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1 Sunset: Dealing with Endings



There is a time for everything, and a season
for every activity under heaven . . .
a time to tear and a time to mend.
—Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7

Twilight is a time of transition. As late afternoon fades into evening, the vivid colors of day disappear, and the sun, low in the horizon, dips slowly into earth's edge. In the dimness before nightfall it becomes increasingly hard to see. Soon it will be dark. Likewise, a relationship ending is your own "heart sunset." Good-bye day; good-bye love.

WHY BREAKUPS HAPPEN

As early evening settles in, dusk becomes an ambiguous zone. With less light, things can seem uncertain or unclear, like why your relationship ended. Sometimes you are left without the answers or closure you want, and you wrack your brain trying to figure out what went wrong. He was indifferent, he just couldn't commit, or he was immature.

Maybe *you* were the one who couldn't do it anymore, and you were just plain done. Perhaps you finally realized that you didn't really have that much in common after all, or the timing was bad, or he found someone else. Maybe you know exactly why you split up, and it makes you livid, depressed, or resentful. There are as many reasons as there are relationships. There's always the "I don't know what I want right now" explanation or the fear factor. Maybe you never had any good role models in your life of what a healthy love relationship or marriage looks like and it scares you to death. You're afraid to trust because you don't want to end up in an unhealthy, dysfunctional, or boring relationship—or one that falls apart again.

I was surprised when a man I'd been getting to know online for a few months sent me an e-mail to break things off by saying, "I was looking at my calendar for the next year and I'm going to be really busy." *Well then what were the past four let's-get-to-know-*

each-other-better months about? Was he really busy or was he afraid of a commitment? I guess I'll never know.

Sadly, you may never know the real reason why the person you once shared everything with will now tell you nothing.

Whether the final send-off came gradually or you were blindsided, endings are never easy. Katy and Will enjoyed a year of Saturday night indie films and Starbucks runs before Will shocked her one summer afternoon when he said he couldn't see himself marrying her. But he still wanted to "hang out," and Katy, not wanting to lose him entirely, continued to see Will for six more months—and in the process lost herself and her self-respect. Finally, she could no longer endure the emotional turmoil of longing and lack, hoping that one day he would come around. As she began to learn more about her true worth and value, she courageously broke it off entirely.

Unlike Katy's drawn-out breakup, Chaundra's ending was sudden. Darren exited as quickly as he entered her life. He was a "comet" dater—burn fast, burn bright, and burn out. From the day they met at her best friend's house, Darren called her every day (sometimes two or three times a day). After a few weeks of spending all of their free time together, he just stopped calling. No explanation. The next Saturday Chaundra saw Darren with another woman at a café and she was heartbroken.

RESPONDING TO "THE END"

Then there's your story. When you end a significant relationship, you may feel a hundred different emotions, from some snarly name-calling or a disillusioned, "I really thought this would go somewhere," to a despondent, "How am I going to get over him?" You're sad, angry, confused, hurt, depressed, and some days you just want to sob with your two new best friends, Ben and Jerry (and their ridiculously good frozen treats).

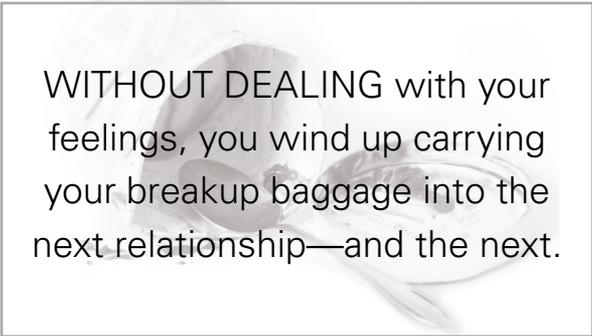
Everyone responds to loss and pain differently. For some of

us it takes longer to absorb the changes, adjust, and begin again. Whether you were together for a long time or a short time, you may have had a close, deep connection. Your personality, temperament, and background all make a difference in how you deal with emotional pain (or don't) and how long it takes to heal.

If you're the one breaking it off, you may be hurting someone you care about (or once cared about) and that can bring a host of emotions from guilt and shame to remorse and blame. No matter what the guy says—like the classic, “it's not you, it's me”—or how he says it (in person or by phone, fax, letter, e-mail, text, or other electronic media), your relationship has ended. Game over. You're not together anymore. Now what?

HOW DO YOU “JUST GET OVER IT”?

When it comes to breakups, everyone around you will most likely have an opinion, even your most well-intentioned friends. *Forget about it. There are other fish in the sea. I never liked him anyway. You're such a nice girl I'm sure you will find someone. Just get over it.* But how?



WITHOUT DEALING with your feelings, you wind up carrying your breakup baggage into the next relationship—and the next.

