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**The Journey Continues: Life After Divorce**  
**Part I**  
**By Kenneth A. Sprang**

*Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart.  
Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens.*

--Carl Jung

You probably know the statistics—over 50% of first marriages and 63% of second marriages end in divorce. Chances are that some of you—like me-- are one of them. I was fortunate that my divorce was about as amicable as a divorce can be, I think. Yet I still tell friends that I would not wish divorce on my worst enemy.

Experiences vary, of course. For some of us the dominant emotion is emotional pain—the loss of dreams, a family constellation, economic stability, or day to day interaction with our children. That pain is real and may never completely disappear. Every Thanksgiving and Christmas I shed a few tears and feel a knot in my stomach as my children work out which parent they will see when. I am happily married now in a relationship that is emotionally fulfilling. But as much as my wife Carol loves me, she cannot share those memories of the children's first steps, first words, and a million other things that I shared with my children's mother. That loss is one I have had to grieve.

For others, the experience of divorce is driven by anger and resentment. When we are hurt emotionally, we tend to resort to the ancient “flight or fight” response. Too often we choose to fight, and the battles can be bitter, leaving wounds that take years to heal. The adversarial nature of the legal system does not help, though mediation and divorce lawyers who value cooperation have had some positive impact on the process. The anger, the pain, the hurt, and the bitterness are all real. We may feel betrayed,

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misused, victimized or abused. But our own future will be dramatically affected by how we process those emotions.

This is a challenging time in your life. You may be feeling grief, anger, sadness, shame, and myriad other emotions—all normal. You have experienced a major life transition and it is stressful. However, you also stand at the threshold of a new future—Your Future. The journey does continue. You now have the opportunity to build and shape your vision and to live your life in concert with that vision.

As you begin this new journey, I invite you to consider the following:

First, recognize that in every relationship there are two participants. Whatever conflicts and troubles arose were not the “fault” of one partner alone—absent extremes of physical or other abuse, substance abuse, and the like. In Imago theory we learn that we are attracted to persons who “push our buttons.” We in turn push theirs! Accept responsibility for your role in the relationship.

Second, accept that anger, sadness, and other emotions are normal. They are a natural response to all that you have experienced—the conflict in the marriage, the process of the divorce, and the stress of starting anew. The challenge is how you process the feelings. If you hold on to your anger, for example, and continue to battle your spouse or former spouse, you will be hurt as much as anyone. You will not be able to move on and create a healthy new life for yourself, unless you let go. Unresolved anger, grief or resentment eat at our souls like a chronic disease. By letting go, we can heal and move on. If that requires some time in coaching or therapy, do not hesitate to seek the help you need.

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Third, forgive yourself. In the years before my divorce, I would often look at those who divorced and conclude that they had “failed.” Having walked that road myself, I now understand that most of us did the best we could, the best we knew how. We did not fail! We simply did not have the tools we needed to make the marriage work, or perhaps we had a partner unwilling to work with us. In most cases we can look back and see mistakes we made. Human beings make mistakes, and we *are* human. So forgive yourself so that you can move forward and be fully available emotionally to yourself, your children, and others about you.

Finally, keep the children out of it. As a friend told me wisely, “Ken and Viera got a divorce, Mom and Dad didn’t.” Do not malign your former spouse—he or she is the parent of your children. They have modeled their own lives in part on both of you, and negative barbs about the other parent are felt by your children. Let the children make their own judgments about each parent.

Encourage liberal visitation. Begin your new journey facilitating a healthy parent-child relationship between your children and their other parent. Work with your children to build and sustain that relationship. And step out into your new vision, your new life, without the burden of old hurts and anger.

*Please write with questions you have or with topic suggestions. The best sources of material for columns are your real life experiences. Email to [ken@bccounseling.com](mailto:ken@bccounseling.com).*

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