

An interview with Robin Lee Hatcher, Author of *A Promise Kept*



When Robin Lee Hatcher's marriage ended in divorce, she was devastated. "I'd been so convinced God had promised me that He would save our marriage," the author says, but she quickly learned that sometimes God answers prayer in the most unexpected ways. In the following years, God used the pain of what appeared to be a failed marriage to draw her closer to Him. In *A Promise Kept* (Thomas Nelson/January 7, 2014/ISBN: 978-1401687656/\$15.99) Hatcher draws on that personal pain to craft a story about a woman married to an alcoholic, a woman who has to learn the value and importance of surrendering everything to the Lord.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about *A Promise Kept* and specifically how your own life inspired this story?

A Promise Kept opens as Allison Kavanagh arrives at the house her aunt Emma bequeathed to her — a log home in the mountains. Her marriage of more than twenty years has ended in divorce because of her husband's alcoholism. She was so certain God had promised to save her marriage, but obviously she was wrong. Now she is moving from Boise to Kings Meadow to start life afresh and find a way to heal from her heartbreak.

Like Allison, my marriage ended in divorce because of my husband's alcoholism. I was devastated because I'd been so convinced God had promised me He would save our marriage. I had believed His promise through many difficult times, but it hadn't come to pass. I knew God didn't lie. Therefore, I must have misunderstood.

But God had many things to teach me in the following years, including that He answers prayers in totally unexpected ways and in *His* own time, not mine. One of those unexpected ways was realized when my husband and I were remarried more than five years later. God used the divorce to save our marriage!

Q: How does your husband feel about you using aspects of your lives in a novel and speaking openly about it in interviews?

Thanks so much for asking this question. In order to honor my husband, I made certain from the very beginning that he was on-board for me to write about and talk about our marriage — which would mean talking about him and his battles with addiction. His response was, "If my story can help someone else, use it."

Q: How much of your main character's situation is based on your own and will readers see a portrait of the author in your heroine?

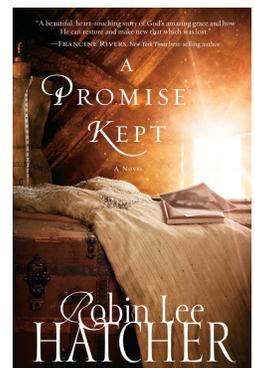
While my characters are never me — I allow them to be individuals and allow their lives to unfold in their own way — there are always pieces of me in them. Allison's life is not the same as mine. I didn't retreat to a mountain cabin nor have an aunt whose journals helped me discover truths I needed to know, nor did I withdraw from God during the depths of my grief as Allison does. But every lesson God teaches me eventually makes its way into one of my stories. That was certainly true of *A Promise Kept*.

Q: What would you say to someone who feels like God has abandoned him or her or forgotten His promise?

Hold onto Him no matter what. We only see such a tiny scrap of reality. God sees the whole picture. He knows you intimately, and He loves you extravagantly. He hasn't abandoned you.

Faith isn't about feelings. We cannot trust our feelings. The Bible warns us that the heart is deceptive. If you are feeling abandoned, get into God's word and do a study on His character. When you know His character, you will cease to fear that He might leave you alone in your trials.

Q: What is the most important thing God taught you during your own period of refinement?



Not the most important but certainly the most surprising was when I realized I had reached the place where I could thank God for my marriage to an alcoholic and mean it. Because of what happened in my marriage, my faith was deepened and strengthened. I learned to hold onto the foot of the cross so tightly that I could feel the splinters in the palms of my hands. No matter what comes, I'm holding onto the Lord, from where my help comes.

I consider my life lesson to be this: Nothing, absolutely nothing, enters my life that isn't caused or allowed by God, filtered through His loving hands, for the purpose of making me more like Jesus.

Salvation happens in an instant when we trust in Christ. But sanctification is a lifelong journey. We travel it one day at a time, and the refining process is always part of it. None of us wants to step into that fire so the dross can be burned away. We don't want to be pruned with those spiritual clippers. But it is for our eternal good that we submit to it.

In the end, I want to be like Jesus more than I want to avoid the discomfort of the refinement process.

Q: Is there anything in particular that your heroine, Allison, clings to that helps remind her of God's promises?

In Allison's case, the end of her marriage caused her to let go of the cross rather than cling tighter. So her journey had to be one that brought her back to that place of trust. What she learns in her aunt's journals helps her begin and continue on that journey, as do the friends she makes.

Q: An important question raised in *A Promise Kept* is, "Am I surrendering everything to the Lord?" What is the significance of this question and how do you determine the answer?

One thing I've learned through the years is that I make a very poor substitute for the Holy Spirit. When I try to control situations or people rather than trust in God, it never turns out for the best. It is human nature to try to hold things back from God, whether we don't fully trust Him or whether we think He might just be too busy to notice. Human, but not wise.

Years ago, God called me to write another book about alcoholism in a Christian home (*Beyond the Shadows*). I thought it was because He wanted me to offer hope to those who were sitting in the pews, trying to look like they were holding it all together, while at the same time they were dying on the inside because of the addictions of loved ones. I wanted them to know they weren't alone. God has, indeed, used the book in such a way. I know because I've received many letters saying so. But writing that book also taught me, the author, a whole new level of submission to the Lord. Who am I to answer back to God and ask Him why He made me this way or why He made my life this way?

Q: When things don't work out the way we want them to, it's easy to blame God. What would you say to someone wrestling with these feelings, and how can we avoid the bitterness that sometimes accompanies them?

Learn the importance of forgiveness. When God helped me learn to forgive as an act of will, it changed me to my core. It has kept me free of bitterness, despite the trials and disappointments. I count myself blessed.

