

Handling Christmas After Divorce

It's been five years, and still I struggle with transitions.

I would have thought by now there'd be no problem whatsoever when my ex-husband picked up our children.

And yet there is.

There is no conflict between him and me, no issues of arguing or glaring or anything. It's just the transition.

It's not like I even think about it. It just is awkward.

And tonight was no different.

My ex-husband is often late, and no matter how hard I try to get my kids organized, there is always a measure of chaos when he arrives.

Even though he's late, we can't seem to be ready.

Tonight was no exception.

Let me set up the scene for the disaster.

It was our only night for my children and me to decorate our tree together because of school, work and bedtime schedules. And because it was their night with their dad, we had about an hour to do it.

I was ready. Dinner was made. All the boxes of decorations had been brought up. The stage was set for a lovely hour of decorating.

And we had a lot of fun, even though not all the children were excited to be decorating. My 7-year-old escaped outside to play with the neighbors, my 12-year-old had a very difficult

time getting his face away from his iPod, and my 16-year-old lasted about 15 minutes before she needed food. It ended up being my 6-year-old and me decorating with my 19-year-old keeping us entertained. A tad goofy but still good!

As our hour to decorate became an hour and a half, my little girls worried they were going to miss a special math and science event at their school. They'd been talking about it for weeks. I should probably have just taken them on time, but we had so much to do and I thought they would enjoy doing it with their dad.

When their dad did arrive, it seemed like everything just fell apart—including me.

My oldest daughter was up in her room doing her hair and makeup. A bit on the bad timing side of things and absolutely unnecessary—she's beautiful.

My shoeless middle son was frantically looking for his iPod, which my oldest son had hidden (with my blessing).

My 7-year-old was ready and at her father's car almost before it stopped. She wanted to get to school fast! They were already 45 minutes late.

My 6-year-old was shoeless and decided to redo her hair—only she can't redo her hair. She's at the age where she can mess it up really well but absolutely not fix it.

Then my 7-year-old came back in because the tinfoil hat she needed to wear to the school event was tearing. She was close to tears.

As I was searching for tape to fix the hat, I glanced around and realized that my teenagers hadn't done any of the things I'd asked them to do.

It just seemed like everything went kablooeey.

I know I'm probably not sufficiently portraying the level of

chaos in those few moments, but I figure you can catch the “feel” of the house regardless of my poor description. Everyone going in different directions, lots of emotions, and dad waiting in the driveway.

I just wish I could keep calm, cool and collected. But I got annoyed with my youngest pulling all her hair clippies out. I was frustrated that the few things I’d asked my middle son and high school daughter to do had not been done. I was disappointed that my daughter went to do her hair and watch Netflix in her bedroom instead of staying downstairs with us, and she still wasn’t ready! I was a little miffed that my ex-husband was late and that meant the girls had missed half of the school event. I was just a hot mess.

And I didn’t hide it. I oozed hot mess on everyone.

I don’t want to send my kids off with fussiness. I hate that!

It isn’t always this way, but it is more often than I want, to be sure.

I just don’t know what exactly it is except that maybe it’s simply that I hate being divorced. I hate sharing my children.

I miss evenings together. I miss looking forward to my husband arriving home from work. I miss family dinners and bedtimes together. I miss going together to their school events and concerts. I miss celebrating birthdays and holidays together. I miss so many things.

I hate that my children’s father isn’t here to decorate the tree with them. To hold our youngest up to put ornaments on the highest branches. To sip hot cocoa and eat cookies. I miss Christmas shopping together for our children. I miss Christmas Eve services and Christmas morning together. I miss hosting a Christmas party together. I miss caroling. I miss it all. All the togetherness.

Maybe the nights when he arrives in the driveway, it’s just a reminder of all those things that are now gone. And maybe we

all get a little wonky because it just isn't right. The whole thing is just awfully wrong. Children aren't supposed to have to go back and forth between parents. They are supposed to be with both of us!

I'm so grieved just thinking about it.

And yet here I sit, all pitiful and sad, looking at our beautiful tree and decorations, and I'm struck by how truly blessed I am. Who every said life was going to be perfect—or even close to perfect? Nobody.

It might just be that there will always be a little touch of sadness to everything, even the joyful things. And maybe that is also just life on earth; this world is not our home.

This world. Hmm. that makes me think about Christ coming here, leaving perfection to come to this sinful, sorrowful place. How He became a man of many sorrows, acquainted with grief (Is. 53:3) for us.

“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteem him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed” (Is. 53:4-5).

It's so easy to get overwhelmed by this life, isn't it? To focus on all the things that are amiss. I can so easily get caught up in the things that aren't going my way, and I can stay there for quite a while. But we have a great Savior who wants to walk this life with us—who wants to carry our burdens.

We have a Savior who didn't just come here to change our eternity. He came here to change our daily. He came to give us all that we need to live a life of hope and joy right here—to live each day with us.

“He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently

lead those that are with young” (Is. 40:11).

The Lord offers us strength and guidance.

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Is. 41:10).

Jesus doesn’t just want to help with the transitions; He wants to give us all that we need in every moment—and all that we need is Him! Just as God delivered His people repeatedly, He has delivered us through the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus! We have a blessed hope and reason for great joy!

“For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth in singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands” (Is. 55:12).

Just reading those Scriptures and all the others I glanced at while looking for them has put my heart and mind in a completely different place. I feel a great hope welling up in me. A hope that even though this life is not and never will be exactly what I want it to be, God is going to make it something beautiful—even in the transitions.

Well, this post didn’t go in the direction I thought it would. I was just planning on saying that this season is a time to reflect on the hope and peace we have in Christ. And God led me in a bit of a different direction! I love when He does that.

I hope my stream-of-consciousness writing today blesses you. And I pray that we will all have the perspective of peace and joy this day and every day as we remind ourselves repeatedly of the beauty of the gospel—of the glorious intrusion of God into our world, our lives, our very selves.

Of a Savior who gladly gave up glory for grief to save his beloved children.

Oh Lord, please help us have the right perspective on this life. There is so much to be joyful about.

Father, just look at those 5 beautiful children you've given me! And I have a beautiful Christmas tree, a kitchen full of food, a pretty dependable car in the driveway, clothes for all my children, heat in my house, my house, toys to trip over (could stand to have a few less of those) and friends and family who love us.

Not to mention this wonderful season of hope! Thank you, Father! This is a time to remember the blessings—to not get all wiggy about the bad stuff, the difficult stuff, the challenging stuff, the disappointing stuff.

I do wiggy really well. I need to do peaceful really well.

Lord, please help us find Your peace in the craziness and challenges and disappointments. Father, you love us so much, and we know that You are going to work through all this difficult stuff, even though at times we can't imagine how. Thank You that we can trust You. And thank You for the hope of this Christmas season. And thank You for our sweet Savior Jesus!

Sue Birdseye *is an author and single mom of five kids that range from 4-years-old to 17-years-old. Her book, When Happily Ever After Shatters (Tyndale House) is in bookstores. This is adapted from her blog, .*