Maybe you don't want to “just get over it”; you want to curl up on the couch and cry, maybe even wallow, at least for a bit. Perhaps you don't know what to do, so you do nothing. Or worse, you

find unhealthy ways of coping with your losses and attempt to numb out and anesthetize the pain of rejection with excessive eating, drinking, shopping, or partying, and you end up stuffed, sloshed, broke, and tired—and you still have a broken heart.

Then there's the Ice Woman approach, where you try not to feel anything at all because it just hurts too much to feel. Perhaps you rebound in a quick relationship with Mr. Right Now instead of holding out for Mr. Right. Without dealing with your feelings, you wind up carrying your breakup baggage into the next relationship—and the next.

How do you heal a broken heart? How do you get rid of the awful kicked-in-the-stomach feeling and become a person of resilience, courage, and joy? How do you leave . . . grieve . . . and learn to trust and love again? How do you begin again, especially when you just don't want to?

This book will cover those topics, but first let's get some perspective on endings and loss, some essential things to know on your heart-healing journey. Often we only see things from our own point of view, but God's perspective is larger. He sees the big picture of our lives; the past, present, and future, and He knows what is best for each of us.

ENDINGS ARE A PART OF LIFE

Endings are a part of life. In fact, much of life is about beginnings and endings, transitions and changes, losing and finding anew. You graduate from high school or college and start a job. You leave a job or ministry and launch into another one. Sometimes you move from one part of the country to another and begin all over again. Loss and gain, good and bad, life and death are all part of life, and life has its cycles.

For some, adjusting to the transition that conclusions bring is smooth, for others it's rocky and staggered. You will not stay in this ending phase of life forever; a new beginning will come. You

may not know when or how, but it will. Just like the springtime comes every year, even after the hardest of winters.

If you pretend life is a storybook with only happy endings, it's not reality. Hard things happen. Sometimes we lose people or things we treasure. But it does not mean we are losers. I've heard that Chuck Swindoll says, "It's not what happens to you, it's how you respond to it that makes a difference."

You can choose to ignore your pain, or in the midst of your pain and darkness, you can look to the light of God's truth for hope, healing, and wholeness. Either way, it's your choice. How you handle endings, or don't, will determine how you move forward. The next few chapters will help you get there.

SOME ENDINGS ARE NECESSARY

It's probably the last thing you want to hear right now, but it's true: some endings are necessary. For example, if you were dating someone who treated you poorly, it's your gain, not your loss, that he's no longer in your life. Someone who is rude, obnoxious, or insulting is not a good choice of someone to bond with, much less spend the rest of your life with.

It's important to discern acceptable behavior—in any relationship. It is not acceptable to tolerate abuse (physical or emotional). Ever. Just as a green plant needs to be pruned in order to grow back healthier leaves, sometimes things need to be cut from our lives so we can heal and blossom. On the other hand, maybe this guy was amazing, but he was not the best choice, God's choice, for your marriage partner.

Endings come in life, but God will not leave you in a place of despair. In time, He will lead you on to beginning anew.

BREAKUPS HURT, BUT GOD HEALS

Have you ever seen a glass break and shatter across a floor? Hundreds of miniscule pieces scatter and leave a complete mess.

You wonder how it can ever be cleaned up or made right again.

Perhaps right now you feel like your heart is fractured like broken glass. Thankfully, the Master is the master at rebuilding brokenness. In His own way and His perfect timing, God restores the splintered fragments of a broken soul. In time you will be able to let go of the past and hold on to a faith that will lead you from sadness to joy, death to life, fear to faith, rejection to acceptance, and darkness to light.

There is more ahead for you—so much more. “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

HEALING TAKES TIME—AND MORE

Don't be fooled into thinking time alone heals all wounds. It's the power of God that heals you, and He uses many avenues to bring about healing: time, the love and care of others, something you read in a book or hear in a sermon, your attitude and actions, and more.

God does His part, and we do our part. Our part begins by showing up and being faithful.

Of course, every relationship is unique, so your healing process—*how* you heal and the *amount of time* it takes—will be different for everyone.

In addition, people who have unhealed grief from the past (whether it's from childhood or previous relationships) will need more time to work through the heart-mending process. It may take your friend a few months to get over her breakup, and it may take you a year. God's methods and timing are unique to each circumstance. The main thing is: don't rush the healing process.

Whether this is your first big breakup or your fifteenth, letting go hurts. The amount of time you spent in the relationship, and how close you were both emotionally and physically all play

a part in how long it takes to stop the heartache and move forward. It takes time to get used to being on your own again.