Blaming God for things not working out the way we want is a fruitless action. And it means we still believe that life is about us. Me and my happiness. You and your happiness. But it isn't. Not in the way we think, anyway.

About ten or so years ago, I was standing in my office, weeping over my husband and our marriage. Big crocodile tears that splattered loudly when they hit the floor mat. I asked God, "Why?" What I meant was, "Why me?" And after a long period of time, I felt God speak to my heart, "Why *not* you, beloved?" It quieted me, stopped me cold. Yes, why not me? Did I think I was so special that I could avoid what Christ told me would be true? Jesus said, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

Q: God never seems to answer our prayers the way we expect or even in the timing we wish for. What advice do you have for people who are in the waiting period?

Waiting is hard, especially for those of us in the Western world. We want and expect immediate gratification. Dinner from the microwave. A mug of coffee in seconds from a single serve K-cup. Buy something on the Internet with a credit card and get it delivered tomorrow. Sometimes we treat the almighty, holy God of the Universe as if He were our personal Santa Claus that we give our wish list to and expect Him to fulfill it immediately. And even if our wish list is full of good things that God wants to give us, His timing can remain a mystery to us.

But God has a beautiful promise for those who learn how to wait on Him.

*Yet those who wait for the LORD
Will gain new strength;
They will mount up with wings like eagles,
They will run and not get tired,
They will walk and not become weary.*
~ **Isaiah 40:31**, NASB95

Q: Allison moves into the cabin she inherited from her self-reliant aunt Emma and uncovers a side of the woman she didn't know existed. Is this wise woman inspired by someone in your real life?

No, Aunt Emma is a character straight from my imagination. But whenever I think of older women of faith, whenever I need to be reminded how I should live, I always think first of my mother. She went home to be with the Lord at the age of 96, and she is who I would first emulate as a Christian woman.

Q: You have an important group of women who have influenced your life. Tell us the most valuable aspect of these friendships.

One of the greatest gifts God has given me was to introduce me to the group of Christian writers who gather together each summer to "plot, play, and pray." The first year we met, most of us were complete strangers. I shudder when I remember I almost declined the invitation, uncertain if I would fit in with people I didn't know. But God knit together something unique that first year, and the bonds have only continued to deepen over time.

The most valuable aspect is that these women love and trust the Lord with their whole hearts, and because of that we can trust one another with our deepest secrets and our true selves. When I was in such anguish over the death of my marriage, there were days I couldn't even form a cohesive prayer in my thoughts. But I knew these friends were praying for me, and that gave me strength to keep moving forward.

Over the years, every single one of us has suffered some kind of hardship or pain. The death of a mother or father or spouse. Cancer of a loved one. Personal health issues and broken bones. Addictions of a loved one. Loss of a job. Financial struggles. Loss of eyesight. What a difference it has made to know we can turn to one another and not have to pretend to be strong or act like we have all the answers.

Q: In your letter to readers, which appears at the end of *A Promise Kept*, you talk about how your divorce felt like a failure. How did God turn that failure around in your life?

When we were first married, my husband and I promised until death do us part. We meant it. So it felt like failure when God told me to "let go" of him after nearly a year of separation, even though I was acting in obedience. What I couldn't see or understand at first was that God needed to get my husband off by himself so the two of them could work on his life without me being there as a safety net, as the strong one. I believe my husband would have died if we continued on the way we had been, but I didn't see it that way at the time. I had to stand back and let God be God.

Q: Alcoholism played a large part in your marriage and eventually your divorce. What gave you the strength to continue to pray for your spouse even when no answer seemed to come?

Strength comes from believing deep down in my soul that God is in control and that He wants the best for both me and my husband. I don't always know what that "best" is, but He does.

Q: There are many women in our audience who are married to someone who has struggled with addiction, and though they have prayed for them, the answers have not yet come. As Christians, we know that divorce is a last resort, but is that ever possibly the answer to prayer? How did you come to that painful decision?

Divorce is a very painful choice. I don't care what the reason. It is painful and shouldn't be entered into lightly. It is especially painful for Christians who are trying to walk in faith and please God. It would be a mistake for anyone to look at me and my situation and say, "If it was OK for her, maybe this is what God wants for me too." That said, I do not believe divorce is always a sin. And if it is sin, it isn't an unforgiveable one. The only unforgiveable sin is blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

Could divorce ever be an answer to prayer? I can't answer that with any certainty. I don't even know that it was God's answer to my prayers. But He allowed divorce to happen and then used it, first to save my husband's life and second to help him embrace a life of sobriety.

When I instigated "tough love," my husband walked out the door, which started our separation. But I still believed God would save our marriage, so for me, the separation had one purpose: to reconcile us. But my husband got worse instead of better, and the day came when God told me to let go of him. It was a terrible, devastating moment. I didn't understand it. I didn't want to do it. There were some Christians who counseled me one way and some who counseled another. All I could do was obey and trust the Lord as best I could.

Q: *A Promise Kept* is such a personal story; what do you hope each reader takes away from it?

I hope readers will be encouraged to keep walking forward. I hope, if they are in a troubled marriage, that they will seek God with their whole hearts and not act out of selfishness but out of obedience. I hope reading *A Promise Kept* will deepen their faith in a God who answers prayers, in His own way and His own time.

Robin Lee Hatcher will be hosting a Facebook party on Thursday, February 6, 2014 at 8:00 PM EST to chat with readers about *A Promise Kept*, give away copies of the book and reveal the grand prize winner of a social media giveaway. More details will be available on her [Facebook page](#).

For more information about Hatcher and her books, visit her online home at www.robinleehatcher.com, become a fan on [Facebook](#) ([robinleehatcher](#)) or follow her on [Twitter](#) ([@robinleehatcher](#)).