . My education had wrapped up and I would begin life as a working single mother that fall.

There were things I was adamant about never letting into my thoughts or home however! I wasn't going to live off the welfare system for starters! My ex had insisted we live off the system while he went to college several times, tried to urge me to find work while pregnant twice, and sponged off the church the rest of the time between short stints at various jobs. So I was determined we would not sponge off the government or the church! That we would be as self-sufficient as possible, as responsible as possible, as upstanding as possible, that no one would have reason to look upon my household as leaches or lazy bums. I also determined that we wouldn't live on the street, that I would do whatever was necessary to keep a roof over our heads and food on the table!

I lived this way from that summer of 2000 until 2006 when the second biggest personal storm would explode in my face and send me on probably the harshest whirlwind I'd ever experienced! My parents were moving away. My ex was threatening me with possible court action again and challenging my morals with the kids. My son was having major issues in school and at home, and I was getting nowhere with the school leadership. All this kicked up between late September and October, and I found myself slipping into a depression. Offers of hope in conversation or circumstance turned into blinding trains bowling me over under their wheels so often that by the time December rolled around, I was scared to get excited for anything, fearful that if I got too happy over some development, that it would turn into a raging lion and tear me to shreds! I wept for an hour one Sunday afternoon before taking part in a massive Christmas performance as a gift to our city.

This storm continued into 2007. A three week lull whipped up into a fury as my son was expelled from school and a guy who feigned mentoring my son to get my hand instead, was kicked out of our lives.

But then the strangest thing happened. . . Hardly a week after kicking that guy out of our lives, and hardly two weeks after obeying God's prompting to put my kids into the public school (against all gut feelings and experiences), I was sitting at my desk at noon working a quiet shift for Your Tech Online when suddenly I was enveloped in such an incredible warmth that I thought I'd fall asleep on the spot! My head fell forward and I straightened up shaking myself wondering what just happened! It was then that an unmistakable sensation came over me, as if God were holding me in a 360 degree embrace and saying, "NOW I can love you!" Fresh tears began to flow as I sat there soaking in a love I had never anticipated could ever flow from God to me.

I honestly had never learned that God could touch my emotions. I had never expected that God's love and talk of His Bride would be anything more than ethereal head knowledge found in the pages of Scripture. Needless to say I had to go diving through the Scriptures to make sure I hadn't suddenly snapped and fallen off the deep end.

What followed led to the lessons, discoveries and revelations found in this book!

**Living as the Bride of Christ in the every-day world.
What does this mean and how does one live this out?**

od started me on a journey back in 2007 that would begin to reveal answers to this question. Penetrating answers, difficult answers, challenging answers, but as I began to step into those answers, I began to experience an intimacy with God that I'd only heard others talk about before.

I am a worshipper. My favourite form of communication between me and God is in the lyric and in the music. It is 100% true that worship is far more than music, that true worship is in actuality, a lifestyle that cultivates nearness toward God in all that we say, think and do with everyone and everything around us. But when it comes to those moments of closeness, those moments of heart touching heart, of spirit touching spirit, some find this on a mountain top after a gruelling hike. Some find this in the end of a paintbrush, or in wet clay between their fingers. I find it in music, and in silence. Consequently, as you begin to travel this journey with me, you will see many references to song lyrics that touched me along the way.

There are many Scriptures along this journey as well, and it is by no means over! The fact I am putting it down in words is simply this author working out her understanding of what God has taken her through, and sharing it with you. This has and continues to be a very intimate journey, a very personal journey, but also quite the adventure, and full of surprises. Life as a Christian for this author has never been boring, but since March of 2007, that defining moment when God first enveloped me in a 360 degree hug and introduced Himself as my unseen Husband, the level of adventure has simply intensified.

Welcome to my journey, welcome into my heart, mind and spirit as I share with you things that perhaps you may have already known but never thought of in this light before. Or, perhaps you've never been exposed to the concepts and thought patterns in this book. Maybe you don't even know the

Heavenly Bridegroom, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Wherever you are, I pray there is something here you can grasp and take hold of.

One thing I want to make clear from the start, is that the concept of the Bride of Christ does not merely encompass the world of women here on earth. We are told in **Galatians 3:28**, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” This means that in the spiritual realm, when we stand before Christ, we are all the same. It is only in dealing with each other that there is gender, and that by design back in Genesis chapter 1. Therefore the Bride of Christ is made up of the Church, as explained in **Ephesians 5:22-23**. John the Baptist himself knew of the future Bride of Christ, in his answer to his disciples when Christ was seen baptizing as He began His ministry. In **John 3:29** we see John saying, “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.”

The Church is the Bride of Christ. Men and women make up the Church, and therefore, make up the Bride of Christ. So this book isn't just for women. It is written by a woman, but I lost count of the number of men I began running into since March of 2007, who were on similar journeys to myself, who were wanting to go deeper into the heart of God and who were facing similar challenges and adventures along the way. Some of these men actually began their journey before I did. As King David's been described as having a bridal heart toward God, so also do the men I have met since this new chapter in my life opened.

The first thing we have to deal with in becoming the Bride of Christ, is settling the issue of the Cross, of sin, of blame, of responsibility, of perfection and holiness. It all starts at the Cross. I invite you into chapter 2 as we dive into our first controversial discussion. . . where it all starts!

Getting the Most out of this Book

Before diving into chapter 2, let's get some housekeeping out of the way.

To get the best out of this book and to make reading it as smooth as possible, a few things will need to be kept in mind. Where possible, visual cues will be given as well.

First, this is a book written as a combination of teaching and journaled experience, with Scripture, songs, and inspiration from others liberally sprinkled throughout. This means that sometimes you will read exhortation and teaching. Other times you will read discoveries and revelations as if you were right there with me in the moment! Still other times the text may read like a letter or a prayer.

To mark the differences between some of these styles of communication:

- 1) Prayers will be preceded by “**A Prayer**” and ended with ***. This is because prayer for me is always open-ended.
- 2) Letters will be preceded by “**A Letter**” and ended with *** as there is no need to “sign off” in this book.
- 3) Scriptures will either be indented off to the right if they are quoted by themselves, or their references in bold if they are included among other text.

In this way it is my hope that you will get the best possible reading experience through this study.

Each chapter will begin with a story segment of usually no more than two or three pages, followed immediately by the chapter heading and the rest of the chapter itself broken into study sessions. Each session will end with a collection of Scriptures, topics and songs either referenced or alluded to in the text, and some questions to help you appropriate what you're reading into your own life.

Becoming the Bride of Christ

Supplemental to these resources, I invite my reader to visit <http://songdove.fa-ct.com/> . There you will find interactive Scripture references, videos containing lyrics to most of the songs listed at the end of each session, topics mentioned in each session, and more. Public domain lyrics will be included in their entirety at the end of each session they appear in.

God has brought these discoveries and revelations to me through several major sources:

- 1) Scripture, including a 2yr trip through the Psalms.
- 2) Music, written by a large number of authors encompassing modern and older choruses, choir songs from the '80's to present, songs by various recording artists, and ancient as well as modern hymns.
- 3) “Song of Songs - Journey of the Bride” by Brian Simmons, available at: <http://www.stairwayministries.org>
- 4) “Living Beyond Yourself” by Beth Moore, a journey through the Fruit of the Spirit. <http://www.lifeway.com/>

If you wish to obtain these latter two resources for your own study, they are available online at their respective websites.

In addition to these top four sources, God also used a tabletop calendar from Focus on the Family called Daily Blessings, a Daily Bible Verse application on Facebook, sermons from my Senior Pastor, and numerous insights from my worship Pastor/Spiritual Mentor. You will see references to these sources in the text as well.

God speaks to us through many avenues if we will open our ears and eyes to receive them. I pray as you move forward in this study, that your spiritual eyes and ears will be opened to all the ways God wishes to engage in your life.

The last thing to note about the flow of text in this book, is that it is largely chronological! I have tried to separate out major themes into their respective chapters, but it hasn't been easy. It will be best to approach each chapter as

occurring concurrently with or interspersed among all the other chapters. Consequently there may be some repetition at times. I'll try to avoid this where possible, but it won't be completely unavoidable. You will come across phrases or paragraphs causing you to think, "Haven't I seen this somewhere before?". You more than likely have.

Explanation of Cover Art

When I first sat down to consider this project, it all looked like the visual equivalent of a tree with intertwining branches weaving in and around each other, hence the artwork on the front cover. It took a while to figure out how to present these lessons in a way that didn't boggle the reader and still offer that sense of discovery and revelation as it came to me. What you have in your hands is the result. The presentation isn't perfect by any means, but I pray it encourages you down your own path into the depths of God's heart.

To read Scriptures referenced in this chapter,
please visit <http://songdove.fa-ct.com/>

There you will find interactive Scripture references, videos containing lyrics to most of the songs in these chapters, topics mentioned in this chapter, and more.

Scriptures used, referred to or that relate to thoughts in this chapter:

Galatians 3:28

Ephesians 5:22-23

John 3:29

Becoming the Bride of Christ

Questions for Discussion:

How would you describe your life in one or two short sentences?

What kind of a worshipper are you? _____

Have you ever had a defining moment in your walk of faith?

YES ___ NO _____

If Yes, want to share a little?

Have you accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour of your life?

YES _____ NO _____ If Yes, when did you get saved?

If No, what has drawn you to read this book?

Now take a moment to reflect on what has made you pick up this book.

What draws you to this topic? What is it you are hoping to gain from joining me on this journey? Write down your thoughts.