You may need a period of adjustment and emotional repair to steady your self after a tidal wave has rocked your “loveboat.” Even a sailboat after a squall needs some time in dry dock to repair the hull and mend the sails. There will be new adventures ahead, but for now, it’s heart-restoration time.

LIGHT OVERCOMES THE DARKNESS

When the power fails and the lights go out in your home, your natural reaction is to grab a flashlight so you can see. When difficult things happen, often people are tempted to hide or withdraw into the “darkness” of isolation, depression, or sin instead of reaching for their spiritual light source to illuminate the emotional darkness of their hearts. They don’t want to deal with things they think will overwhelm them, or they simply don’t have the resources to handle intense feelings.

Pain, anger, resentment, and betrayal are thorny issues. Rejection hurts, and the loss of love and affection can make us do crazy things sometimes. Without the light of God’s truth to guide and heal us, we can gravitate toward dark habits and try to find our own temporary, unhealthy, or ineffective solutions to ease the pain.

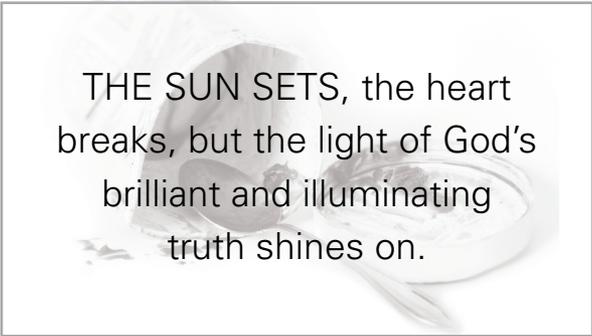
A friend once told me, “Don’t forget in the dark what you’ve learned in the light.” In other words, remember God’s good promises you learned in good times when the hard times come. Jesus said, “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness” (John 12:46).

Light always overcomes darkness. With the Light of the World, Jesus Christ, you can be encouraged, equipped, and empowered to journey through the stages of healing and find restoration and transformation.

A TIME TO HEAL

You may not believe this right now, but the day will come when you don't think about him every day, and the mention of his name doesn't pierce your heart like a verbal arrow. You can drive past your special place and it no longer has a hold on you. It's just a place. You know who you are and what you want and it's okay. You know God loves you and He is with you. And that makes all the difference.

The sun sets, the heart breaks, but the light of God's brilliant and illuminating truth shines on. You come to realize that endings are a part of life, and so are new beginnings.



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And you learn that God heals brokenness and brings joy, hope, and healing. And one day everything really will be okay. Maybe not today, but someday. As the tears pour out you discover that everything happens for a reason, even when you don't understand or like it. Bleary-eyed, you look up and smile as it begins to settle in your heart that God really is in control; He knows what He's doing, He cares and is working all things together for the good whether the relationship door slammed shut or gently closed behind you.

A door closes, a window opens, and a fresh breeze blows into the stale mourning stillness that lingers in your heart. In the midst of your mess, God surprises you, and things begin to change.

A wise man named Solomon reminds us that, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven . . .

a time to plant and a time to uproot, . . .
a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance, . . .
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend.”
(Ecclesiastes 3:1–7)

What time is it in your life? The edge of evening is approaching, and it’s time to get the comfort and support you need to begin the heart-healing process.

The rest of your life is waiting.

PRAYER

Lord, endings can be so hard. I wanted things to be different in my love life, yet here I am with a broken heart. Please help me, comfort me, and heal me. I need Your strength and power—Your love and light—to get through this dark time. Thank You for the assurance that You are with me every step of the way. Help me to trust You even when I do not understand. I know healing is a process and it takes time, so I need wisdom to wait on Your perfect timing for wholeness. I choose to follow Your

healing path from darkness to light, from sadness to joy. Lead me to brighter days and a lighter heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.

LIGHT FOR THE JOURNEY

"Don't forget in the dark what you've learned in the light." One way to remember the light of God's truth is to surround yourself with it. Look up helpful Bible verses and write them on index cards or paper. Then post them in places you will see every day, like your bathroom mirror, dresser, or refrigerator (or carry them with you in your purse or wallet). When you read God's truth and connect with it, you will be changed. Power up with God's Word! Here are a few to get you started:

Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. (Isaiah 50:10)

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

ILLUMINATION

1. Identify what stage you're in right now: Twilight (dealing with endings), Night (healing emotional pain), Dawn (awakening hope), or Day (moving forward).
2. Chuck Swindoll said, "It's not what happens to you, it's how you respond to it that makes a difference." What are some different ways you can choose to respond to your situation right now?

3. Losses need to be dealt with, not suppressed or ignored.
What are some consequences that may occur if you try to “just get over it” and don’t grieve your losses and process your emotional pain?

4. What is one thing you can do this week to change your perspective on your breakup